

Agenzia Habeshia - Italy || Release Eritrea – United Kingdom  
International Commission on Eritrean Refugees (ICER) – United States  
Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR) - Sweden  
The America Team for Displaced Eritreans – United States  
Physicians for Human Rights - Israel || Hotline for Migrant Workers - Israel

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### **Hundreds of Refugees Held Hostage in Sinai Torture Camps Need Rescuing**

**Claims that a large number of refugees have been released from Sinai camps following media reports represents only a partial picture of the current situation on the ground. Human rights organizations worldwide have come together to publish up-to-date information in their possession which shows that the smuggling networks are still up and running and that hundreds of refugee hostages are being tortured by human traffickers in the Sinai.**

For more than 18 months, the [chilling evidence](#) of horrors inflicted by human traffickers on refugees as they are on their way to Israel through the Sinai desert has been published and broadcast in Israel and throughout the world. During the past year, the organizations signed on this document have provided detailed information, systematically collected, regarding smuggling networks operating in the Sinai and beyond (Israel, Ethiopia, and Sudan) to [influential bodies](#) in the [international arena](#) including [diplomats](#), the [UN Refugee Agency \(UNHCR\)](#), and the [Israeli authorities](#). Despite these numerous appeals, and the concrete nature of the information that was transferred, the detention camps, the extortion, and the torture continue.

Throughout the past year, Israeli, American, and European human rights organizations have been in continuous contact with Eritrean and Sudanese refugees held in the torture camps in Sinai. Refugee hostages use cellular telephones provided by their captors to extort large sums of ransom money from their relatives and friends. Despite [recent reports in the media](#) regarding the release of hundreds of refugees held captive in the Sinai, and their arrival in Israel, it is apparent – from the information gathered by [Physicians for Human Rights-Israel](#) and the [Hotline for Migrant Workers](#) in Israel, [Agenzia Habeshia](#) in Italy, [Release Eritrea](#) in the UK, the [International Commission on Eritrean Refugees \(ICER\)](#), the [America Team for Displaced Eritreans](#) and the Swedish [Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights \(EMDHR\)](#) – that hundreds of refugees are still being held captive in the Sinai, some of which are experiencing physical abuse, torture, systematic rape, and even death, all with the objective to obtain tens of thousands of dollars in ransom money in exchange for their release. Heinous methods of torture and extortion, as [previously reported](#), including in a recent report by [Amnesty International](#) include prolonged group bondage, electroshock, suspension by the limbs, burns from white-hot irons, starvation, severe sexual abuse, etc.

Information presented in this document shows that despite recent reports, the people smuggling, trafficking, and torture in the Sinai desert continue to operate as usual.

### **Updated Information on Groups Currently Held in Egypt**

#### **Group of Approximately 165 Hostages**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of November, 2011, rights organization The Hotline for Migrant Workers was contacted several times by 3 hostages that are part of a larger group of 165 Eritrean refugees currently being held hostage. According to their reports, they are under the control of a trafficker named Samieh, nicknamed Abu Musa, who leads a group of 8 smugglers in this

compound. According to the prisoners, the group includes 13 women and 15 unaccompanied minors, ages 14 to 16. The group reports that they are not being held in Sinai but rather in a bunker in a secluded area north of the city of Mansoura, 120 kilometer north of Cairo and a 4 hour drive from Ismaila, Egypt.

According to the refugee held in the bunker, some of whom have been held hostage for several months, the smugglers beat and electroshock them as a way to pressure them into raising the ransom money. The male hostages have not left the bunker since they arrived, but every night the smugglers forcibly take the women outside and rape them. According to their reports, in the last week alone, 5 people have died by electrocution, among them one woman. On November 17<sup>th</sup>, they reported that an additional 2 refugees were electrocuted. They informed the Hotline for Migrant Workers that some of the hostages arrived at the compound after being sold to Samieh's group after paying large ransoms to other traffickers in separate locations. They are currently being ransomed for 30,000 dollars. The contact information for the refugee hostages in this camp can be provided by the organizations signed on this document.

### **Group of 59 Hostages**

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of November, Father Mussie Zerai of the organization Ageniza Habeshia was contacted by several hostages that are part of a larger group of 59 Eritrean refugees, which include 8 women, 2 in late-term pregnancy. The refugees told Father Mussie Zerai and Swedish journalist Meron Estefanos, representative of the EMDHR organization, that the smugglers are demanding 23,000 dollars for the release of each one of the hostages. People from this group have repeatedly contacted Ms. Estefanos and have told her about one woman hostage who is 7 months pregnant and is in this Sinai compound after being kidnapped in Sudan by smugglers who then raped her many times. The smugglers in Sudan demanded 3,000 dollars for her release, and when she could not pay this money, she was sold to other smugglers. The current smugglers are demanding 23,000 dollars and have made it clear that if she does not come up with the money by the time of her delivery, she will be forced to pay an additional 23,000 dollars for the infant. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, Ms. Estefanos was informed that a 22 year-old male hostage from this group died by electrocution. According to information gathered by Father Mussie Zerai, two weeks ago 22 refugee hostages have joined this group.

The 59 hostages are being guarded and tortured by 4 smugglers. According to reports from the hostages, the smugglers are also led by a man named Samieh, nicknamed Abu Musa, meaning he is probably the same smuggler leading the group of 165 hostages described above. The group is supposedly being held hostage in a compound in the north of Sinai, not far from the city Rafah. Refugees reported that while they were outdoors, they heard aircraft engine sounds and saw lights from what appeared to be control towers, leading them to conclude that they are in proximity to an airfield. They report that alongside where they are being held are 3 luxurious houses, a large yard, and a tall tree. Two of the homes are striking in their appearance as they are painted red and constructed like a Chinese pagoda.

### **Group of 111 Hostages**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November, additional hostages made contact with Meron Estefanos, from the EMDHR in Sweden. They report that on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November, they were transferred from Sudan to the Sinai by smugglers that are demanding 28,000 dollars in ransom from each person. According to the information gathered, this is a group held separately from the previous 2 groups and as of the time of publication their approximate whereabouts and information about their captors remain unknown.

### **Group of 17 Hostages**

A Sudanese refugee from Darfur, currently residing in Israel, told a Physicians for Human Rights-Israel activist that he is in contact with a group of 17 Sudanese refugees, mostly from Darfur, that are currently being held in the Sinai. The smugglers, led by a man known as Mohammed (nicknamed Abdallah) from the Sawarka tribe, are torturing the refugees and demanding from each of them 5,200 dollars. The hostages report that they are being held near Al Jorra village, which is located 60 kilometers south of Sheikh Zewaid and 30 kilometers from Bagdad, Sinai. The 17 Sudanese refugees are the remaining hostages of a larger group that was released after they paid the ransom money. Some of the refugees released from this group are currently in Israel. The contact information of the smuggler can be obtained from the organizations.

### **370 Additional Refugees**

A representative of the EMDHR received information that on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 170 Eritreans and on the 15<sup>th</sup> of November another 200 Eritreans were transferred from Sudan to the Sinai.

### **Current Information about Smugglers and Collaborators**

In testimonies collected by human rights organizations over the past year, the names of several prominent smugglers have been continuously repeated, among them, Abu Abdullah, Abu Musa, Abu Ali, Ibrahim, Khaled and Ahmed.

In the group of the 165 refugees that are currently being held in the area of Mansoura, Egypt by **Abu Musa**, the refugees reported that seven additional smugglers are guarding them, including Abu Musa's brothers – **Ali Hamed** and **Salim**. The place is frequented by a smuggler named **Abu Hamed**; it is unclear whether this is an additional smuggler or Abu Musa's brother, Ali Hamed. Refugees who were sold by Abu Hamed to Abu Musa informed us that Abu Hamed runs several additional chambers each holding dozens of refugees and they are located a few kilometers away from where they are currently being held. Reports collected by human rights groups indicate that Abu Musa works with the assistance of an Eritrean living in Israel. The Israeli police have been officially informed about this suspected cooperation.

**Abu Abdullah** is another smuggler that is continuously mentioned in refugee testimonies and is described as a large man in his mid-thirties that works with his brother out of Sinai. Abu Abdullah works closely with an Eritrean man nick-named Cornell who is responsible for collecting ransom money sent to Egypt by hostages' relatives and for managing a network of collaborators in Israel. According to victim's testimonies, these smugglers use Israeli cell phone numbers to be in contact with relatives of the hostages.

Additional testimonies collected by the organizations indicate that an Eritrean man named **Angosom**, based in Khartoum, Sudan, is responsible for kidnapping hundreds of Eritrean refugees from Shagarab and Kassala refugee camps in Sudan and from May Aini and Shimelba refugee camps in Ethiopia and then selling them to human traffickers in Egypt.

Over the past year, the Open Clinic of Physicians for Human Rights-Israel interviewed about 800 patients that arrived to Israel via the Sinai. 78% of interviewees<sup>1</sup> described being subjected to torture by smugglers that threatened them at gunpoint while locking them up in chains.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 562 respondents.

In addition to the horrid testimonies of torture and captivity, 39 people reported to Physicians for Human Rights-Israel that they were kidnapped by the smugglers and arrived at Israel against their will. On November 7, 2011, a Hotline for Migrant Worker's volunteer interviewed an Eritrean refugee who was held for six months until he managed to raise and pay the smugglers 10,000 dollars. He reported that he had no desire to go to Israel but that he was kidnapped in February 2011 in Kassala, Sudan along with another 84 Eritrean refugees. The refugee explained that while the group was on their way to Shagarab refugee camp, they were kidnapped and sold to smugglers who took them to the Sinai desert. Meron Estefanos, from the organization EMDHR, spoke to members of the kidnapped group and confirmed this report. In February 2011, Father Mussie Zerai from Agenzia Habeshia spoke to one of the hostages that reported being chained to an 11-year-old that recently had his arm broken by the smugglers. The child cried in pain but the smugglers refused to let him go. In the past two months, a few refugees from this group have arrived in Israel, after being tortured and held hostage for months and after gathering the ransom which ranged from a few thousand dollars to \$35,000 per person from their families around the world. The fate of the 11 year old child, as well as the fate of many others, is unknown.

One week ago, [Egyptian media](#) reported about violent confrontations between tribes in central Sinai after accusations of being involved in trafficking of refugee organs. The media claims that one of the main smugglers was killed during the fighting.

### **Information transferred to the Israeli authorities regarding collaborators with smuggling networks that are based in Israel**

While the Israeli police do not have the mandate to directly investigate individuals that are suspected of committing crimes in Egyptian territory, the Israeli police are obligated to act regarding operatives that are based in Israel. The Israeli organizations who wrote this report have transferred a great deal of information about suspected criminals that collaborate with the human traffickers, by extorting and collecting ransom money inside of Israel. The activists in these organizations have even met several times with representatives in the relevant police unit. Eritrean refugees living in Israel joined these meetings, following requests by the organizations, and they provided valuable information about human trafficking operatives in Israel. None of the suspected criminals have been detained by the police.

On December 12, 2010, activists from the Hotline for Migrant Workers managed to orchestrate the arrest of 2 Eritreans while they collected ransom money from a relative of a refugee held hostage. Even though the two were caught while conducting the transfer, they were soon released from prison and not put on trial. Inquiries from an Israeli human rights group as to whether charges will be pressed have yet to be answered.

On July 31, 2011, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel and the Hotline for Migrant Workers sent a [joint letter](#) to the police with the phone numbers of 12 suspected collaborators living in Israel that are under suspicion of assisting the human traffickers in Sinai, as well as the license plate number of a car driven by of one of them. No reply has been received to this appeal.

On August 17, 2011, a Hotline for Migrant Workers staff member sent an e-mail to the Israeli police asking them to follow a suspect who was about to collect ransom money in Tel Aviv. Despite attempts to reach the relevant police unit via telephone, the ransom money was given to the suspect without the Israeli police being present during the transaction.

On September 5, 2011, two more complaints were filed with the Israeli police. The first complaint involved three refugees who were kidnapped from Israel and taken to Egypt (last

week it was [reported in Israel](#) that one of the refugees had been killed and the other two are being kept in an Egyptian prison where they face deportation orders back to Eritrea). A relative of one of the kidnapped refugees who lives in Israel filed a complaint with the police. A second complaint was filed by an Eritrean refugee regarding the entry of an Eritrean smuggler into Israel who was involved in the torture and rape of refugees in Sinai. On the same day, an activist from Physicians for Human Rights-Israel provided the police with information about additional suspected collaborators that operate within Israel to help the human traffickers in the Sinai Peninsula.

On September 18, 2011 another complaint was filed by an Eritrean refugee regarding an Israeli citizen to whom he paid money in order to free his relative that was being held hostage in Sinai.

**The organizations Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, Hotline for Migrant Workers, Agenzia Habeshia, International Commission on Eritrean Refugees, The America Team for Displaced Eritreans, Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights, and Release Eritrea call again on the Egyptian and Israeli authorities and the international community to act quickly in order to free the refugees held hostage in the Sinai, to prosecute the smugglers and those that assist them, to bring an immediate end to the torture camps and the network of human trafficking, and to provide care for the torture survivors.**

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