'When a Journey becomes a Nightmare':
States' Obligations related to Trafficking in Forced Migrants

The Case of Eritrean Refugees falling Prey to Traffickers on their Journey from Eritrea to and through Sudan and Egypt


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ABSTRACT

As a result of increasing political oppression and gross human rights violations in Eritrea, many Eritreans clandestinely leave their country with the help of smugglers and their middlemen. While some Eritrean refugees settle in refugee camps in Ethiopia or Sudan, others continue their journey through Northeast Africa and/or further on towards Europe. The irregularity of this large-scale migration movement puts them at high risk of being exploited. In recent years, human smuggling as well as human trafficking networks evolved all along the migration routes of Eritreans in Northeast Africa. At almost every step of the journey to and through Sudan, Egypt, Libya and other countries, Eritreans are at jeopardy of being kidnapped, held hostage and tortured with the purpose of extorting ransom from their relatives. In view of this elaborate trafficking network, this thesis asks whether Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt adhere to their obligations to fight trafficking in human beings, in particular Eritrean refugees.

The first chapter gives an overview of the applicable international framework. The questions whether the purpose of ransom extortion is a new form of trafficking and which states' obligations apply in light of the phenomenon of mixed-migration flows are being highlighted. The second chapter depicts the reasons for and effects of the vulnerability of Eritreans. A specific focus is laid on the question whether and how smuggling and trafficking networks intermingle in the context of Northeast Africa. Lastly, the third chapter outlines efforts undertaken by Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt to fight trafficking, in particular their efforts to provide for an adequate legal framework, prevent, prosecute and protect trafficking victims.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction.............................................................................................................................................1
   1.1 Background........................................................................................................................................1
   1.2 Defining Content and Scope of the Research......................................................................................5
   1.3 Methodology, Sources and Challenges of the Research.......................................................................7

   2.1 What Constitutes Human Trafficking?.................................................................................................8
      2.1.1 Historical Roots of Human Trafficking.......................................................................................9
      2.1.2 Defining Trafficking in Human Beings.......................................................................................10
      2.1.3 The Purpose of Ransom Extortion: A New Form of Exploitation?.............................................11
      2.1.4 Drawing the Line between Smuggling and Trafficking...............................................................18
   2.2 Human Trafficking and States' Obligations in View of the Phenomenon of Mixed-Migration Flows........................................................................20
      2.2.1 States' Responsibility under International Law...........................................................................22
      2.2.2 States' Obligations deriving from the Trafficking Protocol.........................................................23
      2.2.3 States' Obligations Relating to Human Smuggling.................................................................25
      2.2.4 States' Obligations, Human Trafficking and Refugee Protection........................................26
      2.2.5 A Human Rights-Based Approach to Trafficking.................................................................29
      2.2.6 Inadequacy of the Framework?.....................................................................................................34
   2.3 International Accountability Mechanisms.........................................................................................35

3. Trafficking in Eritreans from Eritrea to and/or through Sudan and Egypt...............................................37
   3.1 Unveiling the Pattern: Eritreans as a Particularly Vulnerable Group................................................37
   3.2 The Eritrean Exodus and Migration Routes........................................................................................40
   3.3 Documented Cases of Exploitation of Eritreans..................................................................................43
      3.3.1 Ransom Extortion.......................................................................................................................43
      3.3.2 Enslavement...............................................................................................................................45
      3.3.3 Organ Trafficking.......................................................................................................................46
      3.3.4 Forced Labour............................................................................................................................47
      3.3.5 Sexual Exploitation....................................................................................................................47
   3.4 Applying a Human Rights-Based Approach: Human Rights Violations Related to the Trafficking Industry Exploiting Eritreans.............................................48
   3.5 A Transnational Criminal Network in Eritrea, Sudan and Egypt.........................................................51
      3.5.1 The Smuggling Network...........................................................................................................53
      3.5.2 The Trafficking Network...........................................................................................................55
      3.5.3 Links Between Smuggling and Trafficking Networks................................................................56

4. Addressing the Trafficking Cycle........................................................................................................60
   4.1 Eritrea................................................................................................................................................61
      4.1.1 National Legal Framework........................................................................................................61
      4.1.2 Prevention................................................................................................................................63
      4.1.3 Prosecution................................................................................................................................63
      4.1.4 Protection................................................................................................................................64
      4.1.5 Overall Analysis.........................................................................................................................65
   4.2 Sudan..................................................................................................................................................68
When a journey becomes a nightmare: states obligations related to trafficking in forced migrants. The case of Eritrean refugees falling prey to traffickers on their journey from Eritrea to and through Sudan and Egypt

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