



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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5 February 2008

### ERI102684.E

Eritrea: The Eritrean Army structure, including its units, ranks, functions; whether all divisions of the army are involved in military operations; military activity in Asab, Gash and Tsorona  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### Eritrean Army structure

The Eritrean Army is reportedly composed of four corps, each broken down into twenty infantry brigades, one commando division and one "mechanized" brigade (*Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook* 2006, 590; US Sept. 2005, 15). Information on when this organizational structure came into effect could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Information on the current number of divisions of the Eritrean Army could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. According to the *Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook*, in early 2000, before the army's organizational structure went into a "condition of flux," there were 24 divisions (2006, 590).

The online *International Encyclopedia of Uniform Insignia Around the World* lists several ranks of the Eritrean Army, including Major General, Brigadier General, Colonel, Lieutenant Colonel, Major, Captain, Lieutenant 1st Class, Lieutenant 2nd Class, Master Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Sergeant, Corporal and Private 1st Class (n.d.).

#### Army involvement in non-military operations

Information on whether all divisions of the Eritrean Army are involved in military operations could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate; however, several sources indicate that soldiers may engage in certain non-military activities (UN 19 May 2005; AI 21 Dec. 2006; US 15 Oct. 2007). Cited in a 19 May 2005 article by the United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), an Eritrean government spokesman stated that "[i]n a time of relative peace, 90 percent of the army works in productive sectors ... [Eritreans] have never lived in a situation where the army is simply a fighting force." The article notes that, according to the Eritrean government, the army engages in non-military activities such as farm work and construction of houses and infrastructure (UN 19 May 2005).

A 2006 public statement by Amnesty International (AI) indicates that Eritrean men and women carrying out their compulsory military service may be involved in military activities as well as in "labour on army-related construction projects" (21 Dec. 2006). A 15 October 2007 United States (US) Department of State consular information sheet on Eritrea states that Eritrea's national military service consists of "approximately six months of military training, followed by a number of years in military or other government service."

### **Military activities in Asab, Gash and Tsorona**

Eritrea and Ethiopia reportedly maintain "large military presences" along their shared border (US 15 Oct. 2007). In 2007, news sources reported on Eritrean military activity in the regions of Gash-Barka [southwest Eritrea] (Reuters 27 Dec. 2007; VOA 27 Dec. 2007) and Tsorono [south-central Eritrea], among other areas (ibid.; Reuters 27 Dec. 2007; BBC 10 May 2007; Awate.com 25 June 2007; ibid. 7 Apr. 2007). There is reportedly a military training camp located in the Waime [or Wema] district of Asab province (*Mirror* 5 Mar. 2007; *Sunday Herald* 4 Mar. 2007).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

### References

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Voice of America (VOA). 27 December 2007. "Eritrea Accuses Ethiopia of Border Attacks." (Factiva)

#### Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** The Embassy of the State of Eritrea in Ottawa, the Embassy of the State of Eritrea in Washington, D.C. and the Ministry of Information of the State of Eritrea did not provide information within the time constraints of this Response. Attempts were made to contact the Ministry of Defence in Eritrea and the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE).

**Internet sites, including:** AllAfrica, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), GlobalSecurity.org, Jane's Foreign Report, Jane's Intelligence Review, Jane's Terrorism and Security Monitor, Nationmaster.com, Shabait.com (Ministry of Information of the State of Eritrea), United Kingdom Home Office, United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE).

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