

Be Part of the Unity

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Until recently, the Eritrean political landscape in general and the opposition force in particular was suffering from lack of real unity or some semblance of it. This created uproar and wide condemnation from the Eritrean people.

As a result, the legitimacy and efficiency of the opposition forces was seriously undercut in that it could not garner a durable and credible support from the Eritrean public. The lack of support was even more prominent among the Eritrean youth and Eritrean experts than in any other segment of our society.

The protracted unity crisis is blamed on varied reasons, ranging from unsettled political differences created in the liberation era (among ELF groups and their offshoots) to the seemingly irreconcilable differences between ELF and EPLF and to the unruly foreign intervention in our internal affairs. Some detractors even blame the presence of PFDJ infiltrators inside the opposition forces. One could on and on looking for other possible reasons.

But whatever we believe the reason might be the lack of unity is more explainable when it is directed towards the current Eritrean political groups. We say this because the epicenter of the entire problem of unity is none other than the opposition forces themselves that failed to change and adapt to the fast developing circumstances in post independence Eritrea. While the nature of unity changed in post independence Eritrea where it called for the inclusion of all stakeholders, notably the EPLF groups and other non ELF members, independent individuals... Etc, the former ELF groups stuck with their narrower version of unity, mainly to the tune of amalgamating ex ELF groups and the rest of their offshoots. Even so, no concrete or durable unity was ever established. It was all disaster and disappointing. Yes, some sort of unity here and there was forged or attempted, but never held its ground to the true meaning of unity.

The post independence era brought a new development, which called for change in our thinking, change in our political coalitions and alliances, change in our understanding of unity, change in our views and realities, and change in our old practices and rules, and change on how to bridge the generational gap ... etc. Change has become the rule than the exception in post independence Eritrea. It is a paradigm shift if you will. And the call to deal with the unity crisis did not completely fall on deaf ears. The crisis was brought to the center of the Eritrean political arena by the former Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC) where it was debated extensively as to how to go about formulating a strategy to solve the long awaited unity crisis among Eritrea political groups, and by extension among the Eritrean people.

ELF-RC laid down a foundation on two fronts to tackle the unity crisis. One was to introduce change in the body politics of Eritrea as part of paving the way for unity. Second, it aimed to address the conflict between ELF and EPLF by breaking the wall that symbolized as a historical divide in our society. These two fronts were crucial both in opening up a political space and in freeing ourselves from the narrow political culture, which is a major political and social liability among the current Eritrean political organizations. ELF-RC did not stop in this seemingly easy sound strategy, but hard to achieve it. It looked an ownership for this change to occur. As history witnessed, ELF-RC members disbanded their organization; and subsequently participated in establishing an-all inclusive political party where all stakeholders put their vision together for change in future Eritrea. That was the time when the unity began to pick up momentum in the Eritrean politics. That was the time when the Eritrean People's Party (EPP), a.k.a Al-hizib El shab or Sefi Hizbi was born.

Ever since the birth of EPP, the unity agenda was kept in high priority. Not only did EPP want to achieve unity but also it formulated mechanisms and evolving processes to make it realistic and irreversible. The first strategy was to dismantle the mentality, politics, and historical differences that had stood as a wall for years between Eritreans and prevented them from Seeing Eye to eye.

EPP reached out and found a partner, the Eritrean Democratic Party. Ardent and proudly EPLF, EDP equally had to overcome its own challenges and meet EPP halfway. Together, they adapted change and renewal policies where they broke the taboo of ELF vs. EPLF that had been feared for more than 30 years. The process of unity, which is to conclude soon, took a unique approach in that it went through a number of phases: phase of introduction and preparation for commitment, confidence building that leads to readiness to engage and the willpower to take actions. The entire process encompassed identifying the points of differences and agreements, negotiating and engaging in narrowing down the differences, seeking input and active participation from members of both political parties on agreements reached between the two parties over the course of the process, planning a joint regional conferences, and holding a merger congress.

Both political parties successfully trekked the road and substantively reached on acceptable and irreversible stage in which they are now poised to merge very soon. The entire process would not have happened if both parties had not understood the nature of change that Eritrean politics had demanded for a long time in post independence Eritrea.

The unity and change being embraced by EDP and EPP is sweeping away the trait of fear and mistrust in our political culture. It has opened a new era. For example, EPP reached out another Eritrean organization- the Eritrean Democratic Resistance Movement/Gash-Setit and negotiated a merger. The merger of the two was declared complete in April 2009, which was a milestone in the history of Eritrean unity. Second, the Eritrean People's Movement (EPM) has recently entered the unity process, which will boost the participation and hope of Eritrean people in the struggle for change and unity.

Yes, the country is changing and we need to change with it. But there are people who live on the wrong side of the track, spending time belittling and disparaging the crucial role of the unity that is taking place. They are so fixed by the world of the past that there is no prospect of bringing new life into it. They make no effort to challenge their deluded state of mind that reduced them to exclusion and failure. Instead, they opt to remain restless and disgruntled by blaming others without seeking to transform and reinvent themselves. But framing accusation and recrimination is an old and familiar politics in our midst that will not be allowed to take the place of thinking for change and salvation of our country any longer.

The unity among the EDP, EPP, and EDRM/Gash-Setit is making a strong leap from the old generation to the new generation, from the mentality of ELF vs. EPLF to the mentality of Eritrea, and from the order of dominance to the order of unity and inclusiveness, and from the mentality of disempowering and alienating our people to the mentality of participatory and democratic society the need to be thinking about change and salvation. Be part of the unity. It is the best insurance to speed up the downfall of the dictatorial regime of PFDJ, and to pave the way for establishing a future democratic Eritrea.