

Part 2

Human Rights Council President appoints Members of Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea

26 September 2014

The President of the Human Rights Council, Ambassador Baudelaire Ndong Ella (Gabon), announced today the appointment of Mike Smith of Australia and Victor Dankwa of Ghana who will join Sheila B. Keetharuth, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea, to serve as the members of the commission of inquiry to investigate all alleged human rights violations in Eritrea, mandated by the Council at its June 2014 session. Mr. Smith will serve as Chair of the three-person commission.

The Council decided to establish, for a period of one year, the commission of inquiry at its twenty-sixth on 27 June 2014 to investigate all alleged violations of human rights in Eritrea, as outlined in the reports of the Special Rapporteur. Among the violations to be investigated are those pertaining to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and prison conditions, freedom of expression and opinion, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of religious belief, freedom of movement and forced military conscription. Resolution 26/24 also decided that the Special Rapporteur should serve as one of the members of the three-person commission.

Through this decision the Council also called upon the Government of Eritrea to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur and the commission of inquiry, to permit them and their staff members unrestricted access to visit the country, to give due consideration to the recommendations contained in the reports of the Special Rapporteur, and to provide them with the information necessary for the fulfilment of their mandates, and underlines the importance for all States to lend their support to the Special Rapporteur and the commission of inquiry for the discharge of their mandates.

The same resolution requested the commission of inquiry to present an oral update to the Human Rights Council at its twenty-eighth session in March 2015 and a written report to the Council at its twenty-ninth session in June 2015.

Biographies of members of commission of inquiry

Ms. Sheila B. Keetharuth (Mauritius) was appointed in October 2012 as the first Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea. Ms. Keetharuth has worked and travelled in Africa for over two and a half decades and brings extensive experience in the area of human rights, including research, advocacy, litigation and training. She has also worked as a broadcaster for over eight years on the African continent. After obtaining an LL.M. in International Human Rights Law and Civil Liberties at the University of Leicester (UK), she was called to the Bar in Mauritius in January 1997. In July 2002, she joined Amnesty International as a Researcher at the Africa Regional Office in Kampala, Uganda, and acted as the Interim Head of Office until December 2005. From November 2006 to June 2012, Sheila B. Keetharuth was the Executive Director of the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), a pan-African NGO based in Banjul, The Gambia. She is currently enrolled as a part-time doctoral candidate at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. In 2011, the Madrid Bar Association awarded Sheila B. Keetharuth a Medal of Honour for her human rights work on the African continent.

Mike Smith (Australia) recently served as Executive Director of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), a position he held from November 2007 to November 2013. Prior to that served as Australian Permanent Representative to the United Nations at Geneva and Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament between 2002 and May 2006. In 2004, he was, concurrently with his other responsibilities, Chairman of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Between 1998 and 2002 Mr. Smith was Chief of Staff to Alexander Downer MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs. Overseas, in addition to his most recent position in Geneva, Mr. Smith served as Ambassador to Egypt and Sudan (1995-98), Minister (Political) in the Australian Embassy in the United States (1993-95), Ambassador to Algeria and Tunisia (1989-91), Counsellor in the Australian Permanent Mission to the United Nations at Geneva (1986-89), and served as First Secretary while in Syria (1981-84) and Second Secretary while posted in Egypt (1977-79).

Victor Dankwa (Ghana) is currently serving as a professor at the University of Ghana and chairs the Constitutional Review Implementation Committee of Ghana. He was a Member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights from 1993 to 2005 serving as

its Vice-Chair, Chair and as the First Special Rapporteur on Prisons and Detention Centres in Africa (1996 – 2000). He was senior Member of the Faculty of Law, University of Ghana (1972 – 2005), and a Senior Member at the Department of International Law, University of Limburg, Netherlands (1985 – 1987). Professor Dankwa also held positions as a Member of the Committee of Experts drafting proposals for the current Constitution of Ghana; Commonwealth Secretariat Consultant to the Constitution Drafting Committee of Swaziland and United Nations Consultant for Review of the Laws of Liberia for their conformity with International Human Rights between 1991 - 2005. Furthermore, he served as a Member of the Ghana Law Reform Commission from 1991 to 2005.

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