

UNPRECEDENTED MEETINGS IN SEATTLE AND IT'S VICINITY

Eritrean People's Party Department of Information 17.09.2008

ERITREAN PEOPLES PARTY members in Seattle and its vicinity held the first meeting on September 14, 2008 to discuss development in the newly formed party. The meeting was the first one since EPP's conception. All the participants arrived on time. Mr. Mhari Berhe chaired the meeting.

Mr. Mhari commenced the meeting with a warm welcome to all the participants; each of them was given an opportunity to introduce himself. He proceeded to explain the meeting's agenda. Mr. Mhari expounded on the recent developments of the EPP and introduced the newly elected leaders to the participants, who congratulated and wished them well.

Ms. Eritrea Alazar, the Head of the Department for Women Affairs, was the first speaker of the day. She addressed the role of women in the current Eritrean political opposition organizations and explained their experiences in the armed struggle for Eritrean independence. Ms Alazar went on to explain that Eritrean women fought equally with men to free the Eritrean people from tyranny, and were very successful in all aspects. The current dictatorial regime in Eritrea has forgotten all of their noble deeds and deprived them of their inalienable rights. The Chairwoman added that not only were women in Eritrea deprived of their rights; they were also subjected to different abusive acts, and inhuman and demeaning treatment. She referenced the infamous camp of Sawa as an example of what women have had to endure.

Ms. Alazar applauded the EPP leadership for the inclusion in the active struggle for freedom, women and the younger generation as evidenced by the current make up of the EPP leadership. The First Congress of the EPP on July 2008 acknowledged the crucial role that women and the younger generation will play in the struggle for democracy in Eritrea. Such recognition has led the EPP to establish the Department for Women and Youth. Ms. Alazar, encouraged women not to be contented to rest on the seeming success of the struggle for gender equality. She encouraged women to continue with their active involvement with the opposition group. This, she added, will make a difference in their communities in general, and in the EPP in particular.

Ms. Chairwoman further explored some strategies of how women can reach out to the Eritrean community to bring awareness of the opposition group. Ms. Alazar's speech and exaltation was met with loud applause.

Mr. Yohannes Misgina addressed the participants on behalf of the Department of Youth Affairs. As the newly elected member to lead the Youth Affairs, Mr. Misgina expressed his concern that the voice of the younger generation has been silent for far too long. He spoke about the younger generation's importance in Eritrea's reconstruction and transformation, as well as their vision and desire for the country they wish to build and pass on to other generations.

Mr. Misgina addressed 2 issues that have impeded the younger generation from active participation in political affairs. The first issue is the divisive policies and practices of the current regime. He described how this ruthless dictatorship has divided the Eritrean people by zoba, ethnicity and race, and in so doing has managed to keep them disinterested in politics. This generation is however becoming increasingly aware of these divisive schemes and is eagerly waiting for the opportunity to join together with others who share their vision.

Quoting the famous proverb that *a house divided cannot stand*, Mr. Misgina called on all Eritreans, both old and young, to unite and work together for the good of our people. He called on all people to awake from the self-deception of imagined progress that has been brought about by such divisive policies, and work together in unison so as to achieve our people's expectations. He challenged both the old and young generations to evaluate the causes of failure of our 30 years long struggle for peace, justice democracy and development. Such evaluation, he added, will help us to narrow our differences and unify our vision for a free Eritrea. He opined that EPP's inclusion of the younger generation in the party as an important and giant step towards that direction.

The second issue Mr. Misgina raised as a cause hindering the participation of the younger generation is the lack of vision among themselves, and among the leadership elite. It seems like the government is busy perpetuating its own stay in power while the opposition groups on the other hand are busy opposing and fighting each other, and in the meantime, the young people are lost in self absorption. He urged the party to own a common vision, one that the younger generation can join in and identify with. He cautioned those who were present against trying to find tomorrow's hope in yesterday's answers. A new vision, he added, must be born if there will be any hope of success for a free and democratic Eritrea.

A discussion forum followed Mr. Misgina's address. Those who were present eagerly and excitedly joined in the question and answer session. Many questions were asked as the participants wanted to know more about the vision of the new party. They also gave in valuable input as to what they would want to see and what their expectations were. The young people had questions for the older leaders wanting to know what to do to avoid repeating old mistakes. They also wanted to know what they need to do to make a difference in Eritrea.

By the time the meeting was adjourned, there was new found sense of unity and commitment to working together for the people of Eritrea.