

ELF-RC Statement at the Constituent Party Congress

25.07.2008

Honourable Mr. Hibur Ghebre-Kidan, chairman of the Secretariat of the Sana'a Forum and representative of the host country,
Honourable Mr. Haj Abdelnur, vice-chairman of the Eritrean Democratic Alliance,
Honourable heads and representatives of Eritrean opposition organizations,
Honourable Haile Ghebru, chairman of the Joint Party Formation Commission,
Honourable Amanuel Habte, chairman of the preparatory committee,
Honourable total membership of the ELF-RC,
Honourable Observers, Members of the Media, and Invited Guests,
Honourable Party Congress Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I feel honoured to warmly salute our guests and independent observers who are here responding to the invitation of the preparatory committee of the Joint Party Formation Commission.

Secondly, I warmly salute you congress delegates coming from many parts of the five continents of the globe to take part in this historic event that you worked hard in its making!! We are all proud that we made it happen!! I also take the opportunity of commending the Joint Party Formation Commission and the preparatory committee for their relentless efforts to organize this event.



No doubt that all of us in this hall today are witnesses of a unique historic being initiated and starting to unfold in Eritrean politics.

It is to be recalled that, we in the ELF-RC have decided at the 6th congress two days ago to dissolve our organization and join other compatriots in forming a broad based mass party. This is what we are doing today. But before talking about the intended changes, let me give an account of the organizational activities in the past two years; give our views on the place of the organization in Eritrea's political records, and finally state why we have decided to join others in establishing a new mass party with new visions and attitudes.

What ELF-RC did between July 2006 and July 2008:

During the past 24 months, members of the ELF-RC had to conduct a double struggle: the first being the ongoing struggle against the dictatorial regime and the second task was that of working hard to form a party for the new era. The tasks accomplished included the following:

- The indefatigable ELF-RC members in all parts of the world organized over 100 public assemblies, seminars, festivals and conferences that served the two objects of fighting the regime while promoting the party formation process. The public information and mass mobilization inside the homeland was conducted successfully and continually by the propaganda units of the organization.
- The leadership and the total membership of the organization also played active part in the various joint activities of the opposition in exposing the abuses of dictatorial regime in Eritrea. And as noted before, the organs of the organization conducted successful tasks in the party formation process that was led by a Joint Commission of new party candidates.
- As usual, the information activities of the ELF-RC continued in an effective way to reflect the activities of the opposition camp against the dictatorship in Eritrea.
- Work in the public and diplomatic fields was also fruitful with the many protest messages and memoranda addressed to the United Nations bodies and various other human rights organizations and regional bodies.
- The ELF-RC continued to be second to none in delivering social services to refugees, refugee families and children as well as to newly arriving young refugees in the neighbourhood of Eritrea.
- The accord we reached with the Eritrean Democratic Party was part of the relentless efforts exerted by the ELF-RC in the past two years to realize unity of organizations and individuals with similar vision for Eritrea. We trust that the new party will continue this process towards forming a viable alternative to the dictatorship in Eritrea.

A Short Profile of the Remarkable ELF-RC (1981- 2008)

The long history of the ELF is a joint history of many Eritreans. However, the ELF-RC has its own particular history that started in 1982 when the mother organization was fragmented into three factions. The mainstream body that grew into the ELF-RC started

under the deserved name of General Trend (Teyar al Am) that epitomized the national democratic line of the mother organization that, among other things, vigorously defended national unity. In the past quarter of a century, the ELF-RC registered a remarkable role with positive influence in the national struggle. The ELF-RC consolidated the national democratic path of the revolution and built upon it by its 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th congresses that now embody the history of this worthy organization that we are putting aside to historical archives of our past. In short, the ELF-RC will be remembered partly for the following:

- It was the Eritrean organization that strove with success to contain the negative narrow sentiments that cropped up after the schism of the ELF in 1982.
- Likewise, we believe Eritrean history will take note of the role the ELF-RC played in confronting the fundamentalist stance of the chauvinist PFDJ and the narrow regional and localized groupies that emerged because of the policies of the regime.
- We say the ELF-RC will be remembered for its struggle to correctly manage the diversity of the Eritrean people, and its stand in protecting the independent political decision of the Eritrean opposition camp.

In short, the history of the ELF-RC is already recorded in the accounts of its past congresses. It is hoped that the broad-based party that we are forming this week will bequeath the positive legacies of this worthy Eritrean organization that we are passing to history today.

You may recall that meeting at this same hall two years ago, we in the ELF-RC entered a pledge to our people. The pledge resolved by us was to put aside our organization and join other compatriots in forming a party that can lead our people to a successful new phase of struggle. Today, we are assembled in this hall to launch the resolve of realizing an all-out change. The pledge was to change course by replacing the old with a new method of struggle that would lead to victory. That resolve to work out success was the resolve and pledge of our 6th Congress. It indeed was the pledge of all Eritrean organizations that appeared in the course of the struggle. In particular, it was the pledge of the Eritrean Liberation Movement (Mahber Shewate/Haraka); the resolve and pledge of the heroic Hamid Idris Awate and his liberation army; the resolve and pledge of the historic ELF; the resolve and pledge of the PLF, and the resolve and pledge of the history-making EPLF whose name has been blemished and whose objectives were hijacked by Dictator Isayas Afworki and his clique.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The armed struggle declared 47 years ago was launched for replacing the old colonial rule. Changing an existing reality for sure requires an uphill struggle. Yet, there was a resolve to change the despair of the day to hopefulness, and it was possible to make it. However, the change - the revolution - that was launched in 1961 had three basic aims: **national unity, independence and democracy.**

The first objective – national unity – was secured to a large extent during the liberation struggle, and thanks to that unity of purpose, our people jointly paid high sacrifices and won national independence. But territorial independence was not accompanied with a democratic system of governance. Old attitudes, grudges, the old political culture and old ways of doing things remained unchanged. As such, our people’s victory stopped half-way and remained unfinished. To the contrary, the achievements on mutual trust of our people and their unity registered reverses. Thus, out of the three objectives of the liberation struggle only one was achieved: that of territorial independence. The people were not to enjoy the long dreamt fruits of liberation.

In other words, we still face an uphill struggle to secure unity and to build a democratic state of Eritrea. The factors that adversely affected our national unity and the drive to build a democratic system will have to be dealt with now. The dictatorial one-man regime and the factors of backward political culture that it exploited need to be address without delay because the abject political, economic and social condition in Eritrea is unbearable.

[We are for change!](#)

Eritrea would have been spared of the sad situation it is in if the wasted 17 years since 1991 were to be utilized in building a democratic system of governance with the participation of all Eritreans. Democracy carries in its wings solutions to all problems. Democratic system is the powerhouse that emits peace and tranquility; that delivers justice, equality, unity, and social progress. The failure to start practicing the ABC of democracy at Eritrea’s independence landed us where we are as today:

- By the way, would we be witnessing today the presence of narrow sectarian sentiments and movements if independent Eritrea was able to establish a democratic government that was respectful of the rights, interests, aspirations, cultures, and traditions of all segments of the population?
- Would there be today organizations that claim to represent only certain linguistic or ethnic segments of the new state if our people were not forced to waste 17 years under a cruel dictatorship that sowed seeds of hatred and division in the society?
- Won’t Eritreans by now be building their national parties if Isayas and his PFDJ were not to hijack the dreams of our great patriots for unity, equality and democracy in an independent state?

We in the ELF-RC presume that the responses of each and every one of you are similar to those we have in mind.

At this juncture, one need let bygones be bygones and dwell on what is to be done in the future to change the unwanted situation in Eritrea. Naturally, the seemingly simple word “change”, is not really that simple. It means replacing one’s current status, current condition by something totally different – and that is very difficult to be or to accept. Therefore, the task we start to change the sad situation in our country will at the outset appear to be very difficult although it is a surmountable task. But when we say change, we mean destroying the archaic attitudes and practice not only those of PFDJ but also

those of us in the opposition. Indeed, the archaic ways of doing work in the opposition, the failed paths in the struggle of the opposition must be buried and be replaced by ideals and methods of struggle that can lead to victory.

- It is high time that we leave behind us the old Jebha/Shabia divide of grudges - which we should have done way back in 1991 - and instead open a new chapter in order to lead our people to victory.
- Victory will not be ours unless we heed to and accept the wishes and aspirations of the Eritreans below the age of 35 who in fact make about three-fourth of the Eritrean people. The historical baggage that we attach to the old ELF and the old EPLF have little to do with the 75% of the new generation in Eritrea, and we better start talking in the language of this new generation and address its aspirations in order to build a better Eritrea - a changed Eritrea.
- The historic role the Eritrean women played in the era of the liberation struggle is sadly weakened in the current struggle for change and democratization. It is time to remove the obstacles to their participation in this struggle inside the homeland and in the Diaspora. Otherwise, the success of our people's struggle for change will be delayed.
- We need to change our attitude favourably towards those Eritreans who, wittingly or unwittingly, are on the side of the dictatorship today. They are not and should not be taken as our enemies, nor should they be left alone to take us as their adversaries. They are victims of the situation in the country and need help to join our ranks to struggle for change.

In short, we are proceeding to enter into a new era our party congress. It is a new stage in which we promise to address all the points mentioned above. As Haile Ghebru, the chairman of the Joint Party Formation Commission has repeatedly stated, we are launching a Positive Revolution. Likewise, as Dr. Ghebremeskel Habte-Yonas, the vice-chairman of the Commission, calls it, we are starting an All-out Change in our way of conducting the struggle for change. It is a change to be effected by each and every one of us. Those of us who have been members of the ELF-RC have willingly accepted the change. We are in a new stage, in a new era. As already stated, we are hereby putting our organization to respectable historical archives that it deserves, and are launching this party, this new instrument of victory, together with other compatriots who are joining us today and will join us in the days ahead. The eventual success of this new phase in our struggle is well assured.

At this point, I wish to pay gratitude to the government and people of Ethiopia for granting us this forum for struggle that we have been deprived in our country, and for their support to our struggle for change and democratization. I also take this opportunity to thank countries of the Sana'a Forum for their past sympathy with the sad situation in our country. It is true that the recent decision of the Sudanese government towards the Eritrean opposition is a cause for concern but we hope it will be reconsidered and changed in favour of the Eritrean people because that decision was not to the interest of both the Sudanese and Eritrean peoples.

In conclusion, and on behalf of the leadership and the members of this congress, I say a big thank you to all those who have been helping in making this congress a success. We also pay tribute to our fallen heroes, among them Martyr Seyoum Ogbamichael, who paid their lives to build this organization. We today tell them that we are joining other compatriots in upgrading the worthy organization they built to a higher level so that we can crown with success our cause for change and democratization.

Victory to our struggle for change and democratization!

Victory to this congress and its party!

Glory and eternal memory to our martyrs!