



## Eritrean Seaman Union Department of Public Relations

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The Eritrean Seaman Union (ESU) has continued its analysis of the current regional situation in the Red Sea and its impact due to **Houthi** activity.



Figure 1 - Horn Africa map

This has resulted in a 57% reduction in shipping traffic through the Bab el-Mandeb strait, raising ongoing security concerns. While these attacks directly threaten international trade, they also endanger 9% of the world's oil supply passing through the area, forcing ships to reroute and driving prices up by 20-30%.

The Eritrean Seafarers Union is deeply concerned about the seafarers, the economic activities of traditional sailors, and the environmental and security situation along the Red Sea route, particularly regarding the voiceless Eritrean traditional sailors and the fragile ecosystem of the Eritrean Red Sea. The ongoing attacks in the area, combined with the resulting pollution, are impacting the Eritrean coastline and neighboring countries



Figure 2 - Figure 2The Rubymar partially submerged, March 7, 2024. (Credit: Khaled Ziad/AFP)

more than ever. Eritrea and Yemen are bearing the greatest burden from these crises, while the Houthi attacks continue to prioritize military and political objectives at the expense of regional stability.

To date, the sinking of the MV Rubymar in March 2024 remains the worst disaster. As of September 2024, reports indicate the nearly submerged ship with carrying fertilizer, threatening the marine biodiversity of the Hanish Islands and jeopardizing the local fishing economy. The IMO and the United States have expressed concern about the environmental risks posed by the oil and fertilizer remaining onboard, highlighting the threat to the Hanish Islands and surrounding ecosystems.



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Additionally, the Greek-flagged oil tanker MV Sounion has been burning since August 2024, following an attack by Houthi militants. Coalition naval forces are preparing to rescue the vessel, which contains 150,000 tonnes of crude oil, posing a major environmental threat.



Figure 3 - MV Sounion Greek oil ታኻር

The Houthi forces have shown little regard for the environmental and economic damage caused by their attacks on ships like the MV Rubymar and MV Sounion. Their focus remains on military objectives, neglecting the widespread pollution caused by spilled oil, fertilizers, and other hazardous cargo. If these attacks persist, the long-term pollution of the marine ecosystems and coastal communities in Eritrea and Yemen will become irreversible. The Houthi forces must cease their attacks immediately for the benefit of the regional population and the environment.

These attacks have had a devastating impact on the Afar people of Eritrea, whose cultural activities, especially fishing and maritime trade, have been severely disrupted. Our sources confirm that the livelihoods of traditional Eritrean fishermen in the Denkeli regions, home to the Afar people, have been directly affected. If left unaddressed, the long-term damage to marine ecosystems and resources could take decades to repair. Without prompt action, countries along the Red Sea coast may be unable to protect themselves from the escalating marine pollution. International intervention is urgently needed to mitigate the damage and restore stability.



Figure 4 - traditional fishing Afar Eritrea

In the meantime, the ESU will continue to advocate for the voiceless people of the Afar-Denkeli region of Eritrea, who rely on traditional maritime activities. However, traditional fishing and maritime trade remain hazardous for the Afar-Denkeli people and those living in surrounding areas. The Denkalia region of Eritrea faces not only internal challenges but also an external security threat, compounding the suffering of the local population. The ESU is deeply concerned that the human and institutional fabric of traditional fishermen and seafarers from the Eritrean Denkeli community is being dismantled. The current security situation in the Red Sea has caused confusion and hardship for traditional fishermen due to ongoing clashes with Houthi armed forces.

The ESU is closely monitoring the situation affecting traditional seafarers both domestically and internationally.

Recent reports from various sources are alarming. The situation is exacerbated by a cholera outbreak in Tio Denklaya, along with severe floods and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, as well as pressure from the Eritrean government. These overlapping crises have created a double burden for the traditional seafarers of the Afar



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Figure 7 - Sea pollution

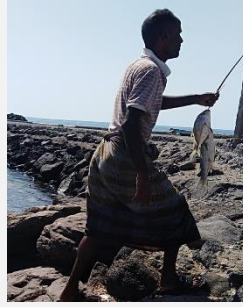


Figure 6 - Eritrean Afar traditional fisherman



Figure 5 - contaminated fish washed ashore

people. These attacks continue to disrupt health and humanitarian efforts, obstructing urgent international coordination needed to address the health and security challenges in the region.

It is well-known that the traditional sailors of the Afar people of Eritrea have been banned from using the Red Sea for over 20 years, preventing them from accessing their traditional livelihoods.



Figure 8 - Traditiona Eritrean Afar seaman's

The Eritrean Seaman Union is working with relevant organizations to prevent the extinction of these traditional seafaring communities.

In conclusion, the Eritrean seaman Union has been collaborating with Red Sea coastal countries, their maritime institutions, the African Union, the Arab League, IGAD, and international bodies such as the United Nations (UN), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), UNEP, Greenpeace MENA, PERSGA, IUCN, and others. We call on all interested associations and institutions to work together for the safety and security of the Red Sea. Immediate action and international cooperation are urgently needed to address the escalating environmental and security threats in the Red Sea. We also call for the condemnation of the Houthi forces and for negotiations to seek alternative solutions.

## Eritrean Seaman Union

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