

Persistence in a Culture That Tries to Pull Us Apart

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It has been more than two years since the process of unity between the Eritrean People's Party and Eritrean Democratic Party began. In between, two political organizations joined the process: the Eritrean People's Movement and the Eritrean Democratic Movement for Gash/Setit. In April 2009, negotiation between the Eritrean Democratic Movement for Gash/Setit and the Eritrean People's Party heralded a complete merger of the Eritrean Democratic Movement for Gash/Setit with EPP. The Eritrean People's Movement is a major partner in the ongoing unity process.

The process has never been easy. Initially, bringing two political parties brought up in two different political environments and experience was the biggest obstacle to overcome. At times the process has been heated, but always cultivating, fostering, and adapting.

We evolved through a unique process of confidence building measures focused on communication and transparency. The process has included diverse elements – bringing the two grass-roots and leaderships to exchange views and experiences and collecting ideas and inputs to assess the development of the process. The track record of the confidence building measure was successful. The process brought trust and common ground where future negotiations and agreements were declared favorable and mature. The process led us toward common understanding thus weakening the structure of “my party, my organization, and ELF vs. EPLF” culture ingrained for years in the Eritrean body politics in general and in the opposition forces in particular.

We introduced a new dynamics to the language of unity in Eritrean politics that never existed before. We looked into sustainable and fundamental strategy that changes the minds and hearts of many Eritreans. We avoided unity based on political expediency that historically turned blind eye to the interest of our people and eroded the confidence in the opposition forces. We reversed the culture of politicized, short-sighted, and corrupted unity that served the agenda of leaders and groups, as well as contributed to the collapse of all unity efforts ever tried in our history: whether the unity we tried in pre independence or the ones we pursued in post independence.

The strategy and approach we pursued gained significant support. The strategy we followed is taking strong hold; it is making an impact across the entire spectrum of Eritrean politics, which is a positive contribution to the overall struggle for democracy and a huge consolidation of the Eritrean opposition force. Again, the unity represented a sharp break from the longstanding precedent of entering into unity that never worked and remained folded in the shelves of many opposition members.

And yet, the anti unity forces did not waste time and went on a rapid hate campaign ever since the unity agreement began to shape. Every move we made they stood against it, twisted it, and distorted

it. They have played the religious card, they have played the highland-lowland card, they have played the ethnic card... etc. But the scale of the opposition is not huge. This is a minority group, mainly an amalgamation of desperate individuals, extremists and zealots who believe they should continue to spew lies, disinformation, and poison so that the unity does not get recognition. Their chief motive is to guard the status quo by legitimizing disinformation and fear among the gullible. It was a concerted strategy of dehumanization and exclusion aimed at stifling the ongoing unity.

But the campaign backfired. It mobilized people who were not either serious or active in the process of unity. It also brought civic society organization members and individuals of every great caliber and stripes who felt the campaign and disinformation was a disservice to the cause of democracy.

We marched through all the hate campaigns and divisive politics with responsibility and determination. We resolved to go beyond the malicious campaigns. No matter how much they tried, they could not shovel the ongoing unity aside to the corner. Eritrean people wanted it. It is also our experience that any extreme and exclusionist ideology taken to the extreme will fail. And those who are pursuing such an ideology to provide their routine acts of self promotion and egos in every possible way to the gullible will one day realize that they are badly mistaken.

The unity process taught us change and reason. We are slowly but assuredly garnering public support. The unity is attracting diverse supporters. We have grown to be stronger and forward looking in every aspect of our struggle for unity. We have become more diverse, pluralistic, inclusive, and open, which we believe is a corner stone to building sustainable Eritrea for generations to come.

Yes, the first phase of the unity of the three political parties is approaching. But the struggle for sustainable unity is at its early stage; it is a long journey. It will require us to hold firm to the vision of unity and continue to show Eritrean people the importance of unity. We will continue to learn from our mistakes and intensify our efforts to build a strong and sustainable unity that will contribute to democracy and freedom in our society. We perfectly know that the challenge is to safeguard the unity transition and consolidation of the achievements in the midst of the political extremism that breeds prevarication, tensions, and fear at the sound of unity. But we won't be hindered; we will stick together and continue to develop new values and attitudes that raise greater awareness over the importance of unity. Persistence and determination is the game.

