

## Rowdy deportee stalls return to Eritrea

Wednesday, 23 January 2008

Sweden's controversial attempt to send a 23-year-old Asylum seeker back to Eritrea failed on Wednesday after the pilot of the plane refused to take off with the rowdy deportee on board.

The man was due to be put on a flight on Wednesday morning and returned to his native country but his behaviour on the plane has now earned him a temporary reprieve.

A few weeks ago Sweden deported a woman to the east African country, despite warnings from the UN and Amnesty International that nobody should be forced to return there. Sweden's policy until now was not to send people to Eritrea.

Most European countries do not forcibly send people back to Eritrea, although Germany sent an asylum seeker back there two years ago and the UK deported one person in the autumn. Amnesty reports that both were jailed on their return.

"The human rights situation in Eritrea is currently very serious," said Madelaine Seidlitz, Amnesty's refugee and migration expert.

"We have so many reports of people who are sent back being arrested and subjected to torture, so we think it is quite inappropriate and in contravention of the Refugee Convention to force someone to return," she said.

The Swedish Board of Migration says the general situation in Eritrea is not considered a basis for residency in Sweden. It added that the individual circumstances in the man's case were not strong enough to warrant an exception.

Some 878 Eritreans came to Sweden last year, according to Migration Board statistics.

Under the government of President Isaias Afwerki, the country's international standing has plunged to new depths.

National elections due to be held in 1997 have been postponed until the resolution of the intractable border conflict with Ethiopia, government critics have been arrested and held without trial and the US declared Eritrea a 'country of particular concern' for its record of religious persecution.

All privately owned media was shut down in 2001, and last year Reporters Without Borders declared the country bottom in the world for its record on press freedom.