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EDITORIAL:

ERITREAN OPPOSITION NOW POISED FOR VICTORY

Due to several cumulative factors, including the birth of an all-inclusive democratic alliance, Eritreans who are opposed to the dictatorial regime in Asmara are now on the edge of victory. Indications are that this brave nation will once again prevail over oppression and injustice and realize its long-deferred wish and determination to build an exemplary modern state that can bestow peace, justice and prosperity to its own people and able to forge constructive relations with all friendly peoples and states.

We in the ELF-RC and others in the Eritrean political opposition have been of the opinion that the regime of Isayas Afeworki was authoritarian from day one of Eritrea's birth as an independent nation in 1991. One would then ask why couldn't those of us opposed to the regime make our way to victory anytime during the past 14 years? And what is new today that can reassure success to the Eritrean opposition? There were many factors.

New Eritrea was warmly welcomed by everybody at its birth.

- *During most parts of the 1990s, members and supporters of the EPLF were of the view that Isayas and his entourage would make a good governing team. Many other Eritreans also wanted to give a benefit of doubt to the new leader and his team.*
- *Neighbouring countries, in particular Ethiopia and the Sudan, were very friendly to the provisional government in Asmara. The ELF-RC and its partners in the opposition had few listeners for quite a long time and as such were unwelcome in the area.*
- *The international community was happy that justice worked Eritrea's way and wished to believe that a leader of a liberation movement of the stature of the EPLF won't go wrong in strategies and policies for his own people. It was difficult to convince the world that Isayas Afeworki was*

not made of stuff that can turn him into a statesman worth becoming part of a new breed of leaders for 'African renaissance'.

The tide turns against Isayas and his clique.

It took nearly a decade for a great many Eritreans, their fraternal neighbours and friends in the international community to fully see what a destructive mini-monster Isayas Afeworki was. The continued failure of the authoritarian regime's strategies and callous policies have finally turned the vast majority of our people inside the homeland against Isayas and his, by now widely hated, PFDJ. The incited enmity and confrontation with all neighbours, the worst of which was the costly 1998-2000 war with Ethiopia. Other friends in the international community waited long until they saw it for themselves that Isayas and his team can only be the opposite of a good model they wished for Africa.

Therefore, the fact that the Isayas regime is disowned by the majority of Eritreans, discarded by Eritrea's neighbours and despised by regional and international organizations makes it easier for the Eritrean opposition to be heard and to be lent the necessary support to get rid of the evil regime. No one in his right mind wishes an evil regime to linger in power by abusing the weaknesses and helplessness of its own people.

The Eritrean opposition takes a better shape.

In spite of many attempts since 1991, unity of the opposition forces did not make much headway until recently. The alliance created in March 1999 was a step forward although its structural defects were a handicap. The political climate that emerged at the end of the senseless border war of 1998-2000 with Ethiopia was not effectively exploited in favour of the Eritrean political opposition, which by then consisted of the already existing opposition forces and the force that recently emerged from within the government. Too much time was wasted before the opposition organizations could come closer through mutual respect and democratic dialogue.

As of January 2005, the Eritrean opposition has started to take a better form than ever before. The Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) now includes old and new opposition organizations that are willing to work together in removing the dictatorship in Asmara and then form a transitional authority that can ensure the establishment of a peaceful and democratic Eritrea where the rule of law under a multi-party system shall be guaranteed..

The new alliance has ensured the following:

- *Responded to the whole-hearted call of the Eritrean public for unity in the opposition camp.*
- *Recognized the major role of our people inside the homeland in bringing about change in Eritrea. The new alliance agreed to lay trust on the Eritrean defense forces as part of the future national army of democratic Eritrea. As such, the conscripted Eritrean youth are now called upon to play their patriotic role by defying the dictatorial regime and standing on the side of their people and EDA.*
- *Reassured skeptical segments in the society that the real and perceived injustices and inequalities in PFDJ's Eritrea will not have any place in the post-Isayas Eritrea where the people shall regain their full sovereignty.*
- *EDA committed itself to faithfully accomplish the promises of the liberation struggle to the Eritrean people while assuring lasting peace and fraternal solidarity with all neighbouring peoples and states.*

All the cumulative factors mentioned above have already opened the gate to victory against the dictatorial regime which will not be able to fight and win against a people's uprising that is now in the making. EDA is indeed poised for victory. Eritreans with the leading role of the EDA are poised to achieve victory against a tyranny with a better chance of realizing long held aspirations of a bright and prosperous future.

THE DROWNING DICTATOR CLUTCHING AT ANYTHING

The Eritrean dictator felt very much at home during frequent visits he made to the US in the "good" old days of the past. He used to pose before cameras and generously spell out promise after promise, claim after claim, all for free, promises of excellent relations with all, democratisation, respect for human rights, an open or free economy, easy investment and privatisation, even a "Singapore-like Eritrea."

The Eritrean dictator was basking in an abundance of admiration around him and relishing in the benefit of doubt that circles in the West in general and the US administrations in particular gave him and his regime and for a boringly overdrawn period. The media, it is to be remembered, was very fond of Mr. Isayas, his lies and his poses as they would with a promising new Hollywood star. Many went out of their way to label him all the promising names they could get hold of. They tried to make him the man that was not. The Eritrean people paid dearly for the benefit that Isayas got. Those circles, knew or cared little that he was standing before their cameras having massacred entire groups of opponents, and having as well locked up in underground hell-holes thousands of innocent creatures with the prison keys freshly in his pocket.

Isayas, to the contrary, rarely ventured elsewhere in the West and rarely showed up in a European tour, not more than a

couple of times, except in the peripheries, like Italy. European countries happened to be the first to raise questions, voice concerns and visibly show discomfort with the distinct features of his tendencies and statements that betrayed his real and sinister intentions, promotion of his project of establishing a tyranny Eritreans had never before experienced or heard of. The European Union and its member countries, with the exception of a very few are on record expressing their concerns on human rights violations and his regime's moves away from democratisation. They called on the regime to open up the arena and ensure the liberties of the people. European human rights organizations tuned those concerns so aptly that the dictator himself became manifestly suspicious of everything European, particularly German, and stayed away from Europe as much as he stayed away from the universal bill of human rights and all human values, away from the promises of the Eritrean revolution for democracy, justice and progress for which the Eritrean people made untold sacrifices.

It was not long before US governmental and non-governmental circles also followed Europe's lead and summoned all the moral courage they could "afford" to point to the flaws in Isayas' ways and his regime's human rights abuses and continued circumvention of the right of the Eritrean people to auto-determination, their right to set up a government of their choice. Of course, many factors were involved in bringing to this level the rapidly conflicting interests between the PFDJ regime in Eritrea and earlier US administrations that had groomed Isayas to serve and guard "vital cold war strategic interests" in the area. That was before he later fell out of grace. As a result Isayas' visits to the US grew less frequent and even then with little or no fanfare. He was, ever since he embarked on his project of a tyranny, felt uncomfortable with the West's language and continued pressure on the issues of human rights and democ-

racy, issues he happens to be innately most allergic about, themes that directly upset his nervous system to its foundations.

That was when he started seeking and making friends elsewhere., where but human rights and democracy are omitted from the political dictionaries and definitely not an agenda or element in the chemistry of relations. Thus, the frequent visits to Mr. Gaddafi's tent in Libya, where democracy, human rights were mocked on and derided instead and where conspiracies are hatched against Eritrean refugees. All Isayas had to do was from time to time address his host as Alraies, the leader, then make another turn north to Italy where the talk is mostly about arms and business and not human values and rights; a flight to Saudi Arabia on the way back would suffice to fill the gaps in Isayas ego and coffers.

Unfortunately, honeymoons normally do not last long, and particularly honeymoons of this kind, exclusively based on expediencies rather than on genuine and enduring values of relationship. So the Libyan dish was overused and with time grew thinner. As the Arab proverb goes, If your brother himself turns into honey do not lick him off too much.

As Isayas' world kept narrowing every time and with the fossilization of his intransigence and arrogance, he had to look to elsewhere, but where? Definitely, always where he could be sure issues of human rights and democratization are not allowed to creep into the talks and into the aid arrangements, and where instead currencies and commodities would be the only languages allowed.

So, why not to China, and even Pakistan; but of course, not to neighbouring India or Bangladesh which are not free from the language of democracy and human rights and could surprise their errant guest.

What if democracy visits also China and Pakistan? He may not need to worry

about that anyway, as the democracy that he dreads most is soon bound to visit him right at home, then the allergy would reach its critical stage. Indeed, a drowning man clutches at anything that comes his way. In the case of the Eritrean dictator nothing that he clutches at now would save his skin ,let alone his hold on power. The end of an era, and the beginning of a new one is at hand. Circles that gave a blind eye to his crimes and the lot of our downtrodden people are bound to share Isayas' ignominy, and many more shall be proud to share the historic significance our people's another great day.

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ELF-RC ON ETHIOPIA'S FIVE-POINT PEACE PLAN

We in the ELF-RC have received with warm welcome Ethiopia's recent stated decision to accept in principle and hopefully abide by the Border Commission's ruling as good news for the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia and for the Horn Region in general. This hopefully genuine position would no doubt help remove the threat of renewal of hostilities that had negatively charged and polluted the security and political atmosphere in the region for a long time now.

The emergence of the Ethiopian Government's positive stance would deny the dictatorial regime in Eritrea the justifications and pretexts it has all along used to hide its sinister intentions and hold the people of Eritrea hostage to all real and imagined factors of external threat and state of war. This position would as well significantly narrow the space before the dictatorship's profiteering stance exploited in light of Ethiopia's rejection of the border ruling. Above all, this would signify Ethiopia's recognition of the fact that the issues related to land and peace are basically issues of fundamental concern to the Eritrean people, and the coming generations, long before they entered into the Eritrean tyrant's power calculations, and would remain so long after the dictatorship itself is gone.

Ethiopia's acceptance of the border ruling and more so its implementation would also remove

one important negative factor in overall Ethio-Eritrean relations and so help improve relations between Ethiopia and the Eritrean people's mainstream opposition, as rejection of the ruling had cast its shadow on the arena and frustrated genuine efforts for understanding, thus threatening to erode away confidence, undermine relations and all prospects of their consolidation.

We in the meantime hope that the possibly approaching end of this chapter in the history of Ethio-Eritrean relations with the resolution of the border issue would clear the arena for the Eritrean people's democratic struggle to effect fundamental change of governance in the country and contribute to the guarantees of lasting peace between the two peoples and peoples of the region.

The ELF-RC believes that in the last analysis, the question of abiding by the internationally sanctioned border ruling is more a matter of responsibility of peace and safeguarding the destiny of coming generations than a question of loss or gain of contested border territory.

Basing on this principled position and true to its long-held conviction that lasting resolution of border conflicts could only be attained through peaceful and legal means, the ELF-RC welcomes the long-delayed but responsible position now taken by the Ethiopian Government and Parliament to abide by the ruling of the Border Commission, as this represents an option for peace. In the meantime, we urge that all the arsenal of non basic and unnecessary accessories, preconditions and delaying factors in the position of both parties be dropped to unequivocally give way to a positive atmosphere more conducive to peace and thus more helpful to speed up and facilitate actual implementation of the ruling which is final and binding.

We believe that by consummating its position of principle down to implementation, Ethiopia would be well positioned to play a positive and constructive role in the ongoing healing and pacification process on local and regional levels. In light of this, and at this historic juncture, which also happens to be the closing stage of its very existence, the Eritrean regime is required to drop the long exposed futile practice of exploiting the border ruling for unholy purposes of its tragically narrow power agenda and engage

instead in serious and constructive talks that could facilitate the implementation of the ruling on the ground and so give peace a chance, a blessing the two brotherly peoples long aspired to and deserve to attain.

Seyoum O.Michael
Chairman of Executive Committee
25.11.2004

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THE CHAIRMAN OF THE ELF-RC RESPONDS TO QUESTIONS BY NHARNET VISITORS

Lately you led a delegation of your organization that met with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia in Khartoum. It was also reported that you are in Ethiopia as I formulate this question. What brought about the renewal or improvement of the relationship between Ethiopian government and your organization? Does this renewed relationship affect your stand in regard to the call for acceptance and implementation of the international border ruling? Some see the 5th point on the 5 point peace plan put forward by Ethiopia as a precondition and you have stated that the peace plan is a positive step forward. How do you reconcile the two.

Response: Let me elaborate. It is true, as reported earlier, a delegation of the ELF-RC led by myself held a meeting in Khartoum with Mr. Melles Zenawi, the Prime Minister of The Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It is also true those talks have resumed during our current visit to Ethiopia. By and large, the meetings have assumed their importance in the light of the unfolding developments in Ethio-Eritrean relations and the need for exchange of views about the crucial issues that have imposed themselves on the arena. Top on the agenda was the question of peace and border demarcation.

The talks we had with Mr. Melles were frank, responsible and friendly. We took up all aspects of the issues of crucial im-

portance. In those meetings we had the opportunity to obtain the explanation the Prime Minister had to provide and his government's interpretation of the five-point peace plan as endorsed by the Parliament. We as well availed of the opportunity to express our concerns and observations about aspects of the peace plan and also about possible developments that could lead to renewal of hostilities and cause damage to the long-term relations between our two countries, to which the Prime Minister addressed and elaborated on. I have to say that we found our talks very interesting, useful and highly positive.

We have had comprehensive discussions on the border ruling within the context of the comprehensive Ethio-Eritrean future relations, taking into consideration the various factors that have bearing on the issue on all levels. One may take or leave the Prime Minister's interpretation of the 5-point peace plan or the Prime Minister's inbuilt agenda for the proposed give and take, which he said is not a precondition. The fact remains, though, the Ethiopian Government has made the peace option and ruled out war as an alternative solution to the tension that has so far been left to play between the two countries. This is very, very important from ELF-RC view, and all peace-loving circles for that matter. It addresses the fears and concerns we had about a variety of threats that the spectre of war constituted to our people's fundamental interests in safety and stability. It is therefore our moral, human and national duty to encourage the peace option and make our input to build on it.

On the issue of actual implementation, long before we met the Prime Minister, and when our relations were at their worst, we were for talks between the two governments, talks that would facilitate the process of demarcation and address the possible consequences of demarcation on the other. We have made this clear in

many an occasion. The talks are necessary to address the problems that would surely ensue as a result of the demarcation. A sizable portion of our people shall wake up one day to find themselves on the wrong side of the border, thus the ensuing identity crisis and related problems. Equally thousands of Ethiopians shall after demarcation overnight find themselves on the other side of the border, and thus the attendant problems. Both peoples are already feeling the pangs of the coming painful surgical operation that shall amount to amputations. The two governments are required to rise to the level of responsibility about their peoples' lot and future; they should sit down for talks not as a precondition but as a necessary mechanism to address matters of vital concern to their peoples. In other words, they should use the long lost opportunity for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the first place, to save what could be saved even now; i.e. in terms of alleviating the consequences of demarcation to our two peoples living in the border areas.

To come to the core of the issue of discussion, basically, ELF-RC position remains the same, as has repeatedly and pointedly been clarified in a series of statements we issued in this regard, and in particular in the statement I issued following Mr. Melles' announcement of his government's acceptance, in principle, of the border commission's ruling. We strongly demand and push for implementation, as the ruling is final and binding and a basic element in the consummation of the objective of peace. We are for talks not as a precondition but as an important mechanism of facilitation and opportunity of addressing the resultant problems before they occur. The question is not just a matter of loss or gain of chunks of land; what matters most are the people involved and their future.

To come to the issue of renewal of relations you pointed to, the objective of ELF-RC relations with Ethiopia or any country

for that matter is to promote and share peace, stability and cooperation; this is based on mutual interest served by mutual respect and non-interference in each other's exclusive affairs. We can maintain relations with Ethiopia while arguing about other issues of difference, when they occur. In fact we should maintain relations and channels of communication so that give and take could always be there and intact. We had no other preconditions for that before, and we do not have one now. We have highlighted and criticised encroachments in this regard in the past, without losing sight also of our duty to have them rectified through talks, as we are doing right now, and make sure they do not occur again. There is no eternal dead end to developments and relations with any, let alone with Ethiopia. Likewise, the Ethiopians have not at this juncture tried to force anything down our throats, and the ELF-RC is very, very allergic to such attempts when and if they happen. We are confident we shall use the communication and normal relations we are renewing with the Ethiopians to promote understanding, good neighbourliness, and make the concerns of our people heard in the Ethiopian circles, governmental or otherwise.

As opposition forces we all stand to benefit by normal relations with our neighbours, and we as ELF-RC are solidly qualified to ensure that those relations serve the long-term interests of the Eritrean people and not narrow organisational purposes which could prove unholy. We remain firmly against war, against any encroachment on the sovereign rights of our people and our country's territorial integrity in any manner. We are firmly against any attempt at circumventing the process of border demarcation, against any hint at bending our independence of opinion and decision by any quarter and as firmly as ever. Our compatriots should rest assured that our organisation shall, true to its principles and its record, say a loud and unequivocal "no" when and if,

God forbid, that happens again. We are not here to trade with those national interests and rights that we consider and uphold as sacred

We want to share this. The perception we have about current Ethiopian intentions, and the understanding we have attained, do allow and encourage normal and workable fraternal relations of solidarity and on the basis of mutual respect and the common good. So much damage has been wrought on the relations of the two peoples in the remote and recent past; we won't allow ourselves add more to that. To the contrary, we shall make the necessary effort and sacrifice to reverse the hate, bitterness and rigidity that we already have in abundance. We shall make one more sincere try and build on the understanding reached, and build positively. We know it is not easy, but in our opinion that is the responsible and right thing to do.

DETERIORATING HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION

ERITREA: FIRST IN AFRICA AND THIRD IN THE WORLD!

Three out of four journalists now in detention in the world are found in four countries: China, Cuba, Eritrea and Burma. This is what the latest study made by the CPJ, on the state of detained journalists and their distribution confirms. Peter Cooper of the CPJ has described those countries as moving astray from the course of nations' progress. as they have no faith in their peoples and no respect for world public opinion. Eritrea, with 17 journalists declared as detainees, is third in the world and number one in Africa in the number of journalists it detained.

ERITREA: LEADING AFRICA IN THE LEVEL OF CHILD MALNUTRITION.

- With 16% of children in Eritrea suffering of malnutrition, the country tops the list of countries in Africa with child malnutrition problems.

FIRST IN AFRICA IN THE PERCENTAGE OF ORPHANED CHILDREN

- 10% of Eritrea's children are orphans largely as a result of the toll the Ethio-Eritrean conflict took on the people. Eritrea also occupies the number one place in Africa in the number of orphaned children.
- Prostitution among underage children (below 18 years) has risen sharply following the conflict and the deterioration of the economy. It has now reached alarming levels.

ERITREA: RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION CONTINUES UNABATED

- 31 Christian believers arrested in January 2005 in the outskirts of Asmara, the capital, remain in detention. They were arrested for resuming "illegal" Christian activities. The number of religious institutions known for practicing, according to the regime, illegal religious activities has reached 187.
- 15 women were likewise arrested in Keren, as they were praying in their place of worship. The regime spread rumours that the women were caught red-handed as they held one of many clandestine political meetings held in various parts of the country and aiming at the ousting the government. Officially, government functionaries are saying, in response to inquiries by many, that the women were arrested for committing things that were forbidden by the government. As is always the case with most political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, no charge has so far been made against the women.
- Fourteen members of Kale-Heywet

Church, Adi Tekelezan, were on February 4 arrested while they were assembled for their prayers. They are reported still in detention in Adi-Tekelezan.

- It is to be remembered that Pastor Kidane Ghebremeskel, Pastor Abraham Belay and Fanuel Tesfamariam were on January 21 arrested ; their whereabouts remain unknown. Fears about their safety are widely felt in the capital.

The government has given directives to local administrators throughout the country to keep an eye on the people and report on activities by particular religious groups which have been labeled as security threats.

EVENTS & DEVELOPMENTS

ELF-RC AND ETHIOPIA RESUME BETTER RELATIONS

Mr. Seyoum O. Michael, the Chairman of ELF-RC Executive Committee and Mr. Mengesteab Asmerom, head of Information and Culture, have wound up an important work tour in Ethiopia. The delegation held lengthy discussions with Mr. Melles Zenawi, the Prime Minister, as a continuation of talks started during his visit to Khartoum; they also held similar discussions with other concerned functionaries.

Top on the agenda of the delegation was exploration of common ground on a number of issues of national and regional concern that included the border case, Ethiopian position relating peace and relations with the opposition camp, expected role in bolstering the opposition's position vis-à-vis the challenges ahead, etc. The need to promote relations on the basis of mutual respect for each other's sovereignty and independence of decision were emphasised. Commitment to the implementation of the border ruling and peaceful resolution of problems was jointly stressed. The talks have helped to the melting of the ice

in relations between the ELF-RC and the Ethiopian Government.

The recent talks have apparently led to normalisation of relations. On his return from Addis Ababa to Khartoum, the Chairman of the ELF-RC was cautiously optimistic about the prospects of Ethio-Eritrean relations on opposition level. The visit came after contradictions and distrust had crept into relations between the EPRDF and ELF-RC and kept building bringing them to freezing point when for all practical purposes communication had come to a stop. Continued differences on policies and measures during the recent Ethio-Eritrean conflict, mainly on the mass deportation and detention of Eritreans living in Ethiopia, the handling and conduct of the war, on the EEBC border ruling, on relations with the opposition, on the handling of the painful split within the ELF-RC. Etc.

These were among the areas of friction and at the root of the deterioration of confidence. They were addressed to at the recent talks in frank and constructive manner. Looking forward joint focus was made on the need to open up a new chapter of understanding and cooperation and contribute to the betterment of the much damaged relations of the two brotherly peoples.

ELF-RC SEATTLE BRANCH HELD 10TH CONGRESS

ELF-RC Branch in Seattle, USA, held its 10th Regular Congress in February 2005. The branch congress listened to reports by the branch committee and discussed activities made during the past two years. The congress, basing on deliberations made in the light of the stagnancy in the opposition, endorsed a package of work programme to be implemented on branch level and a number of recommendations that covered a wide-range of concerns

on national level. Particular interest was given to the state of the opposition camp and the need to forge joint national action to effect a speedy change and open the political arena. The congress emphasise that the principal objective was setting in motion a process of democratisation and put the country on a track to peace and irreversible development. Among the salient features of the congresses resolutions were spelled as follow:

1. Step up serious efforts to improve relations among the opposition with the aim of achieving the common goal.
2. Work towards attaining a situation whereby the opposition focuses on joint action on issues of common concern, while respecting differences and acknowledging the need for tolerance and coexistence.
3. Give priority to fostering understanding and cooperation among members of different opposition forces and work to surmount obstacles that stood in the way of healthy relations through formation of joint working committees basing on the recent unity agreement.

The Seattle ELF-RC Branch Congress successfully concluded its work with the election of a new leadership for the coming term.

THE ERITREAN OPPOSITION HAS UNITED

The Eritrean political organisations opposed to the dictatorial regime in Eritrea have, following lengthy deliberations in Khartoum that continued from December 18, 2004 until March 5, formed an all-inclusive umbrella organisation, the Eritrean Democratic Alliance. The birth of the EDA has closed the era of disunity and confusion in the opposition camp. Member organisations of the former ENA and other independent organisations have all converged to form the new EDA, which is expected to pull the opposition camp out

of the stagnancy and futile in-fighting that continued unabated and threatened to derail the course of their struggle.

The EDA held a public signing ceremony in Khartoum, the traditional second home of Eritrean refugees for decades now. In its final statement, the new EDA pinpointed its messages to all concerned. It has called on the people to rally around the call for salvation. The leadership also appealed to the Eritrean Defence forces to side with their betrayed nation's democratic movement. Important as it is, the EDA has expressed its readiness for talks with the regime in Asmara to resolve the deteriorating political crisis in the country, with the aim of attaining a peaceful transition to a democratic system of governance.

The EDA endorsed a political Charter, the EDA constitution, important political resolutions and work guidelines. A 27-man representative Central Leadership was formed; this in turn elected a 9-man Executive Office that would be in charge of leading the EDA for the coming term.

The Executive Committee of the ELF-RC Concludes Regular Meeting

The Executive Committee of the ELF-RC held its meeting from 10-12 March 2005. It reviewed the reports from all executive offices and its organs as well as recommendations from various branches of the organisation. The Executive Committee discussed and evaluated the prolonged talks among the opposition that culminated in the formation of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance. The developments unfolding in Eritrea and in the region as a whole took a large portion of the EC work. Important decisions were adopted and work programmes on various areas endorsed. Top on the list of decisions has been recommitment of the ELF-RC to contribute to the utmost to make the umbrella organisation effective and productive. Specific resolutions have been made to contribute in manpower and material

capability to the formation and promotion of EDA organs that are in their formative stage. The Executive Committee has in the meantime reiterated its reservation relating certain provisions in the Charter, including the article on nationalities which being a controversial matter, the EC believes should not have been part of the document considered to be an agreement on a minimum programme. The EC has confirmed that efforts should be stepped up in the future to introduce the necessary modifications to the political charter with the aim of enhancing joint work for the common good. Another crucial issue of utmost concern of the EC meeting was the lot of Eritrean refugees in the neighbouring countries and elsewhere. The meeting has once again re-indorsed plans that have been in place and introduced ways and means that would best address the issues related to this saga.

HISTORIC ELA DAY AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATED

ELF-RC branches all over the world have organized celebrations to commemorate the historic and heroic stand of the early Eritrean freedom fighters back in 1964, at the battle field of Togorba, in the Western lowlands. That was the first and best ever expression of the faith, dedication and sacrifice of the poorly armed few espousing a just cause against the arrogant, well armed, well trained numerically superior occupation army. It was a crashing blow to the forces of aggression and a boost to the morale of the Eritrean people and to their belief in their capabilities. In the end it was the continued repeat of the historic victory at Togorba that brought about the final collapse of the of the Ethiopian occupation army and culminated in the shining military victory of the Eritrean revolution in May 1991. Members and supporters of the ELF-RC and Eritrean nationalists have solidarised to make the celebrations a success and keep alive the spirit of Togorba for peace, democracy and prosperity.

The International Women's Day, March 8, was for convenience's sake, celebrated jointly with ELA Day as tradition has it in the ELF-RC. Women, the youth, veterans of the ELA, leaders of zonal branch committees were present at the celebrations. They took the podium one after the other to glorify the events with poems and speeches and express their pride in the role the Eritrean woman and all freedom fighters in challenging occupation in all areas to finally realise the liberation of national territory and sovereignty. Participants pledged to keep up the struggle until the aspirations of the betrayed nation are realized to the full.

The Head of ELF-RC Organisational Office Mr. Assefaw Berhe, was a guest at the celebrations organized for the occasions in Frankfurt, Germany. The celebration was launched by an opening speech by Mr. Measho Asrat, Head of the Hessen Branch.

This was followed by a passionate address given by Mrs. Teebe Tekie, a former freedom fighter and current head of Nuremberg Branch. She hailed both the International Women's Day and the ELA Day, and in a lengthy speech exposed the painful and humiliating condition of women under the current repressive policies of the regime in Eritrea; Mrs. Teebe called for women to unite and rise for their rights and their dignity and play their role in the ongoing struggle for democracy and peace in the country.

On behalf of the leadership of the ELF-RC, Mr. Assefaw Berhe, Head of Organisational Affairs Office, saluted and addressed the participants, hailing the historic ELA and Women's days. Mr. Assefaw elaborated on the significance of Togorba and the living message it has conveyed to the present and future generations. He pointed to importance of the newly born Eritrean Democratic Alliance whose foundation was announced on March 5, 2005. The opposition has united its word, the

EDA needs now needs to unite its action in a spirit of tolerance, sense of responsibility and co-existence among its different components to surmount the obstacles of the past and rise up to the level of the challenges ahead and emerge victorious," he said.

The celebrations were in themselves memorable; participants radiated with optimism; following the speeches, they sang and danced away the night of the historic days.

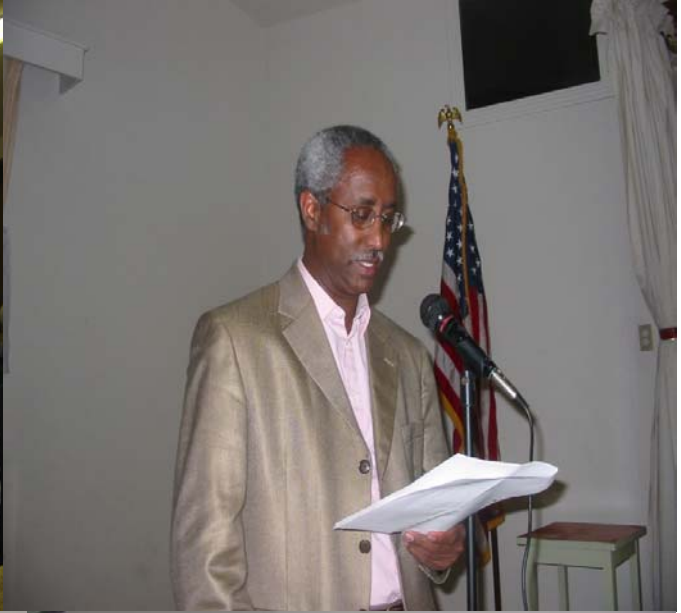
WOMEN'S DAY AND ELA DAY CELEBRATIONS IN BAY AREA, USA

The ELF RC Bay Area Branches featured an exciting event on Saturday March 26, 2005 in commemoration of the glorious Eritrean Liberation Army Day (Togoruba) and International women's day. The city of Santa Rosa hosted the celebration and it was marked by dynamic setting and multiple programs.

The program coordinator Mr. Fesehaye Hagos opened the event with warm greeting to the crowd and briefly presented the purpose of the celebration focusing on the historical significance of the day and its impact on the Eritrean political life.

ELF-RC Zone leaders, members of the Eritrean Democratic Association Board of governors, members of ELF-RC leadership and significant personalities affiliated to various political and community organizations and the youth attended the celebration letting the event embrace diversity.

The key note speaker, Mr. Wolde-selassie Tesfai, Chairman of the Western Zone, addressed the gathering and brought home the historical significance of the day and gave particular attention to the encouraging emergence of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance recently signed by 16 organizations in Khartoum, the Sudan. He acknowledged the political and social diversity of the Eritrean society and said that the formation of a coalition between 16 different organizations marks a step forward towards establishing a pluralistic democratic Eritrea.



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He asserted that the ELF RC, true to its beliefs, is committed to play its part to enhance the performance of the coalition, to let it keep a higher ground, embrace the Eritrean population and forge with concrete work plans that would facilitate the demise of the dictatorial regime in Asmara.

Following the address of the keynote speaker a speech on the Eritrean women's struggle both for national independence and women's emancipation was presented by Mrs. Asghedet Mehreteab, member of Sacramento and environs ELF-RC branch and former member of leadership of the General Union of Eritrean Women. She exposed the horrible situation Eritrean women are facing under the dictatorial regime and called all nationalist and democratic women to rise up, organize and once again fight for their rights.

Mr. Desbele Kahsai, Member of Western Zone leadership, led a seminar featuring children's program. Mr. Desbele was professionally able to draw the attention not only of the teens and youth but also of the adult attendees. The program was a success in intensifying Eritrean political and cultural awareness among the youth.

Special attention was given to a very bright and successful student, Bethel Asmerom from the city of Oakland, for the role she played to help Eritrean refugee students in the Sudan.

Before the conclusion of the discussions session, two members of ELF-RC leadership, Mr. Tesfai W. Michael and Mr. Habtemariam Kifle took the stand to answer questions and receive suggestions from the audience. Deep and thorough discussions underwent on the current political developments in the Eritrean political arena. Members of the leadership explained the important tenets of Khartoum agreement. They said that in the atmosphere of division witnessed among the opposition, to find 16 diverse organizations acknowledging the necessity of harmony among the opposition in itself is a success. They said that it's ELF-RC's belief that such a coalition may pave the right path to get rid of the horrific crimes perpetrated against our people, to defend freedom of conscience and rightfully claim Eritrea as a land of sovereign and free people.

Adding more color and taste to the celebration, Mr. Habte Michael Degol of Sacramento Branch presented a piece of poetry and satire on the current Eritrean political situation. Mr. Habte gave the audience a time to relax and think, and at same time to laugh and enjoy the night.

Eritrean cuisine prepared by Santa Rosa Branch was enjoyed through out the night and folklore dances crowned the night with joy and feeling of togetherness.

EDA LEADERSHIP WINDS UP ITS TOUR IN SUDAN'S EASTERN REGION

Following the formation of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance by the opposition, a high level delegation of the Executive Office has from 16-23 March, 2005 crisscrossed the Eastern Region of Sudan to hold meetings with the Eritrean public. The delegation composed of Mr. Hussein Khalifa, the current head of the Executive Office and Mengesteab Asmerom, Ahmad Nasser, Shengeb M. Tahir and Ahmad Turki, all members of the top EDA leadership addressed mass rallies held in the towns of Kassala, Port-Sudan, Gedaref and the refugee camps of Shegherab, Umgurgur, and Kilo Sitta-wa-Ishrin in support of the unity of the opposition.

In all meetings there was an unprecedented turnout, and a very high level of popular participation was registered during discussions. Indeed it was telling enough about the extent of support the unity of the opposition enjoys and the interest that refugees have maintained in the affairs of their country.

The delegation put forth the objectives of the EDA and the role expected of the public to realise the long held aspirations of change, democratization and peace in Eritrea.

The delegation also responded to questions from the public who expressed their solidarity and recommendations to safeguard the gains made and make the EDA an umbrella that unites and delivers on the people's agenda of national salvation. In all the rallies participants expressed their full support and pledged to stand by the EDA until victory.





**ERITREAN DEMOCRATIC
ASSOCIATION, INC.**

A Nonprofit Public Benefit corporation

**Eritrean Democratic Association (EDA)-Bay
Area Chapter, Conducted a fund raising event**

The EDA is in its third year since its foundation. It is taking root and thriving to achieve the objectives that were laid out in its mission statement. The EDA is a nonprofit public benefit corporation organized under California law for public and charitable purposes. The specific purposes of this corporation include, but not limited to, stop human rights abuses, raise funds in cash or in kind to alleviate the suffering of the Eritrean people, and provide an opportunity to every child to go to school and every disabled to get vocational training.

The vision and spirit of the EDA was evident in the initiative individual members have been taking. On February 26, 2005, two members of EDA, Bay Area Chapter residing in neighboring cities of Vacaville and Sacramento volunteered to organize a fund raising event in Vacaville. These dedicated ladies prepared food and refreshments on their own expense. They invited EDA members and supporters from all over The Bay Area and Americans residing in Vacaville and Sacramento.

As the participants gathered, EDA brochures were distributed to inform them about the mission and activities of the non-profit corporation. Also, a recent school video taken at the Wedisherifey Refugee School in the Town of Kassala, The Sudan, was shown which gave the participants an opportunity to have a feel of the reality in the life of the School. Wedisherifey School provides elementary and intermediate level of education and accommodates refugee students who were victims of war and families that fled suffering and persecution perpetuated by the dictatorial regime in Eritrea.

The video happened to be a copy of a thank you response sent to Amanuel Yacob, a ten years old Eritrean, residing in Norway for his generous donation of \$250.00 to the school. Amanuel learned from his parents that school materials taken for granted in his school are not available for his fellow Eritrean children living as refugees in The Sudan. The in-

spired young Eritrean sold cookies by going house to house in his neighborhood with a cause to help the needy.

Throughout the event, members of the Board of Directors gave an overview of the corporation and clarified questions that were raised by participants. Eritrean participants were already familiar with the root cause of the problem, whereas Americans who respected the cause and the invitation had to learn about the country, the people, the root cause of the problem and the solution. Eritreans donated by expressing their emotional attachments to the plight of their own people, and Americans shared this and showed their humane care and support by their generous donation. A total of \$ 1365.00 was raised from participants.

On March 12, 2005, The Board of Directors received a donation check of \$750.00 from Bethel Asmerom. Bethel is another young Eritrean in a Bay Area high school who was inspired by her parents, who are members of EDA. Bethel entered a competition offered by her school for students that support needy and legitimate charity organizations; she presented EDA's objectives and activities. EDA was selected as one of the winners and earned the above amount.

Board of directors

