

Eritrea calls on Kenya to help release its nationals

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ASMARA -- Eritrea has called on Kenya to help secure the release of three of its citizens that it says Kenya handed to authorities in Somalia in January, an official statement said.

Kenya gave the Eritreans to the Somali authorities January 20 after arresting them in late December and detaining them illegally for more than three weeks, said a statement posted on the Eritrean foreign ministry Web site late Tuesday.

"The Government of Eritrea again calls on the Kenyan authorities to get the three Eritrean citizens released as soon as possible and repatriate them to their country," the statement said.

It did not explain what the three prisoners had been doing prior to their arrest, where they had been arrested, or where they were being held.

Press rights watchdog Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said that the detainees were journalists working with Eritrean state-owned media.

The three were "working for the Eritrean ministry of information," said Leonard Vincent, who is in charge of Africa in the RSF headquarters in Paris.

Two were working with the public television, EriTV, and the other worked with the country's radio station, he said.

Kenyan officials were not available for comment Wednesday.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused the governments of Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the United States Saturday of secretly detaining hundreds of people fleeing the deadly conflict in Somalia.

In a statement, the rights group detailed "arbitrary detention, expulsion, and apparent enforced disappearance of dozens of individuals who fled the fighting" between Ethiopia-backed Somali troops and a powerful Islamist movement between last December and January 2007.

HRW said that Kenyan security forces had arrested at least 150 individuals from some 18 different nationalities at border crossing points with Somalia since late December.

They were sent to Nairobi, where they were detained illegally before being deported to Somalia, from where many were then sent to Ethiopia, it said.

Horn of Africa watchers have expressed fears that Ethiopia and Eritrea, still at odds over their unresolved 1998-2000 border conflict, may fight a proxy war in Somalia.