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جبهة التحرير الإرترية  
المجلس الثوري  
مكتب الرئيس

ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT/ ELF-RC  
CHAIRMAN OFFICE

### **Pre-Walkout Speech of ELF-RC Delegation To the Meeting of the Eritrean Alliance**

(From the files of the ELF-RC Delegation, 21.10.2002)

Dear Representatives of Fraternal organizations,

Big achievements have been scored in the chain of sessions we have had in the past several days in the way of developing our plans for action in facing future challenges in our struggle. We have adopted the National Charter, the internal constitution, and plans of action for the period ahead. We have jointly worked hard and the outcome is our common achievement. During the deliberations, we were at times heating up the debate, as is the nature of democratic deliberations. At the end, though, we all leave behind us and in this hall the heated expressions uttered at debate hours. We are not supposed to take them home with us. What we take home and guard with great care are the programmes and action plans of the Alliance that have come out of the hot crucible of our intensive discussions. The call of the hour is for us to work with tolerance and mutual respect by focusing on the great expectations of our people to achieve their common national objective in a harmonious manner. On our part, we have long experience in similar tense democratic debates and, on behalf of the ELF-RC delegation, I wish to assure you that we have no hard feelings against anyone of you if you feel you expressed strong viewpoints against us. All the differences expressed shall be left behind us. On the other hand, we ask every participant's sincere apologies for any expressions used in the course the debates and that might have angered or displeased anyone of you in the meeting.

Today, we are in the election session. However, the sad story is that a different breeze of air inflects this agenda item; long before this day, we have been bombarded by one-sided election campaigns through the media and other means. We have all witnessed them. To say the truth, we have not expected this to happen to this Alliance (built on consensus and trust). It has not been a tradition in the Alliance. It is a strange and negative occurrence. As you may recall, this delegation had already drew your attention to this negative development previously.

Per suggestion of my colleague Ahmed Mohammed Nasser, the meeting agreed for one-day of consultations before we come to the election of leadership for the Alliance. Using that occasion, we have contacted most of you in order to consult you for an eventual agreement on the structure and elements that can lead us successfully. What we wanted to ask and share with you was what would be good for all of us. However, what we discovered in the course of our consultations is absolutely disheartening and angering. Those of you we talked with told us that 'Ato Herui Tedla was wanted and supported by neighbouring countries and the international community' and that you agreed. No dialogue, no exchange of ideas was possible. It was a dead end. It was totally outside the mode and practice that hitherto prevailed in the Alliance.

When we asked for consultations, we wanted to discuss whom we should entrust with the responsibility of leading the Alliance. But, according to your own assertions, what you told us made neighbouring countries the decision-makers of Eritrean affairs, thus affecting the free will and independence of the Alliance.

We must make it clearer. We the peoples of this region and the world at large have influences that we make on one another; such influences are taken into consideration when making all types of agreements. However, these influences and considerations always take a secondary position. It is absolutely unacceptable to give primary and decisive role to outside influences in determining one's own fate. This is because giving up to outside pressure in such matters damages one's very existence, one's choice, one's free will and one's power to decide for oneself. As we prepared to elect our leadership in the Alliance, you told us that the wishes and the choices of the regional states would be given the priority. At this stage, we say our national fabric is facing big danger! And whether we liked it or not, we are giving to this election a non-Eritrean character.

We see this matter in light of the principle of freedom of our opinion, and our independent political decision, which cannot be handed over to foreign actors. We protest and we are not willing to be party to election, which is only meant to formalize pre-made decisions. All of you may recall that, wherever it may be, we at the ELF-RC never shied away from defending our independent political decision under any circumstance. We do not boast to be strong, powerful and rich political organization. These features can be possessed and lost in the process. But we own one thing that no one can take away from us. It is our independent political decision, which is organically linked to the sovereignty of our people and country. It is directly linked to our independence and under no circumstances can it be abandoned. It has been our trademark and shall remain so. We cannot let it go because we are accountable on it in front of our members and our nation.

I also wish to raise the other issue linked with this election. Our brother Herui is not new to Eritrea and the Eritrean revolution. But he is new to the Alliance. By our judgment, it will be unfair to Herui and to the Alliance itself to call on Herui to lead the alignment, which he did not know well. It is outside the standard norms and the interest of our cause. This has nothing to do with rules and regulations. Obviously, it is not reasonable. Instead, it would be rational to allow the Alliance know Herui better than the Alliance accepting Herui because he was 'accepted' by neighbours. We cannot allow ourselves to be dragged after the interests of neighbours. This can only be interpreted as the Alliance belittling or neglecting its responsibility and the member organizations of the Alliance giving priority to their individual interests.

Our Brother Herui,

- We have a message we wish to address to you. When you informed the Alliance that you established your party (Eritrean Cooperative Party), we have not stopped your request to join the Alliance; we at the Alliance did not finger point at the formalities that you might have not fulfilled to be a member this year. But when, for any reason, a request came your way to be the Secretary General of the Alliance, one expected you to react with a sense of responsibility. We believe your response should have been as follows: 'I am new to this Alliance and I beg you to give me time to know you well first'. The ELF-RC could have taken the same position we are taking today even if the candidate before us were a 'Ghebre-Qal or Hassan' who is new to the Alliance. Based on logic and reason, we would also expect you, Herui, to take a similar position and oppose the candidature of any newcomer who comes to lead your organization as imposed by outside pressure.

The ELF-RC wishes to clarify that we did not, as you did, receive any pressure by neighbours. But since you, members of this Alliance, have yourselves explained it to us that you are accepting the candidature of Ato Herui under the pressure of neighbouring countries, we wish to firmly state here and now that this act is a dangerous phenomenon that entails serious consequences like: -

- Violation of the letter and spirit of the National Charter;
- Adverse effect on the confidence-building measures accumulated during the past four years;
- Reversal of the expectations hoped to be achieved through the Alliance;
- Distortion of election process in practice;
- Discouragement of the aspirations of our people, and above all
- Affecting our independent political decision.

We do not feel proud to take part in this election, which had been finalized before we came to take part in it. Therefore, we as ELF-RC take the liberty of staging a protest walkout from this session. Nevertheless, we wish to make it clear that our protest walkout of this session will in no way be interpreted as withdrawal from the Alliance of Eritrean National Forces. It will only mean protesting against an election session blighted by what you told us (about electing Herui under foreign pressure). My delegation does not even possess the authority of withdrawing the organization from the Alliance. That mandate belongs only to the Revolutionary Council, if it will have any second thoughts about the membership of the ELF-RC in the Alliance. Therefore, while reaffirming our strong attachment to the National Charter, we will, as full-fledged members of the Alliance engage not only in correcting the damages wrought on this Alliance by the current election but also pledge to continue offering all what we can to achieve our people's aspirations in national salvation and democratic transformation. Thank you.

Note:

This speech was delivered in Arabic and then in Tigrinia by the ELF-RC Chairman and head of delegation, Seyoum O. Michael, before the delegation's protest walkout from the last session of the meeting of the Alliance in Addis Ababa.