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ERITREA Hostages in Sinai appeal for international help

Thirteen Eritrean hostages who are being held in northern Sinai, close to the Israeli border, have issued a desperate appeal for international intervention after being informed that they would be sold to organ traffickers if an exorbitant ransom is not paid for them.

In an appeal publicized by Italian NGO EveryOne Group, the hostages said, "We have been beaten, tortured, humiliated in the most atrocious fashion. We have now received an ultimatum from our persecutors: if our families do not pay \$33,000 per head within 24 hours, we will be sold to clandestine clinics that traffic in human organs. We are calling on the civilized countries, religious people who abhor these atrocities, the United Nations and the European Union not to abandon us. If we had been Europeans or Americans, would you have left us in this terrible condition? We are young men and women who have fled from a country that persecuted us."

Eritrean citizens are fleeing the repressive regime of President Isaias Afwerki at a rate of 1,000 people per month, according to conservative estimates. Eritrea has one of the world's worst human rights records, including stringent restrictions on religious freedom. Tens of thousands of Eritreans are thought to be imprisoned in the country's many detention facilities, including around 3,000 Christians. Hundreds of Eritrean refugees, including women and children, have fallen into the hands of human traffickers. Many are still held hostage in purpose-built camps in the Sinai Desert. There they face harassment, extreme sexual abuse and torture until relatives or friends make extortionate payments to secure their release. A recent CNN report also confirmed that many African refugees have organs removed from their bodies for sale, before being left to die.

Andrew Johnston, Advocacy Director at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "This group of young people is representative of many other Eritrean refugees who are being held hostage in the Sinai. It has been over a year since these hostage camps were brought to light. In some cases the people traffickers have even been identified, yet these camps still exist, and the inhumane treatment of these refugees, along with the threat of organ trafficking, continues. We urge the Egyptian authorities to take effective action to end human trafficking within their borders, and to ensure that perpetrators of these appalling crimes are brought to justice. Human trafficking is a transnational crime carried out by criminal syndicates, and ought to be of international concern. It is therefore vital that the international community assists in combating this affront to human dignity, and in ensuring that victims are afforded protection and refuge."