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Declaration by the High Representative Catherine Ashton on behalf of the European Union on political prisoners in Eritrea

The European Union remains deeply concerned that the Government of the State of Eritrea continues to violate its human rights obligations, under both domestic and international law. The EU refers in particular to the continued detention without trial – since 18 September 2001 – of a group of eleven prominent members of Parliament and of the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice, and also – since 23 September 2001 – of ten independent journalists, including the Eritrean-Swedish citizen Dawit Isaak. Despite repeated appeals by the international community, including by the UN Human Rights Council and the European Union, these people have been detained for the last eleven years without any contact with the outside world, and with all rights suspended. There have been reports that other journalists have been arrested and detained without a trial. The European Union is particularly concerned about the reported deaths of some of the political prisoners and the deterioration of the medical situation of others.

The continued lack of information on the whereabouts and the access to health care of the detainees is in clear violation of several human rights obligations, such as the prohibition of arbitrary detention and the right of anyone deprived of his or her liberty to be treated with human dignity. These are enshrined in the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which has been ratified by Eritrea.
The European Union urges the Government of the State of Eritrea to release these prisoners unconditionally, along with other persons detained for their political views. The European Union requests the Government of the State of Eritrea to make public all information on the whereabouts of these prisoners and to allow them access to their families and lawyers not least on humanitarian grounds.

The Acceding Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland† and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as the Republic of Moldova, and Armenia align themselves with this declaration.

* Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

† Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.