

**OFFICIAL NAME:** State of Eritrea

**CAPITAL:** Asmera (Asmara)

**SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT:** Multiparty Republic with Transitional Government

**AREA:** 118,577 Sq Km (45,783 Sq Mi)

**ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION** 4,335,200

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**LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY:** Eritrea is located in North East Africa and includes the Dahlak Archipelago and other islands along the Red Sea coast. It is bound by Sudan to the west, Ethiopia to the south, Djibouti to the southeast and the Red Sea to the north and northeast. Topographically, the country consists of three regions. (1.) A narrow lowland strip along the Red Sea coast that accounts for around 33% of the land area, (2.) the northern extension of the Ethiopian Plateau in the north-central region which is dissected by the valleys of westward flowing rivers and (3.) the western plains near the Sudanese border. Major Cities (pop. est.); Asmera 400,000, Asseb 50,000, Keren 40,000, Massawa 40,000, Mendefera 14,800 (1992). Land Use; forested 0.5%, pastures 57%, agricultural-cultivated 3.5%, other 39% (1993).

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**CLIMATE:** Eritrea has a variety of climatic conditions with conditions at sea level along the coast, hot and semi-arid. The highlands, further inland, with an elevation between 1,800 and 2,100 metres (5,900 and 6,900 feet) are cooler. Precipitation is unreliable while Asmera at 2,325 metres (7,628 feet) has an average temperature of 16 degrees Celsius (60 degrees Fahrenheit) and receives 508 mm (20 inches) of rainfall annually. Mitsiwa at sea level has an average annual temperature of 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit) and an annual precipitation of 203 mm (8 inches).

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**PEOPLE:** Eritrea has a mixed Afro-Asiatic population that is divided by religion and language. The Christian inhabitants of the Ethiopian Plateau and southern highlands speak Tingrinya while the northern coastal Muslims and the Sudanese border Muslims speak either Tigre or Arabic. Along the southern coastal plain the Muslims, many of whom are nomads, speak Afar-Saho while the nomadic Muslim and animist inhabitants of the western plains speak Tigre and Bega as well as Kunama respectively.

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**DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS:** Density; 31 persons per sq km (81 persons per sq mi) (1993). Urban-Rural; 15.4% urban, 84.6% rural (1989). Sex Distribution; 49.9% male, 50.1% female (1989). Life Expectancy at Birth; 46.1 years male, 51.0 years female (1974). Age Breakdown; 46% under 15, 23% 15 to 29, 16% to 44, 9% 45 to 59, 4% 60 to 74, 2% 75 and over (1993). Birth Rate; 45.0 per 1,000 (1981). Death Rate; 17.0 per 1,000 (1981). Increase Rate; 28.0 per 1,000 (1981). Infant Mortality Rate; 135.0 per 1,000 live births (1993).

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**RELIGIONS:** Mostly Christian with around 60% of the population either Coptic Christians, Ethiopian Orthodox or Roman Catholic. The remainder are Muslims while there is also a small community of Kunama-speaking animists.

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**LANGUAGES:** The principal language of Eritrea is Tigrinya while other minority languages include Tigre, Afar-Saho, Bega (Beja) and Arabic which are spoken by the Muslims. Kunama is spoken by an animist minority while Italian is also widely spoken and understood around the capital of Asmera.

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**EDUCATION:** Aged 25 or over and having attained: N/A. Literacy; literate population est. 20% (1993).

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**MODERN HISTORY TO 1993:** Most of Eritrea has a long historical association with Ethiopia. Immigrants from Southern Yemen settled the region from 1,000 BC, and formed the Aksumite empire which flourished from 4th to 6th century AD. By 950 AD most of the Eritrean area was integral part of the Ethiopian empire providing the principal port for foreign Ethiopian trade, although it still did retain a fair degree of autonomy until Ottoman occupation. In 1557, the Ottoman Turks seized the principal offshore islands and used them as a base to push further inland. From the 17th to 19th centuries, control of the territory was disputed between the Ethiopian, Ottoman, Tigrayan, Egyptian and Italian powers. In 1889, the Treaty of Ucciali between Italy and Menelik II of Ethiopia recognized the Italian possessions on the Red Sea with the Italian colony created on Jan. 1, 1890. From 1896 to 1935-36 Eritrea was used a base by the Italians as the main base for invasions into Ethiopia. In 1941 the area came under British administration until it was federated into Ethiopia in 1952. On Nov. 14, 1962, Eritrea became a province within the Ethiopian empire and in the same year the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was formed. The ELF led a movement for independence from Ethiopia and embarked on a sporadic guerrilla war against the Ethiopian Emperor, Haile Selassie's forces. By the mid-1960's the ELF had split into two factions, the Muslim-based ELF and the Christian-based Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), while the province continued to be torn by infighting between the two groups. In 1975, after a military coup deposed the Emperor in 1974, active warfare escalated between the secessionists and the new regime. The new regime was backed by the communist governments of Cuba and the Soviet Union while the ELF was partially funded by Arab countries. By 1982 the ELF was appealing for help from the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and other non-aligned nations. In Mar. 1988 the Eritrean and Tigrayan rebels launched a coordinated offensive and by 1989 had control of most of Eritrea, while by the end of 1989 the rebels also had control of most of Tigray, another Ethiopian province. In May 1991 the long civil war came to a climax when the alliance of four rebel groups won control of the Ethiopian nation and established a multi-party provisional government

headed by Meles Zenawi, the Tigray Rebel Leader. At the same time the EPLF, headed by Issayas Aferworki, appointed itself as the Eritrean government and declared its independence. On April 23, 1993 a referendum was held on secession from Ethiopia and resulted in an overwhelming 99.8% voting in favor of secession. On May 24, 1993, Eritrea gained its long awaited independence.

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**CURRENCY:** The official currency is the Ethiopian Birr (Br) divided into 100 Cents.

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**ECONOMY:** Gross National Product; USD \$393,415,000 (1993). Public Debt; N/A. Imports; Br 1,022,800,000 (1993). Exports; Br 209,200,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; N/A. Balance of Trade; USD \$ -276,100,000 (1993). Economically Active Population; N/A. Unemployed; N/A.

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**MAIN TRADING PARTNERS:** Ethiopia's main trading partners were Saudi Arabia, Japan, the USA, Italy, Djibouti, Egypt, Germany and the UK.

**MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS (Ethiopia-Eritrea):** Barley, Beans and Peas, Cattle, Coffee, Cotton, Copper, Gold, Maize, Millet, Platinum, Potash, Salt, Sorghum, Sugar Cane, Timber, Wheat.

**MAJOR INDUSTRIES (Ethiopia-Eritrea):** Agriculture, Cement, Construction, Food Processing, Textiles.

**MAIN EXPORTS (Ethiopia-Eritrea):** Beans, Coffee, Cotton, Hides and Skins, Sesame Seeds.

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**TRANSPORT:** Railroads; nil. Roads (Asmera); length 899 km (559 mi) (1988). Vehicles; N/A. Merchant Marine; N/A. Air Transport; N/A.

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**COMMUNICATIONS:** Fort nightly Newspapers; total of 2 with a total circulation of 26,000 (1992). Radio; N/A. Television; N/A. Telephones; units 20,000 (1993).

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**MILITARY:** est. 55,000 (1995) total armed personnel (formerly ELF and EPLF) while military expenditure accounts for N/A. of the Gross National Product (GNP).