

Constituent Congress of a New Eritrean Mass Party Opens Sessions

By
Media Team at Site of Congress
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The founding congress of a broad based Eritrean party that was initiated at the July 2006 congress of the ELF-RC was officially opened on 25 July 2008 under the following slogans that were displayed at the conference hall of Ghenet Hotel in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia:

- Our New Party is the Product of Our Vision and Action!
- Joint Purpose for Effect Action and Victory!
- Yes, Democracy is Possible in Eritrea!
- Unity is Our Goal, Change is our Trademark!
- Long Live to the Fraternal Relationship of the Eritrean and Ethiopian Peoples!

A large number of people attended the opening session that started at 10 am. Taking part were many of the over 140 congress participants from different places in Africa, Australia, Asia, Europe, Canada and the United States as well as the vice-chairman of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA), representatives of 11 Eritrean opposition organizations, independent observers; and a representative of the Sana'a Forum and of the Ethiopian government.



A cultural troupe from Shimelba opened the ceremonies by entertaining the audience with moving songs about the aspirations of the Eritrean people and the present-day sad situation of our youth and refugees.

This was followed by welcoming statement by Mr. Amanuel Habte, chairman of the preparatory committee of the Joint Party Formation Commission, who commended the rich and constructive contributions of members of the ELF-RC and other new party candidates in the process of party formation. He believed that the ideals and visions promoted in the party formation process were shared by many Eritreans who contributed in their making.



Mr. Amanuel Habte further stated that a large percentage of the expected 152 delegates of the congress were present and that the congress had sufficient quorum to start its deliberations. He also informed the opening session that Mr. Ibrahim Mohammed Ali, the outgoing Speaker of the Revolutionary Council, was absent from the congress due to health reasons. The Speaker sent his best wishes for the success of the party congress.



Presentation of solidarity messages by invited guests was started by Mr. Haj Abdelnur, vice-chairman of the EDA. Other speakers were Mr. Hussein Khalifa, deputy chairman of the ELF; Mr. Abdalla Mahmoud, representative of the Eritrean National Democratic Front (ENSF); Mr. Ramadan Mohammed M. Nur, deputy chairman of the Islamic Congress Party; Mr. Nur Idris, chairman of the Al Nahda Party; Mr. Adhanom Ghebremariam, chairman of the Eritrean People's Party (EPM); Mr. Ibrahim Idris, representative of the Eritrean Islamic Party for justice and Development; Mr. Tewfiq Nur Hussein, representative of the Eritrean People's Democratic Front (EPDF); Mr Mohammed Maar, representative of the Democratic Organization of the Afar Red Sea; Mr. Beshir Isahak, chairman of the Eritrean Federal Democratic Movement of Eritrea; Mr. Haj Abdenur, representative of the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP); Mr. Abdulgadir Sherif, representative of the Eritrean Islamic Party, and Mr. Hibur Ghebre-Kidan, Ethiopian government representative and chairman of the Sana'a Forum of Ethiopia, the Sudan and Yemen.

Following the solidarity addresses, Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar, the outgoing chairman of the ELF-RC, presented the keynote address of the opening session. Flanked by all RC members standing at the podium, he outlined the activities of the organization in the past two years in the struggle against the regime and in the party formation process; listed the trademarks of ELF-RC in the Eritrean struggle in the past 26 years and the *raison de etre* for the change in the direction and vision of the struggle for transformation from dictatorship to democratic governance.

The outgoing ELF-RC chairman officially declared the dissolution of the organization and confirmed the transfer of all members, institutions, and properties of the organization to the new party.



The next speaker was Mr. Haile Ghebru, chairman of the Joint Party Formation Commission, who explained in great detail the party formation process that was communicated to the public at large through seminars, conferences and all possible modern media of public communication. He commended the ELF-RC leadership for granting all freedom to the Commission and for the leadership's close cooperation with the Commission in the process. He noted that, although other organizations did not join the party formation process, he expressed satisfaction with the number of individual candidates from among the youth, women and intellectuals who joined the process. Most of them were members of other organizations or individuals without any political belonging till the call for membership to the new party.



The final speaker to address the opening session was Mr. Hibur Ghebre-Kidan whose on his part presented a warmly welcomed speech in which he believed the initiative taken by the ELF-RC is an encouraging start in the politics of Eritrean opposition and hoped it will be emulated by other organizations with related political programmes. He also expressed the recent unification of the Eritrean opposition and encouraged giving priority to the joint struggle. Mr. Hibur also

confirmed that the Ethiopian peoples and government are determined to continue the support to the struggle of Eritreans for change and democratization.

At the conclusion of the opening ceremony, invited guests were invited to a reception at a nearby reception.



Following lunchtime, congress participants met to elect a 7 person Secretariat to lead the work of the congress. The new secretariat elected Mr. Gherezgheher Tewelde as its chairman who announced the agenda and the timing for future meetings of the congress. The second session was concluded after reading of solidarity messages sent from different parts of the world.

There will be continued reportage on the deliberations of the congress which is expected to complete its tasks by 30 July 2008.