

'For Whom the Bells Toll'



Eritrea is about 125,000 square kilometers, with 1,000 km of coastline on one of the busiest shipping corridors. That is 3 hectares per family of 4 – an envy of the whole world. It is rich in natural resources.

It is a land where for thousands of years people who fled from political and religious persecutions sought safe refuge. Despite the seemingly primitive tools they used to survive on this precious world, their sense of survival, their sense of justice and fairness, and their ability to coexist remains far advanced from those of us who live in today's 'high-tech' world. Tolerance is all about compassion, forgiveness – and most importantly far-sightedness. Those conflicting Eritrean factions quickly patched up their differences, married their sons and daughters amongst each other regardless of their ethnicity, religion, or status and declared themselves blood relatives. Peace reigned on them. Wherever one travels in Eritrea, this sense of maturity and tolerance is replicated in every village and town.

As the crucial 'unity' meeting approaches, Eritrean opposition parties in Diaspora must re-examine their historical responsibility towards the people and State of Eritrea. Who are we? What are we? What have we become? What do the Eritrean people expect from us? What is the most important thing today? **The faces** all around us ask us these questions. What would we say to them, that we have done our best or that this is the best we can do?



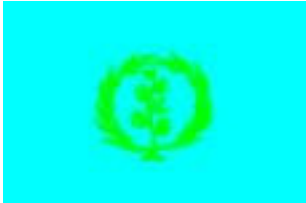
This is critical time in Eritrean (relatively) brief nationhood. There is a strong storm thundering all around us. There is a drum beating around us warning us of yet another tragedy to come. Innocent people – people who want to live their simple lives are prohibited from doing so because others have much grandiose plans of their own. Over 50% of the Eritrean population is under 18 years old, some two-third under 25 years old. None have enjoyed their lives; save for a very short time.

Barely few know what happened in the mountains and deserts of Eritrea barely a decade-and-a-half ago. None know what happened over two decades ago. Yet these are the victims of today's Eritrea.

Eritrea is the land of heroes – Sheik Abdel Kadir Kebire, Sheik Ibrahim Sultan, Aboy Woldeab Woldemariam, Awate, Liberal Party, Al-Rabita, Eritrean Liberation Movement, Eritrean Liberation Front, Eritrean People's Liberation Front, PFDJ, EDP, ENA, ELF-RC, ELF-NC, EPM, ELF (Jebha), and all the other opposition organizations. It is the land of 'Haddas Eritrea', 'Setit'. 'Mekaleh', 'Keste Debena', 'Tsigenai', 'Meskerem.net', 'Visafric.com',



‘Asmarino.com’, ‘Nharnet.com’, ‘adal61.com’, ‘Awate.com’, ‘Eritrea1.org’, ‘Eritreaone.com’, and many more. It is a land of 9 nationalities. It is a land of 4 million people, who live inside and outside Eritrea. We all live under one roof. Very few evil people, of our own, from various organizations have given us heartache, headache, and bad name to the heroic Eritrean people.



The Eritrean struggle evolved from one-stage to another, not because of weakness but because that is a natural phenomenon. It is law of nature that one generation lays the foundation for the next, which in turn lays a higher



foundation for the following generation. The latter generation cannot advance without the earlier generation laying the proper foundation. The new replaces the old. It does not mean the old were wrong. It is the responsibility of the old to accept evolutionary nature of society and pass down their wisdom to the new generation, rather than trying to stifle it. The most important wisdom and foundation is one that teaches tolerance, compassion, fairness, and hard work. These are passed down not only in words – but more importantly through deeds or by example. Those who do not practice tolerance and compassion cannot preach tolerance and compassion.

The ultimate wisdom is not to understand the world outside oneself, rather it is to understand oneself. Why we say, do, think, and feel the way we do. In ourselves, we find the world. If we think ourselves as fair and compassionate, then every other human is just that. If we think ourselves as cunning or deceitful, then every other human is just that. Our actions reflect what is inside of us, are we calm, angry, thoughtful, judgmental? Are our judgments clouded by anger, revenge, ego, pride, poisonous remarks by extremely few evil people whose function in life is to create havoc and chaos? Do we seek other people’s failures so that they will not gloat over us? But in the end who suffers? We all do. Most importantly the innocent people, the people we see around us that we wish and want all the best for are the ones that suffer.



The hallmark of a great person is not the one that wins and says kind words, but the one that feels slighted but then lets go of hatred and revenge and remains on the course of tolerance, compassion, and self-sacrifice so that bigger aims and objectives are achieved. Many of our opposition leaders feel betrayed by their colleagues some three decades ago – it is time to let it go. Many Eritreans (especially Diaspora) feel slighted by certain individuals and groups that label them as traitors, of certain ethnicity, of certain religion, and so on. The vast majority of Eritreans does not belong or subscribe to these types of intolerance. We must pity those who are consumed from within by anger, by revenge, and by greed. We feel for them. The Eritrea we create is the Eritrea we envision, not the Eritrea of those we pity.



If Eritrea is to overcome the enormous damage it has sustained to date, and God Forbid, the worse to come, it does not need people with anger and hatred. Anger and hatred will only punish the innocent – the vast majority of Eritreans. Our revenge on those who label us ‘traitors’ and many other things, is by showing them our true convictions and belief in fairness, justice, tolerance, and compassion, and by creating a free and democratic Eritrea. We will practice it on them and show to the rest of world that the Eritrean people stand for these true principles and characters.

Before the opposition groups meet sometime in the next few days, I ask them to re-examine their inner thoughts. There is no need to pre-posture their stands vis-à-vis other political parties. Look at the faces of our young and old around us. Stare at them for few minutes and gather your thoughts. What do they expect from us? Isn’t peace-of-mind, to be able to wake up in the morning with full enthusiasm and full health above all things? If we all believe in one principle of tolerance, compassion, equality, what is there to divide us? 99 % of the issues occupying the opposition camp today are all that can be addressed and debated in free and democratic Eritrea. Those who complicate issues at this juncture of the struggle for freedom and democracy can’t see the forest for the trees.



There is only one issue that every Eritrean wants to hear today – a ‘united’ opposition under one leadership, under one leader. This will be a leader and leadership that will ‘talk’ to the Eritrean public, to become its ‘quarter-back’, and its backbone. If Eritreans, especially those in Eritrea, are going to get organized, they need a voice that will talk to them. Our victory is so near and yet so far. The opposition [including the general public] has enough strength and momentum within it that only internal and peaceful, i.e. public uprising, is sufficient to blow the wind of change. We must expend all our energies for one, and only one, purpose – remove the thorn in our side. Anything else is to waste our energy, and in the end lose everything.



Result is not just about trying; it is about getting things done. A reform movement that **came into surface** in the summer of 2001, G-15, a dozen journalists, and many other jailed reformists have, **in a space of four months**, practically shut down the PFDJ regime for the past three-and-half years through their self-sacrifice. Joshua could have kept his mouth shut and excused himself by saying his family needs him; but he did not. He could not stand and see the Eritrea he loves get destroyed. Joshua is not a politician; he is an idealist, a hero. What have we achieved in those three-and-half-years other than bickering to take credit for what Joshua has done? It is time to do our part. No excuse! No need to complicate!

Berhan Hagos
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