

PRISONER PROFILE

Prisoner Name: **Twen**

Location: **Eritrea**

Arrested: **2005**

Sentence: **Indefinite**



Arrest and background

Anyone reading the testimony of Eritrean gospel singer Helen Berhane in her book, *Song of the Nightingale*, will be familiar with Helen's fellow prisoner and close friend, 'Esther'. Esther's real name is Twen and she was imprisoned in the same shipping container as Helen. Twen is an amazing Christian woman who has herself endured terrible beatings and torture at the hands of Eritrean prison guards. On occasions, Twen took the punishment in place of Helen and, when Helen was very ill as a result of the beatings and prison conditions, Twen cared for her. She fed Helen, washed her wounds, defended her and even carried her to the toilet when Helen was unable to walk.

Twen was arrested in the Eritrean capital, Asmara, in 2004 but was released after her father persuaded her to sign a paper saying she would not continue to meet with other Christians, share her faith or engage in Christian activities. In 2005, she was re-arrested after she was found participating in an evening prayer meeting in an underground church. Following her arrest, Twen was sent to Mai Sirwa Prison. In 2006, she was joined by a large group of detainees who had been arrested at a Christian wedding celebration in Asmara.

Of this group, all the women who refused to sign the paper stating they would no longer engage in Christian activities, which was tantamount to recanting their faith, were sent to Wi'a, to one of Eritrea's harshest prisons. Wi'a, which is situated on the Red Sea coast, is one of the most inhospitable places on earth. Hundreds of prisoners have died in Wi'a prison as a result of the extreme heat and the deplorable sanitary conditions. The prison was eventually closed by government order. Twen and her group were then sent to Me'etr prison, in the remote north-west of Eritrea. There is no town near Me'etr prison and no public transportation; the prison houses mainly Christian prisoners.

Twen has been in prison for almost ten years now. She was 23 years old when she was first arrested. At that time in 2004, Twen was a new believer. Now 33 years old, Twen would be considered a key senior women's leader in the prison. She continues to look after and care for the other women prisoners.

She has had opportunities to escape. On one occasion, she was given permission to stay with her family in Asmara for a month, because of a health problem. After being cared for and receiving treatment, Twen made her way back to the prison on her own, rather than trying to arrange to be smuggled out of Eritrea to a neighbouring country. People who know and love Twen say she is a precious, lovely Christian who is determined to remain a faithful follower of Jesus. They also say she is willing to stay in prison as long as God enables her to serve him there and to help others.

Send a card of encouragement to Twen's family:

Please write to – Twen, c/o Release International, PO Box 54, Orpington, BR5 9RT

When writing, please do not mention Release International, advance your political opinions or include anything which could be insulting to the authorities.

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