



13 February 2014 - Since 2009, hundreds -possibly thousands- of refugees have been kidnapped in eastern Sudan and sold to traffickers in [Egypt's Sinai Peninsula](#) . There, they are held and tortured until their relatives can raise tens of thousands of dollars in ransom money.

Security forces in Sudan and Egypt have either turned a blind eye to this violent trade in men, women and children or, in some cases, colluded with the traffickers, according to a [new report](#) released on 11 February by Human Rights Watch ( [HRW](#) ),

The UN Refugee Agency ( [UNHCR](#) ) says 300,000 Eritreans had sought asylum outside their country by the beginning of 2013. The majority left after 2004, fleeing widespread human rights abuses. Most leave without the exit permits required by Eritrean law, risking severe punishment if they are caught.

Between 2006 and 2012, many hired smugglers to help them reach Israel via Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Around 2009, reports began to surface of smugglers turning on their clients during the journey through Sinai, and holding them in torture camps while they extorted increasingly large sums of money from desperate relatives.

"They made us call home to our families two or three times a day, and every time they beat us

up so our families heard us screaming,” a [victim told](#) IRIN News. Full report While on the phone to their friends and relatives, molten plastic was dripped on their skin so their screams would ensure the ransom money was paid as quickly as possible.

After his family had paid a ransom of US\$3,500, he was sold to another trafficker, who demanded \$30,000 for his release. At the second camp, the torture intensified. Together with 12 other hostages, including three women, one of whom was pregnant, he was beaten constantly and hung up by their ankles or wrists for hours at a time.

Once released, Egyptian authorities, in effect, hold the trafficking victims hostage a second time, subjecting them to indefinite and arbitrary detention until their relatives can produce the money for the air ticket, which secures their release and removal from Egypt. Israel has completed a fence that virtually seals its border with Egypt. Sealing off of escape routes into Israel and the military campaign in the Sinai desert have resulted in increasing numbers of trafficking victims disappearing and presumably dying following the payment of a ransom and their release.

Both Sudan and Egypt are accused of failing to take action to stop the trafficking and abuse of Eritrean refugees. However, Chiara Cardoletti-Carroll, the UNHCR assistant representative in Sudan, argued that in 2013 the Sudanese government took a number of important steps to prevent kidnappings and prosecute traffickers, including endorsing a joint initiative by UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to combat trafficking.

She confirmed that the routes used by Eritrean refugees had changed, with more heading to Khartoum, the Sudanese capital, which has become a jumping-off point for Libya from where refugees [head for Europe](#) . Khartoum is now becoming a [“hot spot”](#) for smugglers and traffickers.

Regional cooperation on the issue, particularly between Sudan and Egypt, is still lacking. “On this front, I feel there’s a long way to go,” Cardoletti-Carroll told IRIN.

*Source: IRIN News*

UNRIC's library backgrounder on migration

[http://unric.org/html/english/library/backgrounders/migration\\_eng.pdf](http://unric.org/html/english/library/backgrounders/migration_eng.pdf)

IRIN Full report: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99632/sudan-and-egypt-implicated-in-human-trafficking>

## The nightmare in Sinai continues

Thursday, 13 February 2014 00:00

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