

**The 5th General National Congress
of the
Eritrean Liberation Front - Revolutionary Council
E.L.F.-R.C**



- Political Programme
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August 2001

THE POLITICAL REPORT OF THE 5TH GENERAL NATIONAL CONGRESS

Our Congress has convened after a delay of one year, largely due to external factors that hindered our movement. We, therefore, congratulate ourselves and our people on this historic occasion. No doubt, the conditions we see currently unfolding on domestic and international levels vary in many respects from those that had prevailed at the time our 4th National Congress concluded its sessions.

International reality today is characterised by the domination of a single and undisputed world power, and the ongoing process of globalisation that has manifested itself on economic and political spheres. This has created a situation whereby the United Nations has virtually become a body to which the weak can hardly pin their hopes in their quest for justice, whenever their interests happen to contradict with those of the dominant global power. Although globalisation does seem to postulate openness in world trading relations, it has, nonetheless disadvantaged the poor and weak states in the Southern Hemisphere to the extent that unjustly benefited the rich and powerful North, thus widening the gap between the two spheres.

On regional level, the countries on the African Continent, especially those in the Horn region, are known to be among the poorest in the world. The peoples of these nations lack the technical and economic strength to absorb the pressure of globalisation. Consequently, their chances for reasonable competitive economic development have been shrinking. Given the imposing weight of the global order and the ruinous and repressive policies of the current regime, Eritrea, as a fledgling state, could lack the space that would allow it make any viable move towards development.

Politically, during the past few decades, our region has been engulfed in conflicts and devastating wars. The post Siad Barre crisis in Somalia that had spun out of

control, due to the fierce power struggle amongst the various vying political forces had brought the country to a virtual state of non-existence, as central political control was lost. And to make an already bad situation worse, the Ethio-Eritrean conflict had spilled over to their arena and negatively impacted the Somali condition. Graded as one of the cruellest wars Africa has ever witnessed at the closing years of the 20th Century, the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict has been a fertile ground for tension across the entire Horn region.

However, following the agreement among the Somalis in the Arta Conference in Djibouti, which intended to restore normalcy to the Somali state on the one hand, and the Algiers Agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia, on the other, had apparently given a ray of hope for peace and stability in the region. Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the possibilities of the region relapsing to yet another round of tension and conflict. The fact that some of the Somali forces opposed to the new government of their country are still pitted against one another and the Isayas regime, which has been a reservoir of troubles and wars in the region, is still in power make apprehension about the future more real than apparent. These two sources of instability keep dangers to peace in the region lingering on the horizon.

On the Eritrean side of the equation, the regime there has no longer the potency and ego-trip of five years ago that aroused its passion to menace and assault one neighbour after another in a feverish bid to assert itself as a regional bully. Successive internal and external failures have substantially curtailed its manoeuvrability, causing its erstwhile supporters to step back or distance themselves from it altogether. The repercussions of these fiascos have galvanised into an open rift within the ruling establishment triggering bitter internal power struggle.

In contrast, the ELF-RC is no longer in the state of weakness it was in on the eve of the 4th General N. Congress. The influences and alliances the regime enjoyed and utilised in pursuing our organisation have passed away. In fact, the regime itself is suffering of increasing isolation in the region. Having emerged from those difficult conditions, thus, our organisation today stands on a more stable ground. Better organised and well positioned, the ELF-RC has been able to challenge the regime on several fronts, and play a leading role in the context of our joint struggle

with other Eritrean opposition forces. Moreover, the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces has become an organ to which our nation hinges its hopes for setting itself free from the shackles of the dictatorship.

The regime has shown no sign of any change of motto or policy since our 4th General National Congress was held in October 1995. To the contrary, it has escalated the cruelty and ferocity it had demonstrated in its inhuman measures to the extent its relationship with the Eritrean people dropped to its lowest level. Furthermore, the regime has been resorting to base and extremely dangerous methods that have endangered national cohesion cemented during the long national armed resistance. Chauvinistic, arrogant and terrorist tactics of divide-and-rule have manifestly reinforced repressive policies that have characterised the regime's ways. The sensitive nature of religious differences and sentiments was calculatedly stirred and instrumentalised to divide the people and serve the power interests of the regime.

From 1994 onwards, and subsequent to the severing of diplomatic ties with the Sudan, following surprise accusation it levelled against the latter of "support for destructive activities by the Eritrean Islamic Jihad Movement", the regime had been shamelessly attempting to drive a wedge between the two major religious communities of our country. It has been striving to realise these malicious objectives through deliberate ploy of portraying the Eritrean opposition forces as proponents of Shari'a system of rule that would relegate non-Muslims in Eritrea to second-class citizenship. By this means, the regime hoped to instil fear and suspicion among the followers of the Christian faith, easing thereby its way of turning them into a social base for its power under the cloak of championing their best interest. As though this was not enough, the regime added the element of regionalism as yet another expedient for splitting the ranks of the people in order to satiate the dictator's hunger for domination. This latter manoeuvre has indisputably been proven by the document the regime's embassy in Washington issued in 2000. Such an infamous act stood as a stark testimony to the diabolic extremes the regime is capable of going in order to stir up baseless suspicions among inhabitants of various zones.

The social composition of our organisation and the national line it represents have proven their compatibility with our people's national interest to a much more

higher degree than mere representation of the social set up of the Eritrean society. Such a status has accorded our organisation the competence and qualification to challenge the mendacious acts of the regime. As a matter of fact, by exposing its lies and true identity, our organisation has proven that the regime represents none but its own self. The mask of exhibitionist pretension used to pose itself as the champion of one religion against the other has been torn asunder to show its real agenda: staying indefinitely on the saddle of power.

Apart from the respect our organisation has gained by virtue of the initiative it took and the role it played in the formation of the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces, the principles enshrined in its Charter have proved to be the appropriate and decisive response to the false allegations the regime has been keen in spreading. The unequivocal acknowledgement of basic liberties; independence of religious faiths; acceptance of religious, cultural and social pluralism and approval of legitimate rights and obligations as basis for citizenship in Eritrea had shattered the false contentions of the regime.

In February of 1997, the regime had its constitution ratified without any question or dissent in the ranks of the so-called National Council, 50% of whose seats are filled by members of the PFDJ Central Committee. However, despite the fact that it was meticulously tailored to serve the very interest of the regime, there has as yet never been any show of intent to enforce the document as law. It has remained locked, and shall stay there; collecting dust until perhaps some voices from within may some day claim it.

Indisputably, the defeat of the regime in the Ethio-Eritrean war and the terrible devastation it left behind was an eye-opener to many members of the ruling party to see facts hitherto hidden from them, or the reality they had chosen not to see. Humiliation felt by the entire population notwithstanding, the regime capitulated to pre-conditions the winning side had imposed. It was forced to accept a 25,000 km. sq. buffer zone, wholly located inside Eritrean borders to be used as what came to be known as the Temporary Security Zone under the control of international peacekeeping forces. The armed forces of the other side had deployed right on the border of the two countries without conceding an inch of their national land.

Clearly, the June 2000 defeat was a shock that sent the regime reeling in total loss of orientation. Many of its stalwart supporters, who until then applauded and ululated for the regime and its falsehood, began to lose confidence. Significantly also, the shock seems to have mellowed the attitudes of some Eritrean intellectuals who had abdicated their special social merits to distinguish between right and wrong, and chose to serve the regime as mute apologists of its horrendous mistakes, despite repeated calls to consult their conscience and side with their injured people. After the debacle had shown them what had really taken place, those intellectuals began to direct bitter criticism against the boss of the regime and his way of running the affairs of the country and complained about monopolisation of political power in his hands. They went public to underscore the need for democratic system, political pluralism and national reconciliation. Nevertheless, to think about them, and others that are turning their back on the regime, depart from the same set of objectives could still be misleading.

Moreover, the emergence of a reformist wing opposing one-man rule from within the EPDJ was another important event the post Eritrea-Ethiopia war has produced. But its role in weakening the regime and its contribution on the national stage remains uncertain until it comes forward with unambiguous position on crucial matters that concern the people and the country. It is only then that the true political colour of the group could clearly be visible and the speculation of whether or not its objectives are limited to infighting for power is dispelled.

On our part, in order to interact with the current events with wisdom and competence, and deal with them in ways beneficial to our cause, we observe that there is need for careful and thorough study about the scope of the June 2000 defeat. The top-to-bottom changes it triggered inside the regime would have to be appraised vis-à-vis the continuing struggle of the Eritrean people.

The other very sad side of the EPLF regime's story has been the fact that our country, which its children had anticipated to embrace them from dispersal and exile imposed by colonial wars, has been plunged into a much worse inferno. For the second time in its history, its youth are being forced to abandon it in thousands by deserting the ranks of the army or the training camps. They are flocking to seek shelter in neighbouring Sudan or other spots around the wider world. Their rejection

of the war policies proves the regime has utterly failed to persuade them about the credibility and righteousness of its choices.

The flight of the youth from their homeland at a time of its dire need has posed a new challenge to the opposition forces, in general, and our organisation, in particular. Obviously, these young Eritreans are ill-equipped and have very little knowledge about the history of their people's struggle. All they know is what the EPLF had inculcated in them or what they gathered from reading books it had published for the sole purpose of distorting and tarnishing the leading role and national record of the ELF. Under the circumstances, the need to offer them support at the initial stage of their exile entails a crucial responsibility. They should simultaneously be armed with all the facts they lack by way of a clear and concise programme, that can help them reshape their orientation in favour of their peoples national struggle and in ways that could help them contribute positively to the ongoing struggle to oust the dictatorship and ending the suffering of the nation.

On the economic sphere, the EPLF government has during the past ten years hardly accomplished any useful work to improve the condition of ordinary citizens. All its efforts have been preponderantly channelled to enabling the ruling party grow into the biggest business cartel by controlling all lucrative sectors of the economy in the country. Pressures and obstacles had been studiously applied to protect enterprises belonging to the ruling party by way of blocking competition from domestic and foreign investments. As the logical outcome of the system, thus, moral bankruptcy, corruption and sleaze inside the institutions and the organs of the establishment have become so rampant that they could no longer be hidden. To assuage the widespread public anger, the regime came up with yet another pretension and launched in 1996 a special court to deal with corruption!!.

The EPLF government had extravagantly squandered the scarce material resources and productive manpower in its unjust wars of aggression. Soon after the flare up of the Ethio-Eritrean war, the value of regime's currency, the Nakfa, plummeted 50% against the \$ US. The army of the unemployed increased in folds, famine ravaged large zones of Eritrea and the poor standard of living of common people kept on falling.

The implementation of the 1994 land law of the regime did not only cause economic damages; it also produced dangerous social and political tensions. When the ruling party grabbed fertile land from its rightful owners for itself and its supporters with capital in the Gash region without any worry for compensation or redress, there emerged, as counter-reaction, a resistance movement based on purely regional and ethnic lines. Though demanding back the usurped land is legitimate, it has also entailed social ramifications. Tension between natives who were robbed of their possessions and citizens arriving from other regions to receive land from the government has been fermenting. Moreover, the sale of land belonging to villages surrounding the urban centres to rich Eritreans living abroad and capable of paying the government in dollars which it covetously awaits has been another source of friction. The deep resentment this has caused among the villagers aside, loss of land here has been transformed to overt resistance against the regime's land confiscation policy.

Our position on the economic policies of the regime has always been unequivocal and for good reasons. The already paralysed pace of development of the war ravaged economy in our country had further dropped, and the living condition of our people plummeted. Our organisation had challenged the land law right from the beginning, and unambiguously declared that no authority has the prerogative of usurping land from its legal owners and transfer its ownership to persons having no legal right to it.

Regarding Eritreans who have been paying their money to the dollar-addicted regime, this organisation has unmistakably made it clear through an official statement that the Executive Committee issued in accordance with the directive of the Revolutionary Council. The irresponsible measures and acts of land grabbing by the regime were condemned in the strongest possible terms, apart from serving the clearest warning to individuals who chose to purchase land from an authority that does not own it. The people have widely applauded and commended the position our organisation has adopted on the land issue; and our declaration had received strong support among the general public.

The Regime and the Neighbouring Nations.

Right after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, the balance of power had shifted in favour of the only remaining world power: the United States. The US administrations soon rushed to assert undisputed domination in various strategic spots of the globe. Likewise, in the strategically significant zones around the Horn of Africa, the US baptised some leaders of the countries there whom it considered as loyal watchdogs and proxies as the "new generation of African leaders". Being one of them, the ruler of Eritrea was more than ready to join in. His dire need to safeguard his regime and satiate his urge for playing Israel's role in the Horn of Africa matched well with US-Israeli interests. He showed undisguised enthusiasm to prove himself as the right tool for executing their plans in the region.

This was, unsurprisingly, the root of the Eritrean dictator's dangerous embarkation on stirring up conflicts with neighbouring countries. Nations in the region, whose peoples deserved gratitude for their sustained support of our people's cause, became targets of his adventures, while quarters, who overtly declared hostility to the right of our people to self-determination and openly sided with the enemies of our revolution, became his trusted allies. His need of an umbrella covering his diabolic bid to assert himself as a regional player had cost our people very dearly.

We recall today that right after our 4th Congress, the regime had a series of surprises ready for us: tension against yet another neighbouring country had been sparked. Just one year after severing its relation with the Sudan and turning itself into an outright enemy, the regime stirred up another dispute with Yemen. At issue here was the question of sovereignty over the islands of the Hanish Archipelago. It was barely a month after our Congress, in December 1995, that the Eritrean forces were sent to ignite war at Greater Hanish. Our organisation immediately declared its principled position on those developments, and rejecting military option for resolving disputes, it demanded peaceful resolution of differences by appealing to the two governments. They were repeatedly urged to go to the negotiating table, while in the meantime restoring the status quo ante until a final agreement would be reached.

Next, and in a way similar to its behaviour with Yemen, the regime provoked

hostilities with Ethiopia: a closest and long-time ally. In May 1998, and in a surprise move, Eritrean troops entered Badme, a border territory which at the time was administered by the Ethiopians. On these events too, our position did not vary from the one we had on the war against Yemen. While underscoring that from legal perspective Badme should be within Eritrean sovereignty, the 23 May 1998 declaration of the Executive Committee stated the following basic points:

1. That the border dispute should be settled through negotiations and not the military means; denouncing the side resorting to the use force.
2. Withdrawal of forces from disputed areas; and endorsing a mechanism approved by both sides to administer the disputed areas until conclusive solution has been found.
3. The disputing parties to agree on arbitration by an international court and commit themselves to abide by its final ruling.
4. Allow citizens of one another's country to cross the borders at will just as they had been accustomed to and graze their herds.
5. Refrain from inflammatory rhetoric and belligerent acts.

Sadly, all that our organisation had warned about did indeed take place. We stated early, and at the right time, with all clarity that unless a speedy resolution is found, the situation would develop and explode to a dangerously ruinous war whose main vulnerable victims would be the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia. What started as a border dispute flared up into a long-drawn and terrible total war because of the arrogance and intransigence of Eritrea's dictator who rejected proposals for a peaceful approach to the crisis; the heaviest price was paid by our people.

The principled position we maintained on both wars, Yemen and Ethiopia, did not only earn us the expected venom and vicious arrogance from regime alone, but also from the blind supporters of the PFDJ who for long had been hopelessly conditioned to judge matters with chauvinistic outlook. They repeated after the high priests of the regime's propaganda machine vile accusations, and levelled against us the worst adjectives in the basest available words. Nonetheless, not much water had flown under the bridge before things changed. Soon after what we

had warned had befallen, all those with modicum of wisdom were able to see the scope and veracity of our vision. Indeed, we have lived to witness today those who raised the loudest voices against our declarations are seen writing about, and advocating, the messages and contents of our statements which they very much loathed and rejected.

International Relations.

Subsequent to the conclusion of the 4th Congress, the centre of our activities moved closer to the proximities of our country. The isolation of the regime in the region, and repudiation of its conduct, had helped us to relocate and strengthen our presence in the Sudan, Yemen and Ethiopia. Guided by our political programme, we were able to carry out important organisational tasks in those countries and beyond, in countries of the West. Every opportunity has been taken advantage of to utilise the favourable conditions that availed due to events of the past few years, and positive results have been registered. And, to make our relations even more productive in the future, efforts will have to be made to give the region the attention it deserves.

In the context of the countries of the West, endeavours were made to gain membership in the Socialist International. This aimed at promoting the profile of our organisation and obtaining a wider platform for our views and contacts, apart from more solidarity assistance. Socialist parties in France, Sweden and Germany have pledged to support our bid, and contacts with other parties have won us considerable understanding. Moreover, our differences with the German Green Party, which has hitherto had close friendship with the Eritrean regime, have been reasonably narrowed after opening a channel of dialogue with it. This will be pursued further for better relations. Needless to say, more efforts do still await us to expand our contacts in similar directions.

The preparedness shown by the US State Department in June 2000 to meet with the representative of our organisation and listen to our views was a positive sign in its own right. The impression we gathered from the talks there concur with the testimony of the new US ambassador to Eritrea before a Senate Committee. He had testified that promoting democracy in Eritrea was at the top of the list of his assignments. Of course, more work is needed to develop those contacts further. But, as much as our relation with the United States requires due attention from us,

it is very important to note that it should be built on the basis of mutual respect, common interest, maintaining in the meantime our independent political decision.

Naturally, the success of our external contacts is a reflection of our internal strength and influence. The absence of open popular resistance on the arena, led by our organisation or others, portraying instability inside the homeland that matches the picture of the suffocating realities presented by the opposition has been sending mistaken messages to international public opinion. The impression there has been that the regime enjoys popular support while the opposition is localised to some few spots outside the country. Despite widespread unpopularity of the regime, there is as yet no head on popular show of opposition in the streets of our towns and villages with the regime. But, it is increasingly appreciated that it is the cruel intensity of repression and terrorisation in the country as well as some organisational problems that have been hindering our people from bringing their grievances to the open.

On another front, our organisation has been working to open up communication channels with the United Nations agencies, especially with the Human Rights High Commission. These contacts have been useful though more work is needed to open similar channels with other organs of the UN.

In respect to Africa, the Organisation of African Unity receives our publications from time to time. However, failure to make better progress in that realm is one of the cases that have to be admitted. Nonetheless, we did have information exchange opportunities with various African leftist and democratic forces, either in power or opposition. Reasonable chances for expanding these contacts in future are available. Admittedly too, no efforts were made in the direction of the Arab League despite its significance as a regional organisation.

The signing of the cessation of hostilities agreement by the PFDJ regime, and its compliance with it to a degree, might have partially eased its isolation. It has, indeed, been seen making moves to restore tactical contacts with Yemen and Sudan, which was later followed by Djibouti. Evidently, however, once our people are able to bring their struggle to a more advanced stage, chances are that the regime would neither be in a position of breaking out of isolation nor would it be able to win back the trust it has squandered among the international community.

Nevertheless, the regime shall still strive to hide behind the peace agreement and

endeavour to repair its previous relation with Ethiopia, for instance. But, the damage it had caused is too deep to heal so soon and so easily. It cannot, however, be ruled out that the regime may, under cover of pressure from some countries, strike deals targeting the opposition forces. Under pretensions of non-interference in internal affairs and preservation of peace, arrangements might be devised against the opposition forces. In case of such eventualities, policies and tactics which governments might adopt would need to be carefully studied. But generally considered, the wind of change and democracy has become an international concern as well rather than just an Eritrean issue.

ON THE POLITICAL SPHERE

Right after the conclusion of the 4th Congress, the leadership had vigorously embarked on explaining the political programme and the principles contained therein. No obstacles worth mentioning have been encountered save the expected anti-democratic strategies of the EPDJ government. Despite the efforts of the regime, our programme had found wide acceptance among our membership and the people in general. The ruinous internal and external policies of the regime have shown the people, in practice and substance, the naked dictatorial nature of the regime.

Against such a background, our people have appreciated the compatibility of our programme with the realities and problems of our country. As a result, the people understood that only the definitive end of the regime would make room for the programmes qualified to remove the hardships from which the nation continues to suffer. Even some members of the PFDJ itself have appreciated that perception and began to identify the regime as a dictatorship. Despite the fact that many of them still have their sight on internal reform, the developing circumstances indicate that the pendulum for the downfall of the regime is swinging faster than ever before. The emergence of a PFDJ faction opposed to the one-man rule is a case in point, and can be listed as a positive indicator.

Following the adventurous wars of the regime against all the neighbouring countries, the space of operation available for our movement in the region contiguous to our country that was in the past virtually closed to us had substantially broadened; and these advantages opened for us opportunities to carry out our activities among Eritreans living in the neighbouring countries, in addition to offering us the space we needed to reinforce channels of communication with our people in the homeland.

Moreover, our presence there was significantly helpful in discharging, within the bounds of our resources, our duty towards Eritrean nationals victimised by the EPDJ wars; we could do what we could to monitor developments that affected their lives, and provide them with the necessary assistance and counselling.

The authorities of the regime have been visibly traumatised by our presence and activities in the neighbouring countries, especially in Ethiopia. They had, therefore, unleashed intensive and hysterical propaganda campaigns against our organisation, and others, in an attempt to tarnish our image before our own people. The PFDJ government had stooped so low as to accuse us of treason by pretending as though fighting a defensive war of aggression launched by the former colonisers of our country! Old suspicions and memories have been viciously drummed to inflame emotions and incite our people to rally in support of its unjustifiable war.

Such malicious propaganda campaign was carried when every one among our people knew for a fact that the present rulers of Ethiopia could not by any stretch of imagination be compared to the former Ethiopian authorities that presided over the occupation of our nation. Indeed, the memories of the audience the PFDJ government was trying to reach were still fresh about the EPLF's long time alliance with the Ethiopian rulers it was accusing, their recognition of the Eritrean people's right to self-determination while in opposition and unconditional co-operation to implement that right when they acceded to power.

The regime's accusation of us of treason could not hold because the nature and credence of our organisation was an open book to see. No single being could second-guess that it would ever enter into alliances at the cost of the Eritrean people's supreme national interest, its declared principles and its tested and fierce defence of its independent political decision.

Nevertheless, it could not be emphatically suggested that the regime's vicious and expensive campaign could not cause some ephemeral confusion among some circles, in general, and even a few members of our own organisation. It would not be unexpected that active presence of organisations in Ethiopia at a time it was at war with Eritrea could give rise to some misgivings among gullible patriots and non-partisan supports of the regime. Indeed, that was the incentive for donning the cloak of defending the nation's sovereignty by the regime, and spending huge sums of money and resources. But, because its false pretensions and deceptions were equally countered with determination and steadfastness through

straightforward messages our people could see our identity beyond any room for ambiguity.

ON INFORMATION

The organisation registered significant successes in the area of radio programmes that have been broadcast since 1997. Given the situation in which the country has been turned into a prison of its own people, this medium of communication has been vitally important.

The Tigrigna and Arabic radio programmes that were broadcast three days per week had operated up to December 1999, occasional interruptions notwithstanding. This was crucial to our people as a valuable source of information, moral boost and education. Later, these services were supplemented by another half hour weekly transmission that is still functioning though suffering from some problems related to range.

In this context, too, a new transmission has been launched in May 2000 specifically focusing on East Africa, the Middle East and North America. This covers one hour three times per week broadcasting which was later on revised to two hours per week to Africa and one hour to Europe. In the regions to which the transmission has been directed, especially in Eritrea and the surrounding regions, the role of the radio programme has proved irreplaceable; people await the programme with enthusiasm and patience. In addition, there are also successful and continuing local broadcasting programmes launched by our members in various cities of Western Europe and America.

Not least significant too, members of the leadership and the organisation have been taking advantage of opportunities provided by the Internet to explain our views, defend the identity and history of our organisation as well as articulate its vision for the future. Besides, the Internet has offered enormous space for exposing the falsehood of the regime.

Our publications have also been playing a recognisable role. However, when the quantity, scarcity of cadres, delays, distribution problems and limited number of copies reaching the inside are considered, the success we have had cannot match our expectation.

Last but not least, moreover, the annual Eritrea Festival, which has just been held for the 16th consecutive year by the initiative of the Democratic Union of Eritrean Youth branches in Europe, has been playing vital role in disseminating our organisation's views and highlighting the realities prevailing in our country.

ON THE ALLIANCE OF ERITREAN NATIONAL FORCES

Our engagement in the task of unifying the opposition forces should be appraised in the light of the important call for dialogue our organisation had released in 1992. On the basis of that initiative, there were a series of useful negotiations with various organisations. The contacts centred mainly on proximity talks for confidence building and easing tensions involving some organisations, allaying suspicions, halting mutual accusations and clarifying points of differences and agreements.

Obviously, at that time quick agreement for co-ordinating efforts against the dictatorial regime could not be hammered out. But eventually, consensus on a Charter was reached and the Alliance of the Eritrean Forces embracing all of the opposition organisations was formed. This achievement became a very significant historic event because it responded to the wishes of our members and the Eritrean people at large. Moreover, the Alliance became a good framework for resolving misunderstandings and clearing suspicions, apart from providing a mechanism for joint publicity and diplomatic campaigns against the regime. Our organisation's role on all these levels had certainly gained it great respect.

POLITICAL PROGRAMME OF THE ELF-RC

Introduction

Italian colonial rule under the guidance of racist ideology implemented a programme of land confiscation in Eritrea. The most fertile farmland was grabbed from native owners and distributed among white settlers. Farmers who lost their land were forced to flock towards the new urban centres in search of work. Here too, segregationist laws and regulations denied them opportunities for livelihood. Many of them were compelled to enlist in the ranks of Italy's expansionist army.

After World War II, their successors, the British, took steps to abolish the racial laws, albeit leaving the economic status quo and many of the discriminatory statutes in place. Conditions had further worsened as the British in their turn exercised a policy of uprooting and selling profitable firms and manufacturing plants.

Politically, the British introduced their divide-and-rule strategy to exploit the diversity of our people. This policy could have an impact due to the widespread low level of political awareness among our people. This had some role in impeding the emergence of Eritrea as an independent entity.

Later on, in 1952, our people were tied to Ethiopia through a UN sponsored federation without their expressed will. Under pressure of the US government, which had, at the time, cordial relations with the imperial regime of Ethiopia, the General Assembly of the UN adopted a resolution that aborted their demand for self-determination and independence. But, the Federal Act did also introduce a liberal constitution that distributed power into executive, legislative and judicial branches.

However, Emperor Haile Sellasie did not lose time to methodically erode the constitutional system before it could consolidate. Finally the federation was unilaterally abrogated in 1962 by an imperial decree reducing the status of Eritrea to a mere province of Haile Sellasie's empire. The elimination of the federation was preceded by impoverishment of Eritrea by design. Viable economic enterprises and factories were shifted to Ethiopia, and its health and educational services

were left to dilapidate. Ethiopia's slogan of "land-without-people" had its genesis in that period of historical injustice.

Nevertheless, the Eritrean people did not succumb to desperation and did not let the setback break their will to resist. In 1958 the Eritrean Liberation Movement (ELM) was formed; in 1960 the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) was founded and declared the armed struggle under the leadership of the national hero, Martyr Hamid Idris Awate.

As the protracted struggle progressed, the ELF grew to shoulder responsibility for the future of the nation and adopted a political programme taking national independence, total liberation of the Eritrean person and espoused democratic dialogue as the instrument for resolving secondary contradictions that could crop up within our society. On the international stage too, the ELF had exerted relentless effort to articulate the just cause of the Eritrean people in world public forums.

As a result of the bitter and traitorous conspiracy of the EPLF, the military arm of the ELF military was ousted from the fronts of major military confrontation with the enemy. However, the concluding phase of the military victory achieved in 1991 by the People's Liberation Army cannot by any measure be perceived in isolation from the heroic contribution made by the Eritrean Liberation Army since 1961, a fact indelibly engraved in the history of our people's national struggle.

With the liberation of Eritrean national territory, the ELF put aside the bitterness of the past and put forth a comprehensive proposal as a prelude to the building of a free Eritrea. This included the proposal for the formation of an all-inclusive transitional government. Ignoring this, however, the EPLF stubbornly went ahead with its option of monopolising political power and ended up pushing the Eritrean people into the quagmire they now find themselves in. The damages and ruinous ramifications of such a policy on all spheres of life in Eritrea are not hidden to any observer. The terrible war against Ethiopia was just an extreme case. Human and material resources badly needed for the construction of the country have been squandered, and the already disastrous legacy left behind by the Ethiopian occupation forces worsened due to recent senseless wars and subsequent isolation.

Demonstrating familiar behaviour, the regime is now seen rushing to play election gimmick in an attempt to divert attention from criticisms it has been facing from the people in the aftermath of its ruinous war against Ethiopia.

We in the ELF-RC are fully aware that the challenges confronting us today are not in any way easier than those we had to face in the course of our struggle for national independence. We therefore stand firmly committed to building a democratic society in which all citizens under a united nation shall enjoy freedom, cultural advancement and economic prosperity. Convinced that the on-going struggle for political pluralism is a grand national enterprise that concerns all, we comprehend that its consummation requires the participation of all the political and social forces of our nation. Thus, in our quest to realise this crucial common task, side by side with the lofty ideals our organisation cherishes, we depart from our profound conviction in:

FIRST: In Eritrea, the peasantry makes up the overwhelming majority of the society; they subsist on farming, animal husbandry and fishing. Besides. There is a small working class in the urban centres; the majority still maintain bond with their roots: the village and the land. The rest of our population comprises of petite bourgeoisie that engages in small private holdings, trade or skilled labour.

SECOND: The Eritrean society is multi-confessional, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Hence, no serious analysis can overlook these facts when issues touching on identity or the state's position on matters having religious tinge are considered. Polarisation of opinion during the period of self-determination in the 40s and early 50s when the languages issue was raised had proven how religious affiliations and cultural choices could overshadow our people's position. Consensus was reached after heated debates among the various political forces of the time, and it was only a practical compromise that made it possible for Tigrigna and Arabic to be adopted as the official languages of Eritrea. Ever since, the languages issue has remained as one of the standing principles of our nation.

THIRD: There exist gaps of development among the various regions of our country. Due to definitive historical circumstances as well as colonialist schemes that channelled development to the interests of colonisers rather than changing the quality of life in Eritrea, our society was hampered from undergoing through normal evolutionary process of transformation. The outcome of such background was the distorted socio-economic formation that exists today.

Those realities have reflected in the existence of facilities symbolising modernity - electricity, schools, hospitals and communication network - in some regions while virtually non-existent in others. In most cases, religious and linguistic

distribution in Eritrea corresponds with regional demarcations. The existing gaps of development could, therefore, be fertile ground for suspicions and sensitivities that could negatively overshadow political issues. Thus, the implications of those conditions pose serious challenge to patriotic and democratic efforts for building a modern civil society transcending confessional, clan and linguistic divides.

FOURTH: Agriculture is the mainstay of the majority of our people. Farming, livestock breeding and fishing are key occupations. During the period of our armed resistance, hundreds of thousands of peasants were forced to leave their homes and farms and migrated to the urban centres. Others went to live in refugee camps of the neighbouring countries in the thousands.

Since independence the refugee population have been patiently waiting to go back to their villages to lead their normal lives. But, a lot of hurdles have been precluding their repatriation. Once these hindrances have been removed, minimum economic support provided and political stability guaranteed the refugees shall be ready to return. Not surprisingly, thus, the question of Eritrean refugees has been continuously and forcefully imposing itself on the political and socio-economic programmes of all the opposition political forces. For us too, it stands as a crucial responsibility preoccupying our untiring attention.

FIFTH: Eritrea's realistic foreign relations policy has to take the geopolitical, historical and cultural facts that tie our peoples with the peoples of the region into due consideration.

Economically and culturally advanced civil society is our goal. Political pluralism is stepping-stone in the long process of accomplishing that objective. That is why our organisation believes multiparty democracy to be a very urgent national task that cannot be delayed. Moreover, we appreciate fully the fact that democracy is a comprehensive programme that hinges on requisite conditions. However, the one-thousand-mile journey has, of necessity, to begin with one step, to borrow a truism of common wisdom. Political pluralism, too, is an essential first step in the democratisation process whose full form and scope can only be guaranteed through genuine involvement of all the social and political forces. This is the realistic way how our people could mobilise and deploy their energies and resources fully for the sake of a democratic society they aspire. On the other hand, suppression of alternative platforms and options in favour of a particular organisation paralyses the creative contribution of the society, creating thereby a perfect condition for internal strife and backwardness on which despotism thrives.

OBJECTIVES:

The ELF-RC believes that the new state of Eritrea should be built on the principles of democracy, equality, social justice and peace. It believes that democracy is the only system that could guarantee citizens of our nation to enjoy inalienable political and human rights in full. In a democracy, they could mobilise their creative faculties and energies to build their country that has long been ruined by foreign occupation and by the current dictatorial regime.

Categorically rejecting discrimination and injustice, the ELF-RC upholds that equality is the basis of equal opportunities among all citizens irrespective of their sex, conviction, social status or racial origin. To the ELF-RC, equality between men and women is key to social progress.

Social justice is a fundamental principle of our organisation. It believes that social justice leads to a society free from poverty, disease and ignorance. Thus, the ELF-RC strives to realise a system free from unjust exploitation of the citizens where farmers and labourers must enjoy the fruits of their toil.

The ELF-RC holds peace to be a crucial imperative because where there is no peace and stability, there is no development and prosperity. Peace is also an international concern for protecting humanity from the scourge of nuclear conflagration, besides being key to just and equitable relationship between the industrialised North and the developing the South.

1. ON POLITICAL ISSUES

The ELF-RC struggles for:

1.1 Bringing the downfall of the dictatorial regime, and replacing it by a multiparty democracy that ensures basic rights.

1.2. Ensuring democracy as the only instrument for holding and

transferring power.

- 1.3. Guaranteeing sovereignty of the people and the law.
- 1.4. Guaranteeing democratic and civil liberties: freedom of speech, writing, gathering and organising.
- 1.5. Ensuring the supremacy of law.
- 1.6. Preserving and defending the unity of the people and the territorial integrity of the country.
- 1.7. Defending national sovereignty.

A. ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The ELF-RC strives for:

- A.1. Adopting a permanent constitution written with the participation of all of the political forces and ratified by a people's referendum.
- A.2. Establishing a democratic parliamentary system distributing power to legislative, executive and judicial branches of government exercised on provincial, divisional and sub-divisional, municipal ... levels of administration.
- A.3. Writing referendum into the constitution of Eritrea as a mandatory principle to ensure people's sovereign right in decisions affecting national sovereignty and basic laws of the land.
- A.4 Adopting secret ballot in elections.

B. ON HUMAN RIGHTS

The ELF-RC Struggle to:

- B.1. Guarantee the right of independent mass organisations and trade unions, including their right to peaceful demonstration.

B.2. Confirm the right of Eritreans to profess a faith or ideology of their choice.

B.3. Guarantee freedom of the press.

B.4. Ensure freedom of thought, organisation, movement and personal safety.

B.5. Guarantee the citizen's right to work.

C. ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE STATE WITH RELIGION

The ELF-RC confirms:

C.1. The Government of Eritrea shall be secular, and government and religion would be separated from each other.

C.2. The state shall respect all faiths; and state-religion relationship would be founded on mutual respect and co-operation.

C.3 All religions are equal before the law.

C.4. Religious institutions could run their internal affairs.

2. ON THE ECONOMY

Eritrea is in a very horrible economic situation where the majority depends on foreign aid. This requires a short-term economic plan to address the immediate shortages and a long-term strategy to ensure skilful management of national wealth. Thus, the ELF-RC upholds that the viability of any economic strategy depends on:

2.1. Providing citizens the incentives to produce, and stimulating their creative capacity to maximise productivity.

2.2. Providing for the basic needs of the people.

2.3. Productivity of national resources.

2.4. Just distribution of wealth and advancement of the living standard of ordinary people.

2.5. Sustainability and expansion of balanced economic development in various fields of human endeavour.

The failed one-sector economic experiences of countries had shown that such an option cannot bring overall development. Thus, an all-round economic programme taking account of our national realities and norms of international trade is essential. No productive transformation is possible without comprehensive strategy of development targeting all resources and potential of the nation.

Therefore, the ELF-RC believes in a mixed economic system that encompasses all sectors of the national economy: private, state, joint ventures that are conducive to domestic and foreign capital investment.

A. ON THE ECONOMIC POLICY

Thus, the ELF-RC struggles for:

A.1. Adoption of mixed economy.

A.2. Guaranteeing a well-considered policy on national and foreign investment.

A.3. Ensuring fair distribution of wealth.

A.4. Adopting progressive taxation system compatible with personal incomes.

A.5. Ensuring state revenues to finance public projects geared to the alleviating the burden of low-income earners.

A.6. Establishing study centres for development.

A.7 Introducing agricultural, commercial, techno-industrial projects geared to job creation.

A.8. Encouraging private and public capital investment.

A.9. Developing transportation and communication.

A.10. Harnessing agriculture to provide for basic subsistence needs of ordinary citizens.

A.11. Enacting statutes to protect forests and wildlife.

A.12. Promoting a strategy that eases housing problems and ensures the needs of modern living.

A.13. Adopting an economic strategy that targets the narrowing and balancing of development gaps on all levels, and ensuring farming and animal rearing sectors to support people's well being and overall economic progress.

A.14. Encouraging co-operative ventures.

A.15. Ensuring that land is owned by the people; and that the state should, under well defined legal checks, manage land vital to common national interest such as strategic minerals, roads and communications network.

B. ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

The majority of our people are rural inhabitants and practice farming and animal breeding with small fraction of the overall population engaging in livestock rearing and fishing. Thus, agriculture must get commensurate attention to cater for basic needs of the people and support economic development.

Thus, the ELF-RC strives for :

B.1. Preservation of soil and forests; and for programmes promoting

agriculture as a base for woodwork and animal product industries.

B.2. Studies for water resources and dam building.

B.3. Modernisation of farming, pasture, animal breeding and wide use of veterinary services.

B.4. Protection of marine life and development of this sector.

B.5. Utilisation of rivers and streams for irrigation.

B.6. Development of modern techniques of farming.

B.7 Combating desertification and ecological degradation.

C. ON WILDLIFE AND FOREST WEALTH.

The ELF-RC shall ensure:

C.1 Protection and preservation of wildlife and forests.

C.2 Establishment of parks and zoos.

D. ON INDUSTRY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Our natural wealth has not been utilised for national production due to dilapidated and obsolete state of our infrastructure, putting Eritrea on weak economic footing. Transformation to industrial stage has in our country no other alternative save development of the agricultural sector. Crops such as cotton, sugar cane, and oil seeds should get attention to cater for raw materials needed by agro-industrial industries. Fisheries and animal products is another important sector, besides revitalisation of old and feasible plants.

Thus, the ELF-RC shall upholds that:

D.1. National wealth must serve our people.

D.2 Natural resources must be exploited judiciously.

D.3. Cheaply exploitable minerals get priority attention.

D.4. Light and medium scale industries must be established.

D.5. Agro-industries should be the base of industrialisation.

D.6 Factories for farming tools and production equipment must be established.

D.7. Environment should be safeguarded from industrial pollution.

E. TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATION

Transportation and communication networks are as vital to our country as arteries are to human body; they are crucial for promoting trade and exchange of culture.

Thus, the ELF-RC shall uphold that:

E.1. The existing transportation and communication networks must be rehabilitated and improved.

E.2. Comprehensive studies for building new roads to connect the regions to each other must be undertaken.

E.3. Land, Sea and air transportation must be modernised to support growth of the economy and foreign commerce.

E.4. Tourism must be developed.

3. ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

The ELF-RC uphold that:

- 3.1. Peasants, workers, women, students, the youth and other professional groups have the right to form unions.
- 3.2. Pilot farms must be introduced to encourage settlement of nomads as farming communities.
- 3.3. Social services must reach all parts of the rural countryside.
- 3.4. Ways for balanced development with emphasis on deprived areas must be studied.

A. EDUCATION

Education is a key source of knowledge. Progress and development for prosperity depends on a scientifically equipped society.

The ELF-RC confirms that:

- A.1. Education should be accessible to all Eritreans without discrimination.
- A.2. Education should be free and compulsory up to the sixth grade.
- A.3. Instruction at primary level should be given in Tigrigna and Arabic, and English at higher levels. Both official languages should be taught as subjects in higher levels.
- A.4. Technical and trade schools must be expanded.
- A.5. Illiteracy must be eradicated.
- A.6. Private schools must abide by the national syllabus.
- A.7. The national curriculum must be compatible with the realities of the Eritrean society.
- A.8. Religious institutions have right to teach religion in the language

of their choice; but academic subjects should be given in official mediums only.

B. HEALTH SERVICES

Health is basic to the life of human being and does not imply avoiding hazardous organisms only. It includes person’s social, mental and physical well being. Only a healthy society can develop and achieve progress.

Therefore, ELF-RC shall strive for:

- B.1. Free access to health services.
- B.2. Spreading clinics and health care centres in the rural countryside.
- B.3. Providing public health education especially on epidemics and contagious diseases, such as AIDS.
- B.4. Permitting private health care centres to operate under regulations and standards set by the state.
- B.5. Banning all harmful medically unapproved narcotics.
- B.6. Allowing use of popular medicine and trianing practitioners properly.

C. MARTYRS’ FAMILIES AND THE DISABLED

Recognising, with tribute, the dedication of all the men and women who sacrificed their lives for the honour of our people, as well as those who sustained injuries while carrying their duties; and aware of our responsibility towards the disabled and families of martyrs, it is our duty to struggle to fulfil that obligation in full.

Thus, the ELF-RC shall strive:

- C.1. To establish institutions to care for the families of the disabled.

C.2. To provide the necessary training to qualify them to depend on themselves and participate in development.

C.3. To support them form their own associations.

C.4. To establish institutions to serve martyrs' families.

C.5. To Provide social services to help the children of martyrs become self-reliant.

C.6. To establish appropriate sporting facilities for the handicapped.

D. THE VETERAN FIGHTERS

The ELF-RC shall confirm that:

The state shall be duty-bound, within limits of its resources, to provide for veterans who have no body to care for them.

E. THE ORPHANS

The ELF-RC shall ensure that:

The state is responsible for the upbringing and education Eritrean orphans.

F. THE ELDERLY

The ELF-RC shall guarantee that:

The state would provide lodging facilities to the elderly lacking any other means.

G. ON PENSIONS

The ELF-RC confirms that:

Citizens retiring due to old age or illness are entitled to pension.

H. ON THE ERITREAN WOMEN

Women comprise half of our society; their political, economic and social rights are requisite to progress and prosperity.

Therefore, the ELF-RC upholds that:

H.1. Women have the right to form their independent unions.

H.2. Women have the right to engage in all fields of human endeavour.

H.3. Women have the right to equal pay for the same work performed.

H.4. Women have the right to maternity leave with pay.

H.5. Women shall be provided with childcare nurseries at their work places.

H.6. Social customs and traditions impeding the freedom of women would be tackled.

H.7. Women shall be protected from resorting to disgraceful means of livelihood due to economic hardships.

I. ON WORKERS

The Eritrean working class emerged simultaneously with the Italian construction works such as railways, motor roads, port facilities, telephone and small and medium scale manufacturing enterprises that were solely geared to serving the colonial army and administration. After Italy's defeat in WW II, the demobilised native

soldiers were added as reserve labour force, worsening the already saturated labour market. Moreover, the neglected agricultural sector by the colonial authorities could not support the growing peasantry, which made it an extra source of labour.

Eritrean workers inside and in the Diaspora had been an important factor in the sustenance and growth of our armed struggle. In the post liberation era too, the vanguard role of worker side by side with other sectors of the society hardly needs emphasis.

Thus, the Eritrean state has the obligation to create favourable conditions suitable for worker to deploy their physical and spiritual capabilities for development.

The ELF-RC, therefore, struggles for:

- I.1. The right of workers to form their own trade unions and freedom to demonstrate.
- I.2. Defining minimum wage of an ordinary worker.
- I.3. Ensuring weekend and annual leave with pay.
- I.4. Enacting pension and compensation bill.
- I.5. Providing training for upgrading skill and qualification.
- I.6. Ensuring healthy working environment.
- I.7. Ensuring the right of workers who sustain injuries while at work.
- I.8. Prohibiting child labour.

J. ON THE PEASANTRY

As majority of our society, the Eritrean peasantry had suffered the most under colonial oppression, apart from carrying the heaviest burden of our national armed resistance. Now too, our peasants are set to play a key role in developing our national economy. Thus, ensuring their right to utilise their land and enjoy its

fruits is a key responsibility.

Therefore, the ELF-RC confirms:

- J.1. Their participation in the political life of the country and their right to form their independent unions.
- J.2. Their right to be involved in any land reform process.
- J.3. Their right to relevant training programmes to advance their living conditions and production capacities.
- J.4. Their right to form co-operative associations to reinforce their competitive position in the market.
- J.5. Their right to have schools and health care centres in the rural areas.

K. ON THE YOUTH

In a social formation, especially as the Eritrean one, the youth constitute a crucial segment, and is a force that can play active role in production, development, nation building and change. Therefore, the state should discharge its duty of cultivating our youth on modern and scientific foundations compatible with our national development.

Thus, the ELF-RC confirms that:

- K.1. The youth have the right to form their unions.
- K.2. They have the right to sports without distinction of gender; and sporting facilities and clubs should be put in place for that end.

L. THE ERITREAN REFUGEES

Favourable conditions must be created to help the refugees in the areas of their presence. Until then, therefore, the ELF-RC shall strive:

L.1. To ensure their rights in host countries.

L.2. To encourage them maintain their bond with their homeland.

4. ON CULTURAL MATTERS

Culture is as vital to a society as water and air are to a human being. Hence, culture rightly gets due attention in advanced societies. We too face complex challenges in regard to culture, and as we struggle for a society where peace, democracy and justice reign supreme. Our state being a relatively recent creation barely going back hundred years, colonial forces, and now the dictatorship, had been impeding its people from coalescing into cohesive societal formation.

Thus, the ELF-RC believes that:

4.1. Archaic and backward customs, traditions and norms must be supplanted by modern and patriotic cultures and social laws.

4.2. Linguistic groups in Eritrea have the right to use their mother tongue in teaching and practising their cultural heritages beside the official languages. Foreign residents may also enjoy the same rights.

4.3 Literature, art and theatre must be promoted and halls, cultural centres and libraries must be built.

4.4. Cultural museums must be built.

4.5. Tigringna and Arabic are the two national and official languages of Eritrea.

5. ON DEFENCE

We aspire to build a peaceful and democratic nation that discharges its role of promoting peace and stability in our region and the world. We shall, thus, endeavour to establish fraternal and good neighbourly relations with all the countries in our

neighbourhood. Moreover, consistent with our intention to devote our national resources to reconstruction, we are keen to build an army solely entrusted with defending our country from aggression, safeguarding our constitution and ready to take part in production.

Thus, the ELF-RC confirms that:

5.1. The national force shall be entrusted with the defence of the nation.

5.2 Foreign military bases shall be prohibited.

5.3. The army shall safeguard a democratic constitution.

5.4. The army shall not serve outside our borders except under an international legitimacy only.

5.5. Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction shall be prohibited from production or storage in any part of our soil.

5.6. A national service bill shall be enacted.

7.7 The army shall be neutral in politics and loyal to democratically elected constitutional government.

5.8 The army will take part in production

5.9 Soldiers unable to continue in the armed forces shall be supported to rely on themselves.

6. ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

Good-neighbourly ties and cordial relations with organisations and states worldwide are important factors in our endeavours to rebuild our war-ravaged nation. Avoiding military alliances or ties harmful to our vital national interest, thus, our foreign policy shall be guided by objectivity, flexibility and wisdom.

Therefore, the ELF-RC uphold that foreign policy should be based on:

6.1. Enhancing and safeguarding sovereignty of our nation.

- 6.2. Non-interference in internal affairs of others.
- 6.3. Promotion of democracy and peace internally and externally.
- 6.4. Establishing good neighbourly ties and co-operation with the states in our region.
- 6.5 Promoting peace and stability between our people and the peoples of our region.
- 6.6. Respecting international charters and treaties.
- 6.7. Struggling against oppression and racial discrimination
- 6.8 Promoting fair international economic order and dialogue between the industrialised North and developing South.
- 6.9. Establishing equal and friendly relations with all governments dedicated to common interest.

7. ON ASYLUM SEEKERS

Our organisation upholds, and advocates, as a matter of principle, that the Eritrean state must incorporate in its laws the right of foreign nationals to protection and shelter from life threatening dangers in their countries of origin due to their political views, religious beliefs or other humanitarian reasons.

Thus, the ELF-RC believes that:

- 7.1. The state should allow refugees to form their own associations to solve their problems.
- 7.2. The state should provide for legal shield to enable refugees to explain their cases.
- 7.3. The state must endorse all the relevant international treaties and conventions.

POLITICAL RESOLUTIONS OF THE 5TH NATIONAL CONGRESS

- a. Cognisant of the positive and encouraging signs of the growing demand for a democratic system of government in Eritrea among many quarters, including from within the dictatorship itself;
- b. Conscious of the importance of building on the promising and consolidating trend of reconciliation and democratic intercourse thanks to the formation of the Alliance of the Eritrean National Forces;
- c. Aware that the dictatorial nature of the PFDJ regime is more and more being exposed on the international stage;
- d. Taking note of the positive and commendable steps some Eritrean intellectuals, who had for years played significant role within the EPLF, have now taken in the direction of shouldering their historical responsibility towards their nation;
- e. Mindful of the steadfast and continuing struggle of our people to free themselves from the sufferings they have been enduring under the mistaken policies of the regime; and,
- f. Watching the regime's attempts to extricate itself from the quagmire it has fallen in by playing election gimmick as smokescreen for gaining legitimacy as a guise for suppressing internal and external opponents;

The 5th National Congress of the Eritrean Liberation Front-Revolutionary Council has passed the following resolutions:

- 1. The 5th National Congress of the ELF-RC supported a national forum for free exchange of ideas among all Eritreans and the political forces, and has directed the new leadership to take all steps needed for accomplishing this objective.

2. The Congress has re-committed the ELF-RC to the Alliance of the Eritrean National Forces, and directed the leadership to carry on our organisation's positive role in strengthening the Alliance.
3. Encouraging the on-going positive developments, the Congress has resolved that the ELF-RC shall utilise its resources and organisational capabilities to challenge all attempts aimed at frustrating the current political trend in Eritrea.
4. The Congress directed the new leadership to undertake intensive diplomatic campaigns among the international community to win support for these resolutions.
5. The 5th Congress strongly condemned the undemocratic elections the PFDJ regime is intending to hold in December 2001 whose sole objective is to undermine the unity of our people by trampling upon their democratic rights and aspiration for change. The Congress has called on the Eritrean people to escalate their struggle for a true democracy that guarantees their rights and interests.
6. The Congress has called on Eritrean scholars and intellectuals to add their efforts to that of the mainstream opposition and the widening internal opposition to the regime.
7. Having the growing democratic struggle in focus, the 5th National Congress has directed the leadership to do everything possible to start dialogue with all individuals and groups struggling for democracy.
8. Departing from the conviction that no organisation, group or party can alone be an alternative to a democratic government in Eritrea that has to be born on the ruins of the regime by the will of the people and full participation of their political forces, the Congress has committed the ELF-RC to play active role in bringing about a conducive condition for that goal.
9. The 5th National Congress has resolved that the ELF-RC shall not abide by treaties that do not guarantee the best interest of the Eritrean people.

FINAL STATEMENT OF THE 5th NATIONAL CONGRESS

Through this statement, we declare the successful conclusion of our 5th National Congress. The Congress has been in session from 14-18 August 2001. Convening under the slogan of "Reconciliation, Democracy and Development", our Congress was held amid domestic, regional and international circumstances that are different from those existing at the time the 4th National Congress had rounded up its tasks.

The Congress has thoroughly debated and approved the political report that was presented to it by the Revolutionary Council (RC). It has also endorsed political and organisational programmes after making significant and necessary changes deemed compatible to the current circumstances and challenges facing our organisation and country. The Congress has, moreover, adopted political resolutions on topical issues relevant to the Eritrean situation, in addition to resolutions pertaining to the progress of the on-going struggle in the light of our organisation's objectives as well as aspiration of our people.

The Congress has debated developments pertaining to various issues concerning both the Eritrean and international political arenas. On the internal front, the Congress has observed that the regime has no longer the stamina of 5 years ago that stimulated its instinct for roundly provoking and igniting wars against the neighbouring countries and spreading tensions as means of realising its dream of becoming frightening regional power.

The regime's senseless wars and adventurous policies have seriously damaged our people by causing loss of thousands of their sons and daughters. Thousands more have been internally displaced while others crossed the border seeking refuge in the neighbouring countries and beyond after their villages and towns had been raised to the ground.

All these sufferings have alerted our people about many facts hitherto unknown to them. Besides enduring unbearable predicaments due to wars instigated by the regime, and repression and injustices, our people have tasted the bitterness of humiliation when the regime capitulated to conditions dictated by the winning side and acceded to giving up 25,000 km. sq. buffer zone inside Eritrea. The area was conceded and demilitarised after the regime had, prior to its defeat, stubbornly ignored repeated calls by the international community to agree to an African framework for peace which was definitely not as debasing as what the regime was later compelled to accept.

The regime was not able to escape the repercussions of its own misdeeds; and in no time, it lost credibility among its own party members and supporters who have been duped for long by subterfuge and deceit. Consequently, Eritrean intellectuals, who for very long time had served as apologists of the regime's mistakes and misrule, began to voice and write criticisms about the one-man dictatorship, its policies and practices and demanded political pluralism and national reconciliation. Even more, a split has occurred inside the PFDJ that led to the emergence of a vocal group from within the ranks of the leadership. Besides severely criticising the monopolisation of power by one individual, the group openly talked about widespread corruption both within the party and the state organs.

Indisputably, such developments are bound to weaken the dictatorship. But before that happens, the leaders of the group who are opposed to Isayas' autocratic rule would have to clarify their position on several crucial issues that have been preoccupying our people due to their danger to the future of the country. Moreover, apart from clarifying their political identity, this move would show whether or not their mission is limited to mere power struggle.

All these developments combined have put the regime in its weakest position ever in its ten-year rule. In contrast, our organisation is no longer under the trying conditions it used to be on the eve of the 4th National Congress when the regime and its agents through the width and breadth of the region had relentlessly hunted it by exploiting its relation with the neighbouring countries. Now, our organisation has not only been able to challenge the regime and its malicious ploys, but also succeeded to play a vanguard role in pushing forward the unity of the Eritrean national opposition forces, which has been crowned by the formation of the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces.

The in-depth appraisal of the situation has shown the Congress that our region has sunk in conflicts and wars whose magnitude has never been seen in the recent past. Considered in such context, Somalia has since ten years been wading through ruinous civil war. Fortunately, however, a glimmer of hope for peace and stability in the region appears to be hanging on the horizon after the Somalis signed a reconciliation accord at Arta in Djibouti that opened the way for the establishment of a national government. The chances for peace has also been reinforced by the signing of the Algiers Agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea that halted one of the fiercest wars the region has ever seen. But, all these need not blind our sight from the dangers that could return the region back to tension and conflict. Some Somali factions have not yet given up their opposition to the new government. Equally worrying is the fact that security and stability in the area remain illusive as long as Isayas' rogue regime, which thrives on tensions and wars, is still in power.

On the international stage, the Congress observed that globalisation has become the distinguishing mark of a world dominated by uni-polar order. This state of affairs has led to appearance of opposition movements around the globe, economic and political groupings, popular demonstrations and strikes. These developments have been gathering momentum as the gap between the countries of the North and the South markedly widened.

Our Struggling People!

The Congress has observed that the regime has not changed course since its assumption of state power. It had, on the contrary, become ferociously vicious and resorted to extreme and dangerous modes of suppression. Apart from severe repression, the regime has, for the sake of power and wealth, degenerated to the stage of using "divide-and-rule" policy as a means of undermining the harmony within our society that had been cemented in the course of our independence struggle.

On the economic front, the PFDJ regime has through the past years been mainly preoccupied with consolidating its monopolistic grip on all sectors of the economy. Today, the ruling party has grown to the greatest capitalist cartel in the country. Native and foreign capital investment in Eritrea has been effectively blocked by the insurmountable impediments the regime has been setting up in order to ensure the business interest of the party. Corruption and graft have

become rampant within both state and party organs. Indeed, Eritrea has been turned into a country of a rich party with impoverished population.

Moreover, the regime has squandered the scarce resources of the country on senseless wars. As a result, the army of the unemployed has been increasing in folds, famine has been ravaging extensive areas of the country and the poor living conditions of ordinary citizens has kept on falling.

The impacts of the regime's 1994 "Land Proclamation Decree" have not been limited to the economic sphere alone. It has equally caused dangerous and worrying social and political tensions. Ignoring the plight of the people, the ruling party, the government and its rich collaborators have been grabbing fertile land by evicting the rightful owners. The Congress has expressed sincere appreciation of the unequivocal position the leadership of our organisation took to oppose the economic practices of the regime which, its claims to the contrary, has led to extreme deterioration of the subsistence existence of ordinary people. In addition, the Congress has commended the ELF-RC leadership for standing firm on the regime's land decree and advocating the ownership of land by the people. The Congress has condemned the regime for confiscating land from its legal owners and handing it over to those who have no right to it.

The Congress has also closely studied the worsening human rights situation in Eritrea that it has found much worse than it had been during Ethiopian occupation. The regime continued to detain and incarcerate people and keep them in jail for years without any charge or trial. Besides, physical liquidation, kidnapping and acts of terror have become common occurrences.

Our Struggling People!

The regime has ignored the question of repatriating the Eritrean refugees back to their homeland. After ten years since the liberation of our country, most of the refugees are still enduring unimaginable suffering in their camps. Recently, the regime has been making some gestures due to international pressure. However, those who have returned from Sudan have not fared better in the new camps inside Eritrea. Even worse, under the horrible shadow of Isayas' regime the country has become repulsive rather than attractive to its own citizens, as some quarters had hoped. That is why we witness today with sadness the youth, who had been gang-recruited to become cannon fodder in regime's unjustifiable wars,

feeling the ranks of the army and training camps in thousands to seek protection in the neighbouring countries and beyond.

Exposed internally and internationally, the regime has now reached a point where it can no longer deceive anybody. Mindful of this fact, therefore, the Congress has called on countries maintaining relation with the repressive regime to change direction in favour of democratic changes in Eritrea as well as peace and stability in the region. The Congress has also directed the new leadership to put in efforts to erase the scars the wars of the regime had caused and repair the image and relation of the Eritrean people with the peoples of the neighbouring countries. The Congress has, moreover, commended friendly countries and parties that have been supporting our people's struggle for democracy and helping and facilitating the way for the successful convention of this Congress.

Our Struggling People!

The formation of the Alliance of the Eritrean National Forces, which has embraced all of the opposition forces, was an historic event that galvanised the enthusiasm of our masses. Accordingly, the Congress expressed satisfaction for the important role the Alliance has been playing to advance the momentum of the struggle for democracy. Within this context, the Congress expressed its appreciation for the significant role our bases have played in promoting the activities of the Alliance's, and called on them to keep on their active involvement at all levels.

At the time when the battle lines between the forces of democracy and the dictatorial regime are being drawn, the Congress has entrusted the leadership with the task of engaging in dialogue with Eritrean forces, movements, groups and personalities opposing the dictatorial regime in order to unify and co-ordinate their efforts in the interest of shortening the duration of our people's suffering.

Our Struggling People!

The Congress has also declared its support of, and solidarity with, the Palestinian people who are daily paying heavy sacrifices in the course of their continuing uprising against the Israeli occupation for the sake of their legitimate right to self-determination and establishment of their independent state.

Expressing its support for just and comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Congress has equally demanded the return of the Arab occupied land in Syria and Lebanon.

In respect to Africa, the Congress observed that there is no alternative solution to the unending crises and conflicts affecting most of the countries on the Continent other than seeking peaceful means and democratic ways.

The Congress hailed our bases in all places around the world for their steadfastness and adherence to the principles of their organisation in the face of all sorts of intimidation, distortions and terrorisation campaigns unleashed against them by the regime and its agents. It expressed its special commendation and encouragement of our masses inside Eritrea, and called on them to persevere and contribute to the ultimate fulfilment of our and the people's objectives: democracy, peace and justice.

Not least important too, recognising that the Eritrean army is one of the worst affected victims of the regime's adventurous policies, the Congress called upon it to shoulder its national responsibility by standing on the side of our people's struggle for democracy, peace and stability.

Lastly, the Congress appealed to the international community to exercise pressure on the dictatorial regime to release all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, among whom are the former members of the leadership, Woldemariam Bahlibi and Tekleberhan Gebretsadik (alias Wodi Bashay). The Congress had rounded up its sessions by electing a political leadership entrusted with the responsibility of implementing the policies and programmes it adopted.

Long Live Free and Democratic Eritrea!

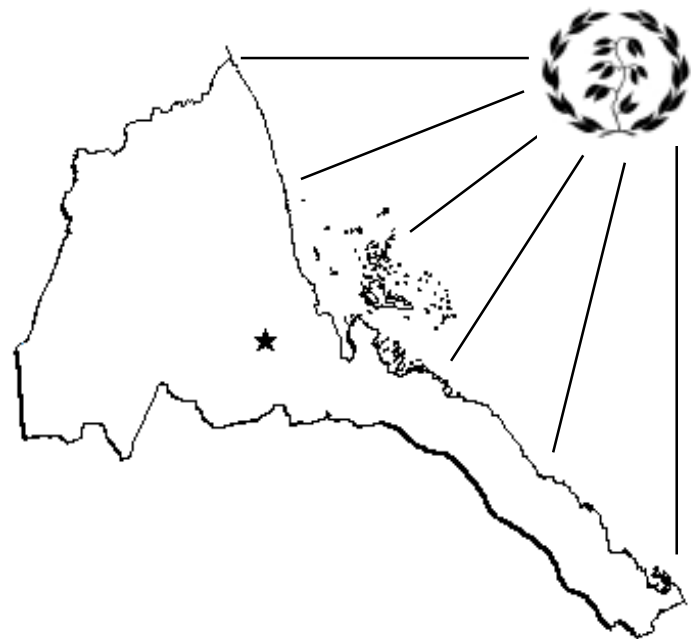
Long Live the ELF-RC!

Long Live the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces!

Down with the PFDJ Dictatorship!

Eternal Glory to our Heroic Martyrs!





*5th General National Congress
for
Reconciliation, Democracy and Development*