

**“African Voices”:  
political cherry picking at its worst!**



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Early this week, a motley network of African writers and journalist wrote an open letter to President Isaias Afwerki expressing concern on what they termed as “continued detention of Eritrean journalists and activists, migration of youth and ...the isolation of Eritrea from the larger African family”.

To impart a semblance of “balance”, the writers also expressed their “most sincere congratulations to Eritrea” for “its normalization of diplomatic relations with Ethiopia”.

The timing and rather inappropriate medium of communication that they selected to convey their views to the Government of Eritrea provoke profound questions of purpose and intent. But we would rather focus, at this point in time, on the issues they have raised than wasting time second-guessing their underlying motives.

June is a very solemn month for all Eritreans in all walks of life. June 20th is Martyrs Day!

Due to the travesty of justice and flagrant breaches of international law at various junctures of their history, the people of Eritrea were compelled to pay enormous sacrifices in the past 60 years. The human toll has been staggering and unparalleled relative to the small size of Eritrea’s population. These figures say it all: 65,000 freedom fighters martyred in the three-decades long liberation war (1961-1991); more than 20,000 of

Eritrea's best sons and daughters lost their lives in the subsequent border war (1998-2000) as well as its sequel in the past two decades as Ethiopia pursued wanton policies of belligerence and "regime change".

June is thus a month of somber reflection on the myriad injustices that were meted on Eritrea by a constellation of major powers and their local surrogates for over six decades. It is a month of commemoration for the high price paid and arduous trajectory blazed simply because Eritrea's inalienable national rights were perceived as incompatible with, and had to be compromised on, the altar of "higher" geostrategic interests of major global powers.

In all these difficult decades, "voices of conscience" in the wider international community – and especially African voices; official or otherwise – were conspicuous for their absence and deafening silence. In the case of African voices, the apathy persisted even in the past 16 years when Ethiopia flagrantly flouted Africa's sacrosanct principle of the sanctity of colonial boundaries and continued its occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories in contravention of the final and binding arbitral ruling of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission of 13 April 2002.

Peace has been achieved at long last now after Ethiopia belatedly accepted the EEBC decision and agreed to implement it fully. This is indeed the backdrop of the Joint Declaration of Peace and Friendship between Eritrea and Ethiopia signed in Asmara on July 9 last year.

Peace is extremely dear to Eritrea. Needless to emphasize, those who cherish peace most are those who have been affected most by its absence; by the attendant prevalence of war. This was acutely felt in Eritrea for the past six decades. Indeed, in the past 57 years from 1961 until 2018, the only time the country enjoyed durable peace to funnel its undivided attention and resources to nation building was the short, seven-year, interlude from 1991 until 1998; in the immediate aftermath of the historic victory of the liberation struggle.

Eritrea is now focused on consolidating the hard-won peace process underway. It is earnestly working to recoup lost time and opportunity to address critical issues of nation-building – in all its dimensions – with a redoubled sense of purpose and urgency. Formulation of appropriate policies, their prioritization and sequencing, as well as timelines of implementation are serious tasks that fall within the purview and prerogatives of the Government and people of Eritrea alone. Maintenance of the independence of its policies and ownership of its national developmental programmes are in fact cardinal principles that the GOE subscribes to strongly.

Despite attempts to isolate and muzzle Eritrea by certain powers, Eritrea has and currently enjoys the support of many, including Africans, at

international forums. Eritrea has vast diplomatic ties and representations in virtually all continents. Suffice to mention a couple of recent examples: Eritrea's election (167 states) to the UN Human Rights Council and its assumption of the Chairmanship of the Khartoum Process that deals with migration and human trafficking issues.

Eritrea is making modest contributions in these forums. More importantly, Eritrea is playing a widely acknowledged, active, and constructive role for regional peace, stability and economic integration.

The provision of education for all and health for all, achievement of food and water security in difficult circumstances of war and relentless belligerency, attest to the government's commitment to improve the lives of its people. Eritrea's commitment is evidenced by its achievement of all health-related UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Much needs to be done, and with the new found peace, no doubt Eritrea will fulfill the aspirations and dreams of her people, to develop their war-torn nation.

In as far as "migration of youth" is concerned, there is vast literature in the public domain on the dominant and politicized pull-factors that have spurred it in the first place. The granting of "automatic political asylum to all Eritreans" by certain European countries, with the UNHCR at the helm, was indeed designed to weaken Eritrea's defense capabilities by "weaning its youth from the National Service". Other domestic push factors pale in impact in terms of this externally-driven and politicized pull-factor.

The authors of the open letter also allude to "continued detention of journalist and other activists". Here again, the painful events of sedition that transpired at a crucial time during the border war are well known, documented and available in the public domain. To feign ignorance of these facts is disingenuous or irresponsible.

The majority of the signatories have undoubtedly been influenced by the narratives on Eritrea produced over the last 20 years. None of them have firsthand knowledge of, or have ever visited, the country. When one skims through the list, there is not even a single individual who has penned one single article on the predicaments of Eritrea in all those decades when it faced enormous existential threats.

Another poignant fact that we must recall is the tendency of external powers to instrumentalize "African voices" to implement their policies of subversion. In the case of Eritrea, both the UNSC sanctions (2009/2011) and the UNHRC resolutions (2012) of harassment were adopted using African Trojan horses as "key sponsors". One wonders whether a similar gimmick is on the offing in this case too. Particularly as some of the individuals in the list have murky associations with certain powers.

Be that as it may, Eritrea's motto has been, "Come and See". Eritrea is

open to all those with genuine interest in understanding the country, its people and its leadership. Otherwise, Eritrea's "rightful place in the family of African nations", achieved and preserved through the blood, sweat and sacrifice of her children, remains intact.

Asmara

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