

## What have we done so far.....to save our nation?

### A message to the Eritrean youth

By

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Eritrea won its independence in 1991 following a 30-year protracted guerrilla warfare that culminated in the military victory of the EPLF forces over the heavily backed Ethiopian occupation regime. In 1993, in a UN monitored referendum, the Eritrean people as a manifestation of their insatiable desire for independence, overwhelmingly voted 'yes' for independence and consequently Eritrea was declared an independent state.



As there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, the Eritrean people, have paid dear human and material prices to attain their cherished independence. It is for this very fact that their expectation from the dawn that independence could bring to them was excessively high. In 1994, The EPLF, in its third organizational congress, renamed itself into the PFDJ, and formed the rather ironical provisional government of Eritrea, which tightly holds the reins of power in Eritrea, to this very moment. In the same congress, a charter on Eritrea's future was framed. On the basis of that, it was promised that Eritrea would set forward on the journey towards being a **constitutional democratic state**. On the basis of this, a clear time table was set to establish the necessary foundations (drafting a constitution, establishing a free-press, an independent judiciary, rules governing the formation and activities of political-parties...Etc) of a constitutional democratic state.

#### **What then.....went wrong?**

With the passage of time, it could be said here that, all the above promises made on the future of Eritrea, were half-hearted. The EPLF which transformed itself in to the PFDJ did not share a common idea on the future of Eritrea. As a result, when it came to the genuine decision on the point the PFDJ was clearly divided in to two diametrically opposed camps; those who saw that the realization of democratic Eritrea was the destination point and the final dream of Eritrea's independence struggle. While the other hostile camp consisted of those who feared that democracy would put their desire for dominance and their lust for power in to question. The fact that, the EPLF and then the PFDJ was highly known for its secrecy guided politics, the debate on this within its higher echelons was unheard of, until the war with Ethiopia broke out, and all the debates began to shine the public spotlight during the vibrant era of the free-press. The former group that staunchly stood for a full move towards democratization, was what latter came to be known as the G-15. Along with the unfinished business of transition to democracy, the group criticized President Isseyas Afwerki for behaving in unconstitutional manner and his illegitimate conduct of war with Ethiopia. September 2001, was the month in which these snowballing events took a disastrous shape, with the government of Eritrea arresting members of the G-15 group. With this, the long yearned move towards democratization was brought to a dead lock, when the Eritrean government officially banned the free-press, to be replaced by the only government printable press (*Hads-Eritrea*)

suspended the constitution, to rule by means of brute force and fiat, and liquidated the nominal independent judiciary to be replaced by the military kangaroo courts. Then the likely outcome of this savage move coupled with the shattering consequences of the war with Ethiopia raised the suffering of the Eritrean people to its summit. Soon the youth were seen to flee the country in an attempt to escape endless servitude and save their life from the destructive and unjustified wars ignited by the regime with all its neighbors.

Though, the somber situation looming high over Eritrea affected every facet of the Eritrean society, in particular it could be said its shattering effects had been more felt by the youth, who, as a manifestation of the harsh realities of life in Eritrea, risk their life to cross over the highly patrolled borders of Eritrea with Sudan, Ethiopian and Yemen, the hostile Sahara desert to Libya, the Mediterranean sea to Italy and Malta and the barbed wires in the Egyptian-Israeli border. The saddest part of this untold story is that, a lot of them have been shot while attempting to cross the border over to Sudan and Ethiopia, or by the Egyptian border troops while attempting to sneak in to Israel and so many of them were lost in the inhospitable cradle of the Sahara desert or in the high seas while attempting to cross in to Europe. Despite its pervasiveness, the Eritrean tragedy especially that of the youth is a real human catastrophe but yet did not get the international attention which it deserved. Countries such as Malta, Libya, Egypt and the Sudan despite signing the UN convention on the right of refugees to asylum, have forcibly turned a considerable number of Eritrean asylum seekers back in to Eritrea, where most of them either still linger in some notorious detention camps or have lost their leaves amidst tough interrogation by the authorities.

The youth continue to flee Eritrea at an alarming rate on a daily basis. According to secondary sources about 50 Eritreans cross the border to Sudan daily and about that many to Ethiopia. The youth is the bread winner upon which the very subsistence of any society depends. About 250,000 of the Eritrean youth still attached to the endless exploitative national service and free-labor construction works of the regime, contributed to a sharp decrease in agricultural produce, which is the back bone of the Eritrean economy. Coupled with the Eritrean governments ban on social welfare organizations and other food dolling organizations makes the specter of drought and starvation loom high. Unofficial reports tell that, considerable number of people are believed to have died due to food shortages. As a manifestation of this, a number of families have arrived collectively in the neighboring countries of Sudan and Ethiopia.

### **Fleeing your country.....is not a solution**

As a fish would not dare to go out of water, nobody would choose to flee his beloved country, when things are at ease. But when things deviate from their normal path, and become completely unbearable, then in the first instance, people would try to stand up in an attempt to rectify the particular ills. In a country where, the right to stand for your rights is absent, then the only option that remains, is exit. Be it, in search of a base from which to oppose or in search of a safe haven.

It is open to the naked eye, that the self appointed government of Eritrea, is one of the most atrocious and brutal dictatorships the world had ever seen. Though it came into power under the banner of Freedom from exploitation and democracy, it proved to be the other way round; pernicious to the maximum. It regards The Eritrean people as commodities rather than free citizens

of a free-state, expected to live and breathe according to its instructions, with out a say even in matters related to their daily life. To oppose the government is considered a punishable crime that could even take one's life. In such a situation coupled with the absence of legal institutional channels to forward ones discontent and grievances, along with the harsh economic life in the country, every body would likely reach to the conclusion of fleeing the country, at any cost. The above mentioned grave political and economic realities which constitute a harbinger of a bleak future for the Eritrean youth are the causes of his escape today.

The PFDJ Orwellian regime is leading Eritrea into quick sand from which escape is impossible. The fruits of the Eritrean revolution are in danger. Saving the nation from the disastrous direction to which it is heading is a matter that must be dealt with urgency. Though the responsibility of saving the nation falls upon every Eritrean but it should not be forgotten that the lead in the queue should be, the Eritrean youth.

### **What have we done so far....to change the specter haunting our nation?**

In the first instance The PFDJ's betrayal of its promises to our people has undoubtedly created a sense of hatred or reluctance towards any organized political work among the youth. There are a number of Diaspora opposition groups especially in Sudan and Ethiopia, where the fleeing youth establish its foothold first, before trekking in to Libya, Italy or Israel. There was a clear weakness of the opposition group in trying to win the favor of the youth and enlist them in the ongoing struggle for democratic change. In addition to that, the disunited presence of the opposition groups and its unjustified daily proliferation have also served to make the already dwindling option of attaching oneself to political work further unthinkable. As a matter of which, every Eritrean youth finds himself in a journey towards leading a detached civilian life either in the west or in refugee camps in neighboring countries.

### **New hopes in the horizon...**

The Eritrean Democratic Alliance consists of 13 opposition groups which could ideologically be categorized in to three groups; namely with ethnic, religious and national secular democratic programs. The number 13 itself is the main point that creates a sort of hope-loss among the Eritrean people, who believe that unity as opposed to disunity is the only way-out for overcoming any particular debacle. And according to me the existence of the 13 opposition groups is unjustifiable from the point of view of their overlapping programs. One question raises itself here, with out an avenue for retreat. 'What is the justification for those opposition groups with similar programs, but who continue to stand at the antipodes? The first brave attempt to answer the question came from the once, ELF – Revolutionary Council (Eritrean peoples Party now). The above mentioned organization in its 6<sup>th</sup> organizational congress, having deeply understood that the opposition with its disunited presence could not stand on its own foot to oppose the dictatorial regime in Asmara, came up with a genuine plan, the crux of which revolved around the idea that; those political parties with similar programs and share the same vision must unite to form strong parties. In its move to realize it, the organization opened dialogue with all political parties with similar programs. While The Eritrean Gash-setiti democratic movement answered to the call and became part and parcel of the new party, the Eritrean People's Party. The Eritrean Democratic Party and the Eritrean people's

movement have also agreed to be part of the project. A New and a strong political party is in the womb to be born in the unifying congress pending to be held in December 2009 between the three political parties, which posses a national secular and democratic political orientation. It is a courageous move and the first glimmer of hope to our people. And its adherents should be merited for trying to end the meandering path which the opposition has been following for years, with out registering any change. So the wind of change is in the assembling. I think it is the right time for us (the youth) to rise up in the laid footsteps by these parties to speedup change, to salvage the already crumbling nation and our gallant people from a dreadful end.

(My message repeated in fewer words below in Arabic)

## ماذا نحن فاعلون ؟

هو الذى الوضع الذى مررت به والكثيرون من الشباب مررؤ به وحتى الان يمرون به ت بذات يمر شعبنا بمراحل صعبه منهاالوق ان اكتب هذا المقال وفي هذا دفعنى لم يكن شئى حديثا لنا بل كل الاعمال الغير فهذا والشتات والسجون الجوع والموالون للنظام يدفعون بعض لهذا النظام الدكتاتوري اصبحت منهجا انسانيه بقطعت ارض لهم يسمح مثل ان مصلحه شخصيه من النقوض مقابل النسب معينه فلجميع لهذا النظام جريمه لن تغفر ؟ فهل تعلم ان مساندتك . لخوا معسكرات الاجئين وفي سجون ليبيا في يعيش مايملك وقرا هارب بلا شئى ترك وقليل من من مات في الصحراء والبحر وبعضهم في اسوا الاوضاع والجهل لجوع والفقروا واحدا هو من يريد الشتات يدفع قرشاً فمن بسلام نجأ وايطال عمر النظام الدكتاتوري فعلياً أن لن نصمت ، فالخوف والهروب لشعبنا . لن يفعل شيئاً ماذا نحن فاعلون ؟

لايحل فعلياً أن ننضم الا نعم والصمت يحل قضيتنا ؟ هل الخوف والهروب البعض يقول هذه . المعارضات الارتريه ونعمل معها باسقاط هذا النظام الدكتاتوري ونضم الى يجب علينا أن نفكر بجديه بشئى فاشله ونحن ان نتحرك المعارضات من اجل مصلحتنا . وان لن صحح مافشلو فيه ونعمل معهم ون صفوف هذه المعارضات تضرارنا مباشرتاً من لانو نحن الشباب اللذين البسيطة نبخل بقدراننا من اخواننا الكثيرون لانوا شيئاً من الحقيقه صممتنا ورقاضنا لا يغذينا، النظام المنزا هذا أن نعمل لتغير فلابدا ونحن نجينا بسلام فى داخل ارتريا مقال الى الدكتاتوري لتحقيق السلام والديمقراطيه فى ارتريا قلم محمد عبده عضو حزب الشعب اخر