

Interview with H.E. President Isaias Afwerki

Introduction

On the 24th of May the people of Eritrea will celebrate the 20th anniversary of their liberation from Ethiopian colonialism. In the preparation of this occasion, Eritrean Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS) Website has conducted an extensive interview with President Isaias Afwerki on a range of internal, regional and international issues.

President Isaias Afwerki discussed, among others, the various achievements registered in Eritrea during the past two decades in the economic, social and cultural sectors, especially in infrastructure, institutional capacity-building and minimization of differences in living standards. He highlighted our people's effective participation in all the areas mentioned above, albeit various obstacles posed against them from time to time.

President Isaias Afwerki underscored the need for regional co-operation and solidarity and elaborated Eritrea's modest efforts to resolve the problems of its neighbors, namely Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Yemen...etc. He exposed that peace, security and stability were being constantly undermined, dissension fueled and problems and conflicts fabricated by global forces intent on promoting their interests at the expense of the countries of our region and others. He cited the UN Security Council's resolution (1907) legally and politically unacceptable, sanctioning Eritrea as an example of fabrication of crises which do not reflect the reality on the ground, since Washington was merely punishing Eritrea for the commendable role it played in the region.

President Isaias Afwerki pointed out that the so-called big powers which pursue "casino" and "bubble" economy are on the verge of collapse and that new powers and laws are emerging. He concluded that economies based on production, distribution and consumption are bound to blossom and reign in the future within a context of social justice.

Asmara, December 2010

ECSSW: On 24th May the Eritrean people will celebrate the 20th Anniversary of independence from Ethiopian rule. What were the most significant challenges and major achievements in nation building during the two decades of independence?

President Isaias: Giving a comprehensive picture of the major achievements since independence in nation building, as well as the challenges that we faced and are still facing requires hours of discussion. The process of nation building has two features - software and hardware -, if I may use computer language. The most significant challenge in nation building is the software, that is, the political side. We did not face many problems in this regard, because we had placed its formative bricks during the liberation struggle. As such, at the time of independence the political building practically existed. We possessed strong determination of our people. We also possessed an adequate balance of the psychological, political, social and cultural factors necessary for nation building. The major challenge we faced in the course of nation building was actually the hardware feature. Building a nation requires having the necessary capacity in infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, communication, electricity, potable water etc. All this was virtually nonexistent during independence, and we had to start from below zero. However, we were able to compliment the material capabilities and absence of infrastructure with the determination of our people. In spite of the experience gained during the independence struggle, institutional capacity was another challenge that we faced. And all these challenges can be viewed in the light of our achievements during the past two decades.

When discussing the achievements some questions pose themselves: what are the criteria for measuring achievements? Can we measure them emotionally? Do you judge matters at your whim? There are many parameters and criteria. For instance, one can look into countries in Africa, or, one can look into advanced countries that were able to overcome many challenges by establishing the necessary institutions, systems and infrastructure. I can say, we cannot overestimate our achievements since independence, because they do not meet the ambitions of the Eritrean people who sacrificed a lot to build this nation. Nevertheless, there is no room for comparison with African, Asian, Middle Eastern, and European standards and experiences. We were able to attain many achievements with our humble capabilities and strong determination. The question is what percentage of the ambition of the Eritrean people were we able to meet? It was just one percent, but we believe this is a significant achievement compared with other countries.

ECSSW: How do you assess the experience of the six Eritrean regions and the role of Eritreans in the process of building the nation?

President Isaias: Of course, this is a part of the challenge. Building a nation involves social, cultural, political and economic dimensions and processes. This should be our first and foremost objective if there is to be something called politics. In any country, community or nation failure comes when the actual realities of the community are misrepresented. In our case, we believe that development programs must be shared equally and that the state budget must be allocated in such a manner as to give the least advantaged more than those benefiting from certain circumstances. For instance, it is necessary to have a development plan to bridge the gap between the life of citizens in remote rural parts of the country and those living in the towns. Such a plan should take into account the levels of cultural, social and economic developments of Eritrean communities.

Any state, government or political system must take into consideration the marginalized and the deprived members of society due to intentional and historical circumstances. It must work to minimize the differences, whether between towns and rural areas or between the beneficiaries and marginalized people. If one looks at the six Eritrean regions, one can observe that every region has its peculiar circumstances. In the Central Region, which includes the capital Asmara, for example, living conditions are relatively easier compared with other remote areas. In this case, should the

government set up projects to develop Asmara? Or should such projects target the remote regions? Special attention is required to those deprived of the facilities that are readily available for people living in Asmara, such as transportation, schools, health centers, potable water, electricity, communication, etc. The challenge is not getting the necessary material capability for development projects. Rather, it is to distribute national resource in a way which creates equal opportunity for citizens, because every citizen is entitled to be afforded equal opportunity. To ensure equal opportunity, there must be special consideration for the actual circumstances of every citizen, and this should be listed within the priorities of all regions. Some regions are developed and enjoy the necessary capacity for development, while others are less developed and lack the conditions for development. So, if state or government institutions ignore this reality and direct the development projects to certain areas and concentrate all resources in specific areas, then development becomes meaningless. For us, our priorities during the last twenty years have been distribution of the available resources in such a way as to bridge the gap and reduce the differences between the different social classes, whether in regions or within their territorial sub-divisions. If this problem is not handled properly, there can be no stability and no development can take place in any part of a country. In fact, I believe these are the basic challenges that face developing societies in Africa and other parts of the world.

The creation of equal opportunities of development was among the many challenges that we faced in the past twenty years. However, thanks to our accumulated experience and political beliefs, we did not commit mistakes in this regard. We are moving in the right direction, although we did not achieve a lot.

ECSSW: This takes us to Eritrean understanding of the democratic process. Can you explain to us the major features of that understanding?

President Isaias: Democracy is a means and not an end in itself. It is a means to achieve full citizenship. It is not a means to get representatives through the ballot box. The development stage of societies should be tackled seriously to ensure effective participation of citizens. There should be real participation of citizens in matters that concern them - economic, social or cultural issues - . Opportunities must, therefore, be made available to ensure such participation. The other dimension is the need for institutional capacity. There must be institutions that represent every citizen and ascertain participation. Such participation becomes, in our view, real democracy when it creates equal opportunities for all citizens. If opportunities are available only for a certain class in a country to send their children to school and universities, whereas the majority is not able to do so because it lacks the capacity, then contending that they can cast their vote equally cannot be blended democracy. A real democracy is one that ensures political, social and economic development of society, and is based on full citizenship and equal opportunities. These are the bases of democracy and require community effort and participation.

In the case of Eritrea, internal political challenges and external intervention aimed at creating division among the people hampered our effort to achieve our objectives. Various schemes were used in the past twenty years to hinder our political development and prevent us from building our institutions. When we carefully examine the post-independence era, we realize that our course has been hindered by many obstacles, including the border conflict with Ethiopia and other fabricated problems. These obstacles have negatively affected and interrupted the political development of our nation. Nonetheless, we succeeded in overcoming them.

We believe that the awareness, commitment and determination of the Eritrean people along with the accumulated experience, will finally lead to the creation of a suitable atmosphere for genuine participation, which can be referred to by some as a democratic process and by others as an effective participation. This might be achieved by the next generations in some instances, though the acceleration of the process is no doubt very important.

Nothing can be achieved right away and smoothly. There are objective conditions that would prevent the acceleration of the process. But also, and as I said previously, the past two decades have seen interferences aimed at weakening the Eritrean people and obstructing its path. This is, has been and remains to be our major challenge. Yet, there is no doubt that our rich experience and strong determination will enable us to overcome this challenge too.

ECSSW: Sawa is misrepresented as a military training camp while it is in fact a school for building a citizen who relies on himself so that he becomes an appendage of humanitarian and revolutionary values. The question is how do you evaluate this unique Eritrean experience?

President Isaias: To begin with, the so-called Eritrean experience was not a new one, nor did we invent a new thing. When we first came up with the idea, it was only as a continuation of our revolutionary experience and not as a new innovation. The armed struggle served as a melting pot. Eritreans from all parts of the country joined it regardless of their differences (class, age etc), and together experienced many difficulties, some of which were bitter. For instance, the fighters were able to overcome the regional conflicts and together liberate their country. Eritrea's liberation struggle is different from African or other countries that claim to have liberated themselves from colonialism. As I have already pointed out, in Eritrea the struggle was a political melting pot. Of course, there might have been some variations, but in general all Eritreans have participated. This experience must have been developed by the time the country's independence was won in 1991. The question that we faced then was: should the process stall or it should continue as a cultural, social and political process for nation building? It was from there that the idea of creating Sawa originated.

As an idea, Sawa did not emerge because we anticipated wars or other hostilities. On the contrary, it came as a continuation of the political process on the basis of which Eritrea was built throughout the armed struggle. In Sawa, Eritrean youth from different parts of the country and all walks of life come together. One would come from Assab, another one from Karora, a third from Tessenei, and others from Asmara, Senafi, Adi-Kula...etc, and all would gather in one place and know each other. These youth were not from the generation of the armed struggle and had not carried weapons before, and they did not have prior political, cultural and social experiences and lived in a climate different from the one that existed during the period of armed struggle. So, the process would be continuous and the continuation in any political process would require interaction with the past. Without this interaction and continuity we could not expect to build a nation.

Consequently, Sawa, as I said, is not a new invention and, of course, I and others have passed through the experience of the revolution, we knew each other in the struggle and worked in unity and sacrificed our lives for the liberation of this country. In the process we came to realize that we had become a single body of a nation. This experience must continue. In this sense, Sawa represents and personalizes the continuation of the nation building process that commenced during the liberation struggle. Whoever denies this fact has the right to say whatever he/she wants. But on our part, Sawa is the reincarnation and continuation of nation building and is by no means a strange phenomenon in our history.

ECSSW: A year has passed since the unjust UNSC Resolution 1907 was adopted. What are the motives and consequences of this Resolution? And how will Eritrea be dealing with it?

President Isaias: First of all, this resolution is totally unacceptable, both on legal and political grounds. We have to look at the Resolution in the light of the comprehensive developments in the region, the situation in Somalia, the fabricated border crisis between Eritrea and Djibouti, the Eritrea-Ethiopia border issue, and the problems in the Sudan. We don't look at these crises as separate ones; rather, they are interlocked.

The Resolution has no legal justification. To start with, if the Security Council had been on the side of the right of its member states and legality, it should have imposed sanctions against Ethiopia for the latter's refusal to enforce the decision of the Boundary Commission. This issue is still suspended and Eritrea's sovereign territories are still under Ethiopian occupation. The Security Council is the responsible body that should have defended Eritrea's sovereignty as a member of the United Nations.

The justifications advanced to pass the resolution were uglier than the sin itself. What are the reasons that motivated the Security Council to adopt this Resolution? Is this sanction really linked with the prevailing crisis in Somalia? If so, it means that external interferences which complicated the Somali problem have contributed to the current state of instability and have largely become part of the problem, instead of the solution. Then, the sanction should have been imposed against Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti. If, on the other hand, the Security Council thinks that there is al-Qaeda involvement and there is a problem of terrorism, then sanction should be imposed upon the interfering power. However, imposing sanctions upon Eritrea alleging that Eritrea interferes in Somalia and is supporting certain parties is not justifiable, because the allegations were fabricated and never reflected the reality on the ground. There is no evidence to support these baseless allegations, and no logic that could motivate the Security Council to impose a sanction upon Eritrea. And, if the issue is related to a fabricated border crisis between Eritrea and Djibouti, neither the UN Security Council nor any other body has the right to impose sanctions without proper investigation of the situation. Is the imposition of sanctions against Eritrea based on a fabricated crisis legally sustainable? Isn't it true that there is no legal justification for such a baseless accusation?

Now, a year after its adoption, I can safely say that this Resolution was in fact a hidden agenda intended to prevent Eritrea from playing a constructive role in solving the crisis in Somalia and creating a stable atmosphere in the region. The UN Security Council Resolution can be seen as Washington's punishment of Eritrea because of Asmara's positive role in the region.

There is no justification or motive for the Security Council to be dragged into this process. If we took the Security Council as an ideal authority that acts in accordance with rules and standards, and if we believe in that theoretically, now that the Security Council has deviated from its track, the Resolution undermines the reputation of the Council. Hence, after a year and the rip off, of every justification, the Security Council has no option but to apologize to the people of Eritrea and restore things to the prior situation. It goes without saying that it should take the necessary steps to resolve the Eritreo-Ethiopian crisis by pressuring Ethiopia to withdraw from the occupied Eritrean territories; to leave Somalis to solve their own problems themselves; to ask the neighboring countries to discontinue their interference in Somalia's internal affairs. Regarding the Eritreo-Djiboutian border issue, the matter has fallen into secure hands and efforts are now underway for its solution. Consequently, the Security Council should withdraw its resolution and rectify its blunder with apologies.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, in the first part of our interview you clarified Eritrea's internal policy. Let us now move to Eritrea's foreign policy in this second part. What are the values governing Eritrean foreign policy and the principles underlying it?

President Isaias: Our vision during the armed struggle was wider in scope and looked far into the future. There has been solidarity and cooperation among peoples. When we speak about the independence of Eritrea, it should be mentioned that there were peoples inside and outside our region who stood alongside the Eritrean people, because they believed independence was the right

of people. The solidarity might have been only political, but the essence was that no people in any country could live isolated from their environment, whether regional or global. As such, since independence our foreign policy has been based on principles capable of creating a conducive atmosphere for solidarity and cooperation among peoples of the Middle East and the Horn of Africa. This, however, does not mean that we are confined to the regional aspect and isolate ourselves from the international arena. We will be required to maintain relations with Asia, Europe, America and the other continents.

All the same our international relations should not prevent us from establishing relations of solidarity and cooperation with peoples in our region. Any relations we have with the peoples of Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya and others, as well as with the peoples of the Middle East are thus based on this strategic understanding. For example, IGAD as an organization set up to foster regional cooperation would have to expand and develop. This is one of the principles on which Eritrea's foreign policy is based. It is necessary to strengthen the bridge built during the armed struggle to link us with the Arab world. This is only a natural thing which reflects the relations existing among countries and political forces in the Middle East. The same is true with Europe and other parts of the world. Creating extensive cooperation requires building institutions. For instance, if we are to speak about economic development, infrastructure, social services and others, such projects should be related with Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and all the surrounding countries. However, for such cooperation to exist the region should enjoy peace and stability that allow its peoples to cooperate with each other. Our foreign policy operates with this understanding.

We Eritreans have paid a heavy toll for the liberation of our country. As such, we should strive to create an environment of cooperation in our region. Once it develops it may spread to other regions. Such relations are built by outlining a strategy for achieving the aims on which the foreign policy is built. In my opinion, it is also necessary to create mechanisms, establish institutions and prepare a plan for realizing these goals. In brief, our foreign policy is based on the principles of mutual respect and peaceful cooperation that ensure people's sustainable development in their living standards and lives.

ECSSW: Since the early days of independence, Eritrea has undertaken serious diplomatic efforts to solve the internal problems of Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen. What are the motives for those efforts and how much did they realize their intended goals?

President Isaias: All communities have conflicts. When a class has interests over and above those of others, conflict arises between the classes which wish to perpetuate their interests at the expenses of the majority which also wishes to ascertain its interests. Wars have been ignited in our world because few who have power and influence wanted to live at the expense of others. This is the reality of the 20th and 21st centuries we are living in. There are also privileged private individuals and corporations that exploit the resources of others. Political conflict, or "the conflict of civilizations" which I think is a misnomer, is also continual. When we speak about the challenges of the past 20 years, we are referring to the conflicts that ensued. When we liberated our country in 1991, we used to declare that the era of war had come to an end and we had entered a new era. The people secured their freedom. In addition, change occurred in the Sudan at the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties. One would have expected these peoples to create an environment enabling them to help each other improve the prevailing conditions. While the peoples of our region, namely the Somalis, Sudanese, Yemenis and others were aspiring to create an atmosphere of cooperation, we should know that there were, on the contrary, dominating and greedy forces which did not permit such cooperation. In various parts of the world, we observe ongoing struggle

between peoples who desire to create an atmosphere of free cooperation and a global force that wishes to dominate. This struggle is going on and will continue in the future.

The efforts we exerted in Somalia are to be understood within this context and we have never had a hidden agenda nor do we have one now. We cooperated in the liberation of the Ethiopian people and we also liberated our selves. The ultimate objective for us and the Ethiopian people was to create a new environment for the coming generations. We also cooperated with Sudan and Yemen with these visions and objectives. We stood alongside the people of Yemen in their struggle for unity and development. It was natural for Eritrea to take such a stance because it was its region. Peace should prevail in Yemen. The creation of a secured region with opportunities for cooperation among peoples in place preserved thus ensuring the security of the Red Sea is an important and urgent matter. Initiatives undertaken to resolve disputes in our region were based on policies intended to create an environment of cooperation and peaceful coexistence among the peoples. These peoples have been living together for thousands of years and centuries. Thus, it is natural for them to work together during the 21st century for a better and advanced historical future. The sad thing is that there is a global force which abhors the creation of better circumstances anywhere. This force is interfering in Somalia, Sudan and Yemen and creating problems in the Red Sea. It is also creating tensions in the Gulf of Aden. So, this is the reality we are facing and we have to deal with it rationally. Our sacred principles which aim at promoting solidarity and cooperation among the peoples of our region are there to stay. We should neither abandon our mission nor waver because of fear of this big force which wishes and attempts to misappropriate our peoples' resources. Although this struggle is bound to continue, we should persist without scruples until we achieve our objectives nationally and regionally.

ECSS: How do you read the current situation in Sudan and its future developments and what role can Eritrea play?

President Isaias: The answer to this question lies in the principles that I have clarified above. Eritrea's relation with each of its neighbors has its peculiarities. Our relationship with the Sudan is a strategic one, regardless of the circumstances that face it, and will remain so for generations to come. The question only is as to how we assess and understand it. How do we read the current transformation in Sudan and our relations with it? I will focus on the current issues about the referendum and the secession of Southern Sudan and other issues. And it all indicates that the mode of resolving conflicts that had existed for more than half a century since independence was a failure. Nevertheless, I think that it is now outdated to talk about what happened in 1956 and the subsequent historical and political stages. We should now talk about the last two decades, and that is, since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a new environment in our region. The Sudan could have overcome its inherited crisis.

The problem of Southern Sudan is a historically inherited one. This problem might be susceptible to explanations. But in the beginning of the 1990s Sudan had the opportunity to solve this problem. We in Eritrea had a clear stand in this regard and believed that the historical problem in South Sudan could be resolved only by respecting rights for all, regardless of whether it was to be called self determination or given any other term. When we say right of self-determination, this is not in the traditional sense but within a context of unity by overcoming differences and bringing to an end the circumstances that led to the marginalization of the people of Southern Sudan, thereby creating a Sudan that is based on citizenship with equal right and giving the southerners their rights, ending the war and creating a political environment that guarantees peaceful co-existence for all Sudanese. Our first effort was to reorganize IGAD and have the Sudanese crisis resolved within it. Regarding this matter Eritrea had also been in contact with our brothers in northern and southern Sudan.

As is well known, the SPLM began its struggle during the Numairi regime in 1983. Historically, the SPLM had embraced two views, namely the secession of South Sudan, on the one hand, and the ascertainment of legitimate rights within a unified Sudan, on the other. I recall that in the early 1990s Rick Machar, the present Vice President of the Government of South Sudan, was calling for secession, while at that time Dr. John Garang was calling for unity, on the grounds that the future of South Sudan was intrinsically linked with that of the north. Such unity according to Dr. Garang meant establishing a new Sudan based on full and equal citizenship rights and obligations.

Hence, if this right were realized the people of South Sudan, too, would be lined up as first class citizens like all the other Sudanese and the problem of the South would be settled. Subsequently, issues of the development of Southern Sudan would follow, which would be secondary and an outcome of the political reality which guarantees the equal rights of citizens. This outlook was consistent with ours and we did not envision the possibility nor the belief of separation of South Sudan. But now separation appears to be a reality. When discussing about self-determination we predicted the possibility of unity would be 99 % and that of separation, 1%. This was a numerical expression reflecting the stance of unity of Sudan upon guaranteeing southerners' rights. However, twenty years of wrong conflict resolution committed by the parties then in power and others has resulted in the present condition. It may not be appropriate now to put the blame on one party or another, though mistakes have certainly been committed. In addition, foreign intervention and agenda have complicated matters bringing them to the current stage. Internal developments such as the death of Dr. John Garang also played a role in this respect. There is an important fact I would like to reaffirm here namely, that we had reservations on the Naivasha Agreement then. One of our reservations was that power and wealth sharing between the two parties could not lead to the unity of the Sudan. The Agreement itself laid the foundations for secession, by creating separate structured governments and separate armies in Khartoum and Juba, respectively. We expressed our reservations thereon right away. We explained the Naivasha Agreement was full of endless substantive pitfalls and that it be deferred. This was our stand before 2005. Despite all our reservations, our choice was thus only to honor the stand of the concerned parties, since we could not replace them, interfere in their internal matters and impose our views on them.

The agreement was named "the Comprehensive Peace Agreement" (CPA), though we had pointed out that it could not be comprehensive, because its coverage could have been expanded. At that time we informed the concerned parties expressly that signing the Agreement would bring about serious problems. However, the two parties proceeded to sign the agreement and the problems ensued.

The second reservation is the external intervention and internationalization of the issue. This matter could have been avoided. When the peace process began, the matter was within IGAD only, but gradually so-called "friends" of IGAD came into the picture and then the so-called partners of IGAD followed, and ultimately the matter went outside the control of IGAD and IGAD was converted in a tool and an umbrella of external forces. In effect, internationalization further complicated the issue. Matters did not stop there. The African Union and mixed forces came into the scene and the Darfur problem further complicated matters.

If one looks at the Eastern Front Agreement, however, one discovers that it was exemplary, because it was based on the principles I have already mentioned. This Agreement did not discuss about the sharing of wealth and power, nor did it involve external intervention such as that of the United Nations or African Union. It was confined to Sudanese effort. It should have served as a model for resolving the problems of South Sudan and Darfur. The Darfur crisis which emerged

subsequently resulted in the Abuja Agreement. We also repeated the same reservations there, because agreement could not be reached fast between the two parties only. The result was further complication of the crisis in the month and years ahead, just like what happened in the Naivasha Agreement. The problems and developments between 2005 and 2011 were so interwoven that five years were not enough to overcome the complications. In addition, the Agreement was regarded sacred and by no means open to change. Instead of postponing the time of the referendum and studying the problems and coming up with a solution satisfactory to all parties. Some internal and external forces insisted that the referendum be carried out at the fixed time. Was it worth it? Time will tell. We had discussed from the beginning that such an approach would not bring about stability and resolve the problems of southern, northern and western Sudan.

Perhaps this may not be the appropriate time to talk about an external agenda fully engaged to complicate matters and utilize it for its own interests because it is too late and would be valueless. Such kind of discussion would be outdated and not provide an opportunity to restore things to where they were..

We have reached a dead end because the problem has assumed an international image and become interwoven with internal and external complications. It's a dead end for the Sudanese's as well as for our region. The Sudan's strategic, social and historical position in our region is by no means to be underestimated. The results of the referendum will no doubt lead to several scenarios. Discussing it takes a lot of time. But in sum, it is the outcome of shortcomings, complications and foreign interference. It would be unrealistic to look for solutions at this late stage. All the same in our region where the cooperation of all peoples and countries is required, our efforts to enable the Sudan to play an effective political rule will be continuous.

ECSSW: Somalia has been bogged in a crisis for more than two decades. What is your reading of the crisis? And what does Eritrea think the solution is?

President Isaias: There is nothing new in this matter. Our relation with Somalia begins during the 19th century. As a result of the environment created for the two peoples by colonialism, there grew during the 20th century common work and affinity between them. This colonial experience brought about relationships of mutual respect, fraternity, interest and sympathy between Eritreans and Somalis. In the early sixties, with the advent of the era of freedom and independence, two parts of Somalia's, the northern part which had been under British rule and the southern part which had been under Italian rule united to form Somalia. It was a voluntary unity. The situation of Somalia is complicated and requires extensive study. Customarily, it is argued Somalia qualifies to be a closely unified country because it enjoys the privileges of a single language, race, religion, culture and geographic area.

In addition, since the Middle Ages, Somalis have inhabited some parts of Djibouti, Ethiopia (Ogaden) and also a part of Northeast Kenya. In other words, they regarded themselves as one people. From this emerged the aspiration to form a Greater Somalia in the Horn of Africa. Was this a legitimate ambition? This is left for history to decide. Whether we like it or not, this feeling exists and is part of the problem that arose during the Cold War. This Somali aspiration has remained an obsession and a cause for worry in our region. Notwithstanding what transpired during the middle Ages, hatred of Somalis developed in Ethiopian mentality during the 20th century, and as a result Somalia became a big challenge for Ethiopians. As is known, Ethiopia was only established as a state at the beginning of the 20th century. From the inception of the imperial Ethiopia, its rulers have regarded Somalia as a major threat because of the conflict which has existed between them.

Somalis inhabiting Ogaden have never regarded it as part of Ethiopia. On the contrary, they regarded it as part of Somalia. Similarly, the Somalis living in North East Kenya considered their habitat part of Somalia. During the Cold War, several factors, including Somali aspirations and problems in neighboring countries like Djibouti, Kenya and Ethiopia, brought problems in Somalia. Djibouti was safe due to its peculiarities and French presence. However, the successive regimes in Ethiopia and Kenya viewed Somalia as a source of unrest. Here, I am not talking about the Ethiopian people but the regime in Addis Ababa which believed that Somalia constituted a danger for Ethiopian national security. The same applied to Kenya, as well.

During the Cold War, full pledged war broke out between Ethiopia and Somalia in 1964 and 1977 and in more intensity than between Djibouti and Somalia or Kenya and Somalia. The threat continued until the end of the Cold War in 1990 and the collapse of President Siad Bari's regime, after which the regional factors, especially Ethiopia began to play a critical role in disintegrating Somalia. We were hoping that, after Mengistu's regime was toppled and a new regime replaced it, the Ethiopians would build new relations and usher a new chapter with the Somalis. I do not want to delve into details here, but the tragic thing was that the new regime in Addis Ababa, based on its internal predicaments, began to view the Somali and Ogaden situation as part of its national security problem. It is true that at that time Somalia was being stirred by its own internal problems, but the bigger problems were coming from Somalia's neighbors, despite differences of intensity among Ethiopian, Kenyan and Djiboutian negative roles. But, in general, these neighbors regarded the fall and disintegration of the State of Somalia would serve their interests. It is this kind of mentality which complicated matters after the collapse of the Siad Bari's regime. Bari's regime certainly had its own internal problems, too. The inhabitants of Somaliland and others had felt marginalized by discriminatory policies. Somalia's defeat in the war with Ethiopia had also resulted in defeatist mentality and contributed to internal fragmentation. All these cumulated to aggravate the problem. In my opinion the major one was the regional factor. The Ethiopian regime adopted an unexpected policy of disintegrating Somalia and the Kenyan regime followed suit, and fortunately for Ethiopia and Kenya and unfortunately for Somalia and our region, the 9/11 incidents occurred. The US began to interfere in Somalia. It is true that Washington had previously on one special occasion intervened, but the intervention brought about diplomatic and military setbacks to the US Administration. Consequently, American politicians decided to interfere indirectly through their regional puppets Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti. The US endorsed this policy after 9/11 and began to implement it.

Thus, the phenomenon of terrorism and war on terrorism appeared. Somalia became part of this map. All this was a concocted scheme. It was finally contrived by global forces to link Somalia with the Kenya and Tanzania incidents and portray Somalia as a threat to our region. The reason was that their interests so dictated. It would also serve to implement the agenda of big powers. This international factor further complicated the Somalia issue. Currently, the Somali problem is not a local problem but a regional one. Somalia's neighbors are now part of the problem and are exploiting the issue of terrorism and the so-called war on terror. To implement it they are especially relying on US support. Somalia has thus become a scapegoat for everything as well as a justification for local problems in Ethiopia, Kenya or Djibouti. It has also become a pretext for robbing Somali resources, including marine, agricultural and livestock. And, of course the, the robbers are these countries.

We maintained and still maintain the stand that Somalia should not be isolated from its surrounding. Somali problems should be solved by the Somali people themselves. But the major problem is that there are regional forces intent on splitting Somalia into meaningless small fragments like the Somaliland, Puntland, Jubaland, Banaderland... etc. No regional or global power is entitled to

disintegrate Somalia. Disintegrating Somalia has also adverse effects on stability in the region. Presenting Somalia as a security risk for regional countries or asserting that Washington's security is interwoven with Somalia's situation by exaggerating Somalia's reality is nothing more than creating a crisis and executing one's agenda in the region. Irrespective of the intricacy or magnitude of the problem Eritrea's stance is clear. Somalia should preserve and maintain its unity, because the disintegration of Somalia does not benefit Somalis. Our entire region and Somalia's neighbors also stand to gain nothing from it. The people of Kenya face no threat from Somalis. It is only the regimes that are talking about threats.

Neighboring countries should not intervene in Somalia's affairs, since they are already part of the Somali problem. In principle, IGAD should have served as a regional instrument to resolve the Somali problem. But as I have already explained this organization which had undertaken the initiative to solve the problem of south Sudan has not been able to play its role pursuant to the responsibility it shoulders and ultimately was only reduced to an umbrella serving other forces. Currently, it is only working as a club where Somalia's neighbors convene and facilitate severally or jointly the realization of their interests. Our stand is firm and will never change. All foreign hands should withdraw from Somalia. Although some Somalis want to separate from Somalia and establish their own country, a conducive atmosphere should be guaranteed for all Somalis in order to decide what they want. Whether Somalis want federal, confederal or other arrangements, the choice is to be left to them. The important thing is giving Somalis the choice.

Whoever wishes the best for Somalis should help them solve their problems themselves. But no one can replace them and bring them miraculous solution. The main challenges in the Somali problem are lack of clarity of things and their being intricately interwoven, providing a wrong image and supplying complicated options instead of presenting solutions. As I have already clarified, although it has led us to confrontation with the Security Council and others, our stand is principled, historical and unwavering, we have held it for the past two decades and we resolutely stand by it. There is no alternative except to remove all regional and global interference from the Somali political arena and to leave the Somalis alone. The Somalis should be helped to build effective government institutions capable of guaranteeing the State, coping with piracy and curbing the process of exploration and ripping off Somalia's resources. Somalia has to be an integral part of a stable and complementary Horn of Africa region.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, there are some parties which contend that Ethiopia's future is in danger. Which way is Ethiopia going?

President Isaias: I do not want to make speculations as to which way Ethiopia is going. I can say that Ethiopia is going in the direction charted for it by the Woyane group administering Ethiopia. This group stood before, and still stands now, to gain nothing at all from Ethiopian unity. An examination of this group's program which is holding the reigns of power in Ethiopia reveals that its objective since the 1975's was to establish an independent sovereign state in Tigray. We conducted relentless struggle to change this viewpoint and introduce them into a single Ethiopia program. But this viewpoint has as yet not disappeared. This regime is still in the process of creating a conducive environment to disintegrate Ethiopia. It does not have Ethiopian national feelings. For instance, if we examine the Ethiopian constitution, especially Article 39 thereof, we observe that it permits right of self-determination up to secession. There is no constitution in the world during this epoch with this kind of provision.

If we look into the policy this regime has been pursuing during the past 20 years, we notice that it has succeeded in splitting and controlling the Oromo, Afar, Somali, Tigray, Amhara and other

nationalities. Ethiopia has been divided into national regions in accordance with the policies pursued by this group. Can this reality lead to armed conflict? These policies would have led to internal armed conflicts had external intervention not taken place. The change of policies we have seen during the past 20 years, especially during the first 12 years, i.e after this group concocted a border incident with Eritrea in 1998 to remain in power, was dependent upon US and other international forces. The surprising thing is that this regime became the executor of the agenda of global forces in our region and the provider of free services to foreign powers in order to ascertain its stay in power. Although this policy has succeeded to an extent during past years, it cannot continue thus until the end. The Ethiopian reality cannot continue as it is indefinitely. Attempts to buy time with foreign support and assistance are a wrong choice of no effect. Border dispute with Eritrea, the Somalia problem, the piracy issue, terrorism ... etc, and the agenda of global forces, are all designed to ascertain its stay in power. The Ethiopian regime has so far used this tactic to stay in power. But its stay in power can be only temporary .We have to examine everything patiently and in terms of its historical and political context. Is it to continue like that? There can be no everlasting thing in Ethiopian or any other experience.

The domination of a minority ethnic regime over majority nationalities cannot continue indefinitely. It is not sustainable to keep away 90 % majority nationalities and control government institution by force. Such kind of regime's life is bound to be limited. The duration of political conspiracies, as well as of policies of disintegration and divide- and- rule, too, can only be ephemeral. Dependence on external forces as well is condemned to be short-lived. It cannot continue for generations without a time bar .This pent-up volcano is bound to erupt on due date. When it is going to explode is left for the future. But it certainly is a volcano which they have temporarily choked with all the force at their command. This regime may appear to be enjoying diplomatic and political victories here and there. Present regional conditions may also portray such regimes as continual. But we have seen regimes like that of Emperor Hailelassie long before this regime. The Emperor's regime used to be called a "colossal regime ". It used to be propagated, that because it was a regime that could not be toppled, the possibility of Eritrea gaining independence and the internal conditions of Ethiopia changing were virtually non-existent. The Mengstu regime which followed was also one of the strongest in Africa. All these have now become old stories. Mengistu's regime collapsed.

Although the current regime in Ethiopia is making futile attempts to perpetuate its existence in power, its duration is limited. To conclude that a regime cannot be toppled merely from a single experience is a blunder. There is no new innovation regarding the so-called diplomatic victories of Ethiopia. For example the Haileselassie regime would not have stood against the struggle of the Eritrean and Ethiopian people had it not received foreign assistance. A regime with no internal social, political and cultural foundation is bound to depend on foreign forces. The Mengistu regime followed the tracks of the previous regime. The present regime, too, is merely repeating what we have seen in past history. I would like to remark here that it is inappropriate to read a single line of a single book only to arrive at a conclusion because the book contains various chapters, topics and details. Any regime which subscribes to such ideology is short-lived.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, the Ethiopian regime is occupying sovereign Eritrean territory in defiance of the decision of the Boundary Commission, the international community and the Security Council .What, in your opinion, is the solution to this problem?

President Isaias: As I have already explained previously, the Ethiopian regime has become a tool of foreign forces. The border issue was one of the ploys to create tension. Perhaps it was concocted to benefit the Ethiopian regime. It could also have been designed to justify the intervention of a foreign power. But ultimately we went to arbitration. The menace now is that if Eritrea becomes

stable, its people will be a source of threat to these forces. So it means you have to create uninterrupted problems for Eritrea. Once the decision was rendered, despite all its inequities, there was no other alternative except to accept it, because we had agreed to accept it as binding, final and non-appealable. As such, we had to enforce it whether we liked it or not. If for instance, the agreement had been implemented, a new environment would have been created.

In hindsight, when we pose a question as to what scenarios would have unfolded if the decision of the Boundary Commission had been executed in 2002, the response would be that Eritrea would have had the opportunity of making a giant stride. And that what all hostile forces dreaded, because the matter had been engineered to hamper Eritrea's political and economic progress. Also the decision appeared as another problem. These people cannot rest without causing problems. The scheme also included creating additional problems for Eritrea. In this connection the resolution of the Security Council imposing sanction on Eritrea on 2009 can be mentioned as an example. On what basis was the decision to sanction Eritrea issued? The intention was to put Eritrea in a position where it could not defend itself and its interests. The decision did not crop up suddenly. It was part of a series of obstacles and hindrances intended to hamper Eritrea's development. Although such conspiracies were temporary, I do not regard them as trivialities. The parties that planned the sanction concocted in advance justification that would enable them to pass the resolution. They introduced talks about Eritrea's intervention in Somalia and fabricated border disputes between Eritrea and Djibouti.

The fundamental objective was to create problems for the Eritrean people and Government, bring about economic and political crises in Eritrea and remove Eritrea from the political map. It was supposed to be a plan and strategy to be implemented step by step. If we look at the documents the American ambassador leaked to the Wikileaks, we can only conclude that these parties who thought Eritrea would crumble due to the obstacles they improvised suffered from psychological illness. When the Security Council used all its resources to pass Resolution 1907, its objective was to weaken Eritrea internally and subsequently bring about its political downfall. They were, therefore, continuously preaching as if in Eritrea there were human rights violations, religious conflicts between Christianity and Islam, and as if within Christianity, too, there were regional divisions and opposition. This was over and above their attempts to impose economic, military, security and other sanctions. Whenever each attempt which they undertook failed, they tried another one. What we understand from this is that these people will never stop until they attain their objectives. But whatever attempts they take will never succeed. Regarding the border dispute, I cannot predict that it will be resolved within a short time. Some people speculate that if challenges cumulate, they will create problems for Eritrea and weaken it. However, whenever Eritrea confronts challenges, its people and government emerge stronger. Consequently, non-wander conditions have become more favorable for Eritrea. By the way, is the border issue one of our priorities right now? It cannot be one of our priorities. In accordance with the rules of military and political conflict, it is understood that the Ethiopian regime will inevitably defeat itself. When is this defeat to occur? Is it due to its internal developments or Eritrea's pressure upon it? Is it due to conditions around the Horn of Africa or global conditions? We could probably present a plethora of analyses and details. We may even have several scenarios. The indisputable fact is that this regime will expose itself to defeat. Its improvisation of new policies and modalities is not to avoid defeat but only postpone its stay in power a little bit. We should thus read history from this perspective and wait patiently. Things will change without us exerting direct influence and, sooner or later, our land will be free from occupation.

ECSSW: One of the concoctions and interferences which Eritrea withstood and is now under Qatari mediation is Djibouti's claim of a border problem with Eritrea? At what stage is the Qatari mediation to be found now?

President Isaias: To be clear on this matter, we should not wrongly blame the Government and people of Djibouti. Djibouti and its people are our neighbors and part of our region. As such, we should not have a wrong understanding of the case. We should view this case in the light of regional and global developments. This case would not have arisen had there not been an external agenda. Due to Djibouti's geographical importance, the external agenda has adopted a plan in the Horn of Africa region and the Red sea, taking Djibouti as a starting point. Since it has actually appeared on the ground, there is no need for analysis and explanation. Eritrea is one of the countries which reject this internal interference. As I have already clarified, if we look into the circumstances of Somalia and the Sudan, we observe that it is being implemented within this strategy. Those that serve this agenda are Ethiopia and others regimes in our region. The scheme aims at complicating the conditions of our region and creating crisis and then managing the same. In this matter Djiboutians have no involvement even remotely. I am not feigning. The French have had presence in Djibouti since independence. Though French presence did not have importance, we were never worried about it. The French also played a positive role, because they brought stability to Djibouti. There was also no harm inflicted in our region due to French presence. But after 9/11 conditions changed completely. The matter is clear for everybody.

As a continuation of the conspiracy to pose obstacles for Eritrea, this fabricated border problem arose. It appeared suddenly in April, 2008. As we had been following things closely, we realized the problem did not come from Djibouti but from an external agenda. I do not wish to go into details. President Ismail Guelleh submitted the matter to the Amir of Qatar in April 2008, when he could have directly discussed the problem with me. The Amir of Qatar, thinking in good faith that we had a border problem contacted me by telephone and informed me about it. I honestly told the Amir that President Ismail Omar Guelleh was my neighbor and so instead of talking with him, he should have talked with me directly and that we could solve it bilaterally. The Amir of Qatar apologized and expressed concurrence with me and hang up. Two days after that President Guelleh came to the border with his troops. I do not blame me because of what occurred. Subsequently, a statement was issued from the US State Department disclosing the matter. How could the US State Department issue such a statement? Maybe Wikileaks will reveal the details of what went on behind curtains, since it has become a referral for all occurrences. We may not have known how things were going, but now the documents are easily available.

The US State Department had no diplomatic or legal justification to issue a statement that Eritrea had occupied Djiboutian territory. How can a technologically and industrially advanced country issue such kind of statement? Would it not have been better to leave it to the concerned parties? Otherwise, it should have verified the matter through the proper means. The matter was clear as of day one. The statement released merely illustrated Washington's vanity. Personally, I prefer to call it mere political and diplomatic folly. The State Department unduly hastened to condemn Eritrea and was thus exposed from the inception. It is clearly known that Djibouti had no role in this concocted scheme. At the beginning the Government of Djibouti was not aware of the matter. Maybe it was a trap for it too. The surprising thing is that right after the US State Department's statement another statement, identical in context with that of the US was released from the UN, as if the UN had been reduced to an office of the US State Department. How come the UN issued such a statement? It is thus clear that the matter was nothing but a drama concocted from the beginning. At any rate, since I have already explained the background I do not wish to delve further into the matter. Documents which expose several facts have also lately began to appear. Perhaps other documents which reveal the entire process may crop up. When the inequitable decision of 23rd December, 2009, which was devoid of legal justification, was issued, matters began to lose their bearing.

The Qataris again presented their initiative advising us that complication of the matter was unnecessary and that our case as brothers should be resolved within narrow bounds. This did not

differ from our stand. Our desire had been to resolve the problem at the bilateral level. But since the matter had gone out of control, we indicated that we had no problem if the matter could be decided by professionals and by legal means rather than by third parties through diplomatic agreements. We contended that if there were claims of possession or dispossession, they should be ascertained legally. We had been reaffirming that we had never crossed our border and occupied Djiboutian territory. This too, would have to be proved by adducing evidence before professional lawyers. We did not wish matters to go out of control. The matter has now become clearer. There had been an external agenda intended to create problems instead of promoting the interests of both Djibouti and Eritrea. So we accepted the Qatari initiative because it did not contradict our stand. Our brothers the Djiboutians also accepted it. The case is proceeding under normal procedures. The attempts to tie the problem with other agendas of the region have now disappeared. The attempts that were being made to give the case an international image and create problems for Eritrea have thus disappeared. Now there is no problem between Djibouti and Eritrea, though as the saying goes the continuation of water by some quarters still continues. The important thing is that the concocted scheme has now, after two years, been exposed and clear for everybody. Honest people at home and abroad now know the truth. As for the hostile agenda, some neighboring countries, especially Ethiopia and some countries under the IGAD umbrella are still harping it. Aside from this, there are ongoing attempts to complicate the problem through AU institutions. But in general, since this agenda has been exposed, no force in our region has legal or political justification to create other problems in order to aggravate or exacerbate this matter.

ECSSW: your Excellency, Yemen has been encountering various problems. What is Eritrea's position on this matter?

President Isaias: Regarding Yemen, there is no change to our stand of the early nineties which had been manifested in practice. Our stand which is based on cooperation with Yemen is derived from our understanding of securing a stable environment that guarantees cooperation among countries. We support the unity of Yemen. Our stand is quite clear and principled. During colonization and subsequently thereafter, there were two Yemens, namely North Yemen and South Yemen. Unity then emerged with the consent of the people of North and South Yemen. Our stand is for the unity of Yemen, because we believe unity serves the interests of the people of Yemen and the entire region. If we look into the conditions of the Horn of Africa, too, we observe that Yemen is in the political map of this region. As such, the stability of Yemen is of great interest to us.

Although there are economic, social, political and cultural problems in Yemen, they have to be resolved within the context of unity. Matters should not be aggravated to develop into regional and international problems. Global forces which exploit the question of terrorism and combating it as an agenda to promote their interests should not be given such opportunity to ascertain their interests in Yemen. Yemenis can themselves solve their problems. As I have stated earlier, Sudanese problems should be solved only by the Sudanese, Somali problems only by the Somalis and Yemeni problems only by the Yemenis. There is no doubt that Yemenis have the capacity and resources to resolve their problems. Any intervention in Yemen on the pretext that there are harm, inequity and demands which are intended to benefit from the conditions in Yemen and to disrupt the peace, stability and security of Yemen is, on our part, not acceptable. And we firmly reject it. Foreign interference is thus rejected under any circumstance. Yemenis know their problems more than others and they are capable of resolving them without external intervention. We Eritreans strongly believe that Yemeni solution and not external solution is the best approach. The questions of development, governance and political order are all matters that concern only Yemenis and should be resolved by them. In effect, Eritrea has stood and still stands alongside the Yemenis. It supports the stability and unity of Yemen as well as the resolution of Yemeni problems by the Yemenis themselves.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, piracy appears to be gaining foot in southern Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Somali coastline and the Indian Ocean. What, in your opinion, are the underlying causes as well as the solutions for this phenomenon?

President Isaias: This phenomenon is the result of the instability in Somalia and our region as a whole. Somalis have become victims of regional and global agenda and interference. There is no stability and peace which guarantees life with dignity for Somalis in Somalia, because there are no government and governmental institutions there. Somalis have thus been forced to resort to other alternatives. There is no force to protect and defend the interests and property of Somalis due to the power vacuum in Somalia. Consequently, Somalia's marine resources are being ripped off by external forces, while Somalis are facing starvation, diseases and exodus. Somali youth have thus been forced to engage in illegal activities, because respect for the law and legality cannot be promoted under such circumstances. Where abnormal and abject conditions prevail, the spirit of desperation increases and the likely hood of being immersed in illegal activities rises. The Somali coastline has been converted into dumping grounds of industrial waste from various countries. There is credible evidence that this practice has become a common phenomenon. It does not mean that Somalis have become the root cause of piracy, because they are unable to utilize their marine and other resources and industrial waste is being dumped on the coastal waters of Somalia. The main cause for piracy is the lack of government and public institutions in Somalia. The solution lies with the Somalis. Only they can resolve this problem. Neither fleets mobilized by various countries nor sophisticated technology has saved the day. On the contrary, the situation is worsening from time to time. We are convinced that the lasting solution for this problem is the establishment of a unified Somalia as a sovereign State with a legitimate government and effective institutions.

During the cold war, meaning before the downfall of the Siad Barri regime, Somalia had military institutions, a navy and an effective defense capability. Had there been such a government and public institutions in Somalia now the piracy phenomenon might not have occurred. Had peace and stability prevailed in Somalia, there would have been employment opportunities and Somalis would not have been forced to flee the country. Multinational corporations benefit indirectly from piracy. Freighters passing through the Somali coastline are charged high insurance premiums because the area is a high security risk. There are security institutions such as Blackwater which operate privately in this area allegedly to guarantee the safe passage of commercial ships. Insurance companies, too, have begun to reap excessive profits. There are several parties which encourage the perpetuity of piracy and those who stand to benefit more are non-Somalis. The deployment of big American, French, Chinese, German etc, warships is pointless. Eritrea does not view piracy in isolation of the political and security conditions prevailing in Somalia.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, whereas some primary and secondary powers are lobbying that the Red Sea's peace and security should be guaranteed, the countries of the region have become silent observers. What is Eritrea's stand on this sensitive issue?

President Isaias: Eritrea does not accept such foreign intervention and it is not due to emotional or political reasons. If left alone, the countries of the region can integrate their resources and solve the problem practically and technically. Even if there had been a problem of security, it was not necessary to try to resolve it by amassing sophisticated technology and big warships in the region. The countries of the region could have resolved the problem by cooperating with each other, without soliciting foreign intervention. The people engaged in piracy merely use small fiber glass boats. They do not have cannons or any other heavy arms. They can carry small arms only, and because there is no force that can curb their illegal activities, the light weapons can be effective. Even if scores of warships are deployed, it is difficult to control Somalia's coastline. Together with its extension the Indian Ocean.

We do not expect the arms and warships mobilized to the region for military and technical purposes will resolve the problem of piracy. It might be possible to resolve the problem in co-operation with the countries in the Red Sea region and the Gulf of Aden. But this does not suit those parties who benefit from piracy. Forces which use piracy as a pretext for promoting their ulterior agendas do not wish the implementation of such cooperation. As a result, when concerned countries attempt to co-operate in this regard, they face challenges from the forces which have deployed warships around our region and stand to benefit by aggravating the crisis.

We should be aware that there are forces which profit from crises and instability. These forces brag they will create a safe environment by combating terrorism and piracy. The main objective of such lies and deceit is to instigate crises and problems and then manage them. These statements are advanced deliberately to cover hidden agendas of schemes concerning the Horn of Africa region and the Red Sea.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, there has been recurring dissension between Nile source countries and those through which the river passes. What is the cause for dissension and how does Eritrea view it?

President Isaias: There are ten countries in the area mentioned. We did not want to join the gathering. Taking various matters into account, we chose to settle for an observer status. The issues being discussed have assumed a political image. The objective is to create a crisis between the two groups of countries. What is wanted is to weave a conspiracy between Egypt and Sudan, on the one hand, and the source countries, on the other, to prevent the conclusion of an agreement that guaranties the interests of all parties. The so-called Nice Valley Initiative, being a camouflage of another agenda, aims at creating discord among the river Nile countries by imposing pressure. An examination of the water resources potential of the Nile reveals that none of the countries are benefiting from it as needed. Politics aside, even from the technical point of view, those countries which claim to have built the necessary infrastructure are not using its waters as required.

There is not a single country which has exploited the Nile's water resources as needed during the past 20 years. Even Egypt and Sudan which claim to be entitled to a larger portion pursuant to previous agreements are not deriving optimum benefit from it. Ethiopia, which asserts that 80% of the Blue Nile waters originate from its territory, has not harnessed even 2% or 3% for agriculture or power generation, respectively. The remaining source countries which together account for 20% of the water originating from the Nile have additional sources and get rains. Not even one country has singly and effectively utilized the Nile waters to improve the living conditions of the people or prepared the infrastructure necessary for agriculture or power generation. The water being used for the development of society does not exceed 3%. So the question whether there is actual water problem arises. In practice, if there is shortage of water, the source countries or the others can create dissension or conflict claiming they have not obtained their share. But that is not the reality. There would be no grounds for argument or dispute, it being understood that there is no shortage of water. I think the objective is one of creating one's grouping or club. The Ethiopian regime is trying to impose pressure upon other countries by exploiting this issue. It is clear that it is planning to set up a club and implement agendas not related to the Nile water issue. The Ethiopian regime may be thinking of establishing a bloc that it controls. The question that comes to the mind is as to what necessitates such grouping or what kind of common interest would bring such a grouping together. Could there be some other difference between the source countries, on the one hand, and Sudan and Egypt, on the other, which leads to dissension? This is something which has been made to appear from nothing, from thin air as they say.

Once crisis and turmoil set in, the question of managing them follows. Had there been an accommodating forum and environment, these countries could sit together and discuss the matter with composure and wisdom. The water resources can be used for agricultural and other purposes if exploited in a manner which protects the interests of all the ten-member countries plus even Eritrea. These ten countries have to pull themselves out of the abyss they have fallen into, because drowning into such abyss merely complicates the matter further.

It also leads them to plunge into the hidden agenda without noticing it. The countries referred to as source countries stand to gain nothing from a conflict with Sudan or Egypt. On the contrary, the Nile water resources being a good fortune, it could be possible to promote the establishment of economic relations among Nile countries, such that all the people could benefit from the resources and the surplus be exported to neighboring countries. Arab and Middle East countries could invest in the Nile water resources. Investment could also come from Europe and Asia. Opportunities could thus be opened to benefit generations living in the source and riparian countries of the Nile. Presently, however, the matter has deviated to recriminations and political intricacies. The Nile countries should avoid such dissension, because it does not benefit present and coming generations and is also totally meaningless.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, in interviews you gave on various occasions to Arab mass media, you have advised that the Nile issue should not be politicized. But in practice, do you think it is been politicized?

President Isaias: A discussion forum in which all parties can participate should be convened. Attempting to reap political advantages by engaging in squabbles and conflicts is meaningless. The best solution would be for the concerned countries to discuss the issue with composure, wisdom and objectivity and use the Nile water resources to the benefit of coming generations. Whether due to innocence or misunderstanding parties are falling into the trap and the dissension is being disseminated through the mass media. Mass media can certainly play a positive role, but we have to be careful with them because they have their negative aspects, too.

Some mass media unintentionally tend to drag people into insults and outbursts. As a result, substance or essence may not be explained clearly. It is fundamental that the Nile river countries should avoid presenting the issue of Nile waters as a political matter. Everybody should also be aware that mixing the issue of the Nile waters with political issues can lead to dangerous developments. Presently, awareness about this issue is better than before. With time several governments and institutions have come to realize the concealed conspiracy being concocted so as to avoid falling into the trap. Source countries and those through which the river Nile flows should thus all be careful not to fall into the trap.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, how do you see the relations between Eritrea and the Arab countries, on the one hand, and between Eritrea and Israel, on the other? Some politicians and Arab mass media say that the two are linked. What is the basis for this?

President Isaias: This appears to be naivety. We have dwelt on this matter a lot. Only recently, while we were attending the Arab League meeting, they were talking about our case. It was presented as if we had come from the moon. It should be realized that the Arab League is not for Arab countries only. Actually, it should have been called Arab and African League, because several member countries are from Africa. It is illogical to argue that because Arab countries found in Africa are members of the Arab league, they are not African. The criteria for membership should be synchronized with 21 century conditions. The current practice is outdated. I have clearly indicated it. We do not need a permit from any body to get identity. Our culture, historical existence and

geographical position in this area all establish our identity. Such an issue should not be tackled only emotionally. The main issue of Arab countries is being questioned because the forces that were supposed to work effectively have not done a good job. Discussions focus on meaningless trivialities, while gatherings to guaranty interests are absent. Had there been coordination and complementarity among these countries, without exaggeration an international force could have certainly been established in this region.

ECSSW: When you say this region, are you referring to the Arab countries?

President Isaias: Yes. This region owns more than 60% of the world's oil reserves though it covers less than 5% of the earth. It also occupies a sensitive strategic position. But where are we now? When I say "we" I am including the Arab, the non-Arab African and those inhabiting the northern, the southern or the middle Arab peninsula. There is a surprising thing here, namely that, whether intentionally or innocently, trivialities which have no bearing on the common interests of these peoples are linked with political matters. This, of course, leads to meaningless diversions and discussions. Examples such as discussions whether a person is an Arab or not or whether a person is a member of the Arab League suffice to explain my point. Basically, instead of embarking on cyclical discussions, one should focus objectively on important principles.

The countries of this region and all Arabs have a historic obligation to ask themselves the following questions: "Where are we now, that is, during the 21st century? Are we living in the Middle Ages?" The prospects for Arab countries are better off now when the world is facing a financial crisis, compared with the period of the cold war or the end of the 20th century. So, the discussion should depart from this perspective.

Regarding the Arab-Israeli issue, the matter has reached a dead end. As the saying goes "there is no new thing under the sun". We have been expressing our opinion since the day the Oslo Agreement was signed. We have indicated that the process was bound to fail, because we had been following the drama from the beginning. It is possible to make one, two or three mistakes, but to continue after that is foolishness. Nothing new will emerge from the discussions that are going on. Under the given circumstances, we do not anticipate a fruitful discussion to be carried out. Why continue discussions when you know they are doomed to failure? Is resumption of discussions to the benefit of Israel or of the Arabs? It is for the benefit of neither one of them.

Israel actually exists in this region. Although Israel is a member of the UN, Many Arab countries do not recognize it. What is the best arrangement to live peacefully and in harmony in this region? Will this crisis continue to drain the resources of Arab countries forever by creating endless complications which pass on for generations? I recall we had friction with the Palestinians during the early 1990s and we had misunderstanding before that. We candidly informed them that the Oslo discussions would not advance. Accordingly, since the Ramala Government was meaningless we did not recognize it. Now Palestinians and all Arabs are convinced that the Ramala Government is meaningless. What was the reason which forced Palestinians to sign the Oslo Agreement? Was there any hope of establishing the State of Palestine? We have observed during the past years that new innovations have been appearing randomly. They would talk about a viable Palestine state. Then they would talk about two countries living together. For a third time another new adjective would be invented.

This approach tends to underestimate the peoples and countries of this region. Its objective is wastage of time and opportunities in order to avoid resolution of the crisis. During the early 21st century we are now living in, Arab countries have to assess achievements and their developments by appropriate means by revising their ideas so as to have joint strategic vision and common

understanding. Mentioning Eritrea's name and linking it once with Israel, after a while with Iran and thirdly with this or that party is humorous. What I want to say briefly is that we are not for sale and have no dissension or trade with any one. We will not enter into coalition with any party. Such denigrating statements against us lack maturity. Eritrea is a small new country. We do not want any party to offer us identity. Eritrea only wants stability and development in this region. If personally asked what I dream for this region, I would, taking our geographical position into account, say "to see all the countries in our region united with resources integrated and thereby transformed into a super power. If this is implemented, it can become stronger than China, India and Japan, and even Europe.

Europe is currently in a financial meltdown. It is not expected to recoup in the near future. The prospects are thus by far better for this region. The necessary resources are there. This region is enjoying a strategic position in the global order. We should have used this to our advantage. But living with a Middle Age mindset is futile. Talk about being Arab, membership or non-membership in the Arab League, who is with whom, what kind of coalition or alliance one is in is all waste of time. And we Eritreans do not need it.

Regarding Israelis, from my observation of daily developments, I am of the opinion that the course they are pursuing leads to the destruction of coming generations. Perhaps, the present international and regional environment has helped them to maintain the policies they have been pursuing. But continuing thus will lead to the destruction of Israelis. They have to think seriously before doing so. True, the weakening and dispersion of Arabs is visible. International conditions also favor Israelis. But the policies Israelis are pursuing in this region ultimately do not serve their interests. If Israelis are to survive here, living in harmony with the people of this region is their best choice. And because this choice has its obligations, the Israelis have to fulfill them. But moving about with reliance on the current world conditions which give the upper hand to Israelis does not serve their interests. Matters have to be resolved wisely. From what we are seeing, the outlooks of both parties appear to be hopeless. Contending continuously that there is a new peace effort is self-deception. Both for Israelis and Arabs, embarking on fruitless cyclical peace negotiations is no use to present and future generations.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, since the early 60s, the African continent has been striving to establish a force that would play a big role in international matters and to promote unity and development. Why has it not been successful?

President Isaias: Irrespective of its symptoms and effects, the problem arises from Africa's unique situation. Africa is the most backward continent in the world. As far as globalization is concerned, it is virtually non-existent. It is lagging in the economic and social spheres, as well as in institutional development. Africa is known only as a chunk of territory with raw materials. Its population has not been able to become an important or effective element. This is a fact which everybody knows or notices. The question that arises is why. There are internal and external causes, as well as the fact that economic and social frankly transformations have not attained the desired standards. During the 60s there had been leaders and people who aspired for fast development in the economic, social and cultural spheres. However, all planned attempts failed. The Organization of African Unity was not capable of doing a good job, albeit its thirty-seven years of existence. African aspirations merely remained unexecuted wishes and feelings. The greedy and dominant international forces which had been controlling African resources also did play a negative role so that Africa would not develop. Their objectives had been to prevent Africa from becoming part of the world economy and divert its raw materials and resources to their advantage. African regimes which had been and still are in power have, as well, become a cause for Africa's backwardness, because they frequented a stereotype modus operandi which did not bring about change and merely served as an appendage of

colonialism and neo-colonialism. During the cold war, ideologies which helped to attain progress and full independence had been surfacing. But they withered away at the end of the cold war. Africa could have availed itself of that opportunity when the cold war ended, had the political and security situation of the world then not blocked it. It is surprising that Africa has not registered visible economic development now after a lapse of over three decades. This situation impels us to raise the question whether there actually is such a thing as economy in Africa. In my opinion, there is no such thing as economy in Africa. It is, therefore, meaningless to talk about economic development. This is a matter which even regimes in power in Africa themselves testify. Africa is today orbiting an endless cycle. News as to the holding of elections in some countries, the occurrence of a coup d'état in another, etc is continuously disseminated. To speak the truth, Africa has, as yet, not secured freedom. Freedom has come in name only as an appellation, but has not been put into practice. Africa has not been able to create a mechanism of unity and complementarity. The Organization of African Unity has not been helpful. This organization had to be revamped allegedly because it had not delivered at all. African Union has emerged and is going on to its tenth year. It, too, has not been that effective. There is no cooperation in the economic and commercial spheres. Neither investment nor infrastructure has developed. We are living in a crisis. Whenever conferences and meetings are held, the main agenda items relate to crises and their resolution and prevention. Here, as well, there is only stagnation. To sum up, Africa is not part of the political, economic and cultural transformation going on in the world. A new generation may come in and bring about the required change. If we examine every region in Africa as to whether the people control the situation or benefit from the wealth and the available resources, the answer is categorically no. The matter requires serious study. Although we have reservations on the African Union, we are still participating there. Thus far promising prospects are lacking. But a human being should never despair.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, lately documents posted on the Wikileaks website have exposed the practice of double standards in diplomacy. Stating one thing officially and doing the opposite clandestinely is being explained as diplomacy. How do you analyze this phenomenon?

President Isaias: Wikileaks has not come up with a new discovery. Nor have we learned a new thing from it. Wikileaks has merely reaffirmed that to be a diplomat, one has to be highly skilled and adept in the art of lying and deception. One who accomplishes matters by deceiving people is considered a diplomat. Thus, Wikileaks did not discover a new thing, but actually exposed the true nature of diplomacy. Wikileaks has made people regard diplomacy as an intricate art or a proven method of solving problems. It has made them change their perception of diplomacy. As such, diplomacy has to be appropriately expressed by its actual meaning. Previously people used to wonder why something was done or measures were undertaken and were also raising questions as to whether these were hidden agendas. This was not an exercise to predict or analyze matters, but merely to learn from visible activities and developments. It was natural to conclude that the world was moving on a wrong course. The practices of the self-appointed democratic forces which had not been consistent with their deceitful assertions began to be exposed. It has now been revealed that the statements they had been making to justify their activities or cover their crimes were only a pack of lies. Several people have begun to express that their suspicions had been correct and that matters had to be read from this true picture rather than from the lies that were being uttered and repeated time and again. It created extensive understanding for people. Endless crimes and shameful acts committed against several peoples have been exposed by the documents of the criminals themselves. The lies and deceptions were thus inconsistent with the facts on the ground.

20th century deceptions and tricks cannot serve during the 21st century. People living in every region are now realizing that diplomacy has a new meaning from the one it previously had. On the

other hand, because we are living in the 21st century and it is the age of technology, many things we had customarily accepted have now changed. The war now is not about who owns missiles or billions of dollars. Rather, it is about who possesses information and how it is interpreted and analyzed. The opportunities for competition are now better than before, because the war now is one of minds. Those considered weak can compete with the strong. A person may be poor but may have a sharp brain not present in other people and thus go into war which is now, after all, one of minds. The opportunities are, therefore open, not only for the rich and well-to-do but for everybody.

Nowadays, only those with brains study more and are more familiar with cyber war. A person who has studied mathematics knows how to program and can infiltrate and retrieve secret documents. For him, all opportunities are open. Everybody has begun to realize this. It is impossible to hide secrets in a box or any other place. It is equally impossible to say something and do the opposite in practice. The picture of the world has changed. Human beings have begun to understand matters more and to think in different ways and with a new mindset. There is no force or army which can prevent a human being from learning a new thing. Knowledge cannot be blocked by any defense force or missiles.

What would happen if the Wikileaks were to post all the information it had about the financial meltdown and banks? The secrets of the big and greedy corporations would be exposed. What if documents revealing how they control the resources of others were to leak? This is very important. Lessons would be learned so that various countries and peoples no more become victims. Private individuals like Bernard Madoff who had been playing with other people's money through deceit and lies have thus far been exposed. For fear of other new exposures, attempts will be made to ensure the disappearance of Wikileaks and Julian Assange and others. But the problem is that there are various Assanges, not only thousands but tens of thousands of them. They can set their minds to work and produce people who can serve humanity. Maybe so far knowledge and science have been at the service of liars and cheats, but now the conditions have changed. Let me come back to the first point. Like I said earlier Wikileaks did not invent or discover a new thing. And we were not impressed. Mention can be made here to the letters and contents sent by the American Embassy at Asmara. Some parties may suspect we were not aware of them. But for me they were not new. These documents exposed the conspiracies and activities of American agenda to corner us. For a person who reads Wikileaks all the details are there in black and white. To sum up, if there is a person who presently thinks diplomacy, politics or other adjectives are meaningful in practice, such person is obviously mistaken. Personally, I suspect whether I should use the word "politics" in the future, because I regard politics and diplomacy as arts of lying and deception. That is why people mistake us for fools when we express our opinions frankly. A person should be clearly told: "this is truth and that is false. This is possible and that is impossible". They tell us: "you are still thinking with the mindset of the revolution and the struggle". But let me speak more candidly that some principles and values never change.

Black color is always black and white will remain white. It is impossible to change these colors in the name of politics and diplomacy. The letters exposed by the Wikileaks are very useful for self-respecting and conscious peoples like the Eritreans. We have to read and understand well information released by Wikileaks, because it will be of great use to us in various ways. This development has come to benefit us the aggrieved peoples. It is a positive phenomenon. That is why privileged and greedy forces become frightened and worry. Without exaggeration when one reads Wikileaks one cannot help remarking that this development should have come before a decade or two. Unfortunately, technology had not yet advanced to this stage. Today, this development has unfolded a new panorama for peoples and countries to look into the future.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise and decline of the united States, new powers have began to emerge recently in Asia and Latin America. What shape are developments likely to take place?

President Isaias: Time cannot go backwards. There could be analysis regarding this topic. I do not wish to delve into analyses and predictions. But what I want to say in brief is that we are at the beginning of the fall of American imperialism. This may look like a demagogic and emotional expression but it happens to be an appropriate reading and analysis of the economic, developmental and technological changes taking place in the world. America emerged as superpower as a result of the industrial development, technological progress and innovations it brought about, as well as the research it conducted in different fields. And the Soviet Union fell because of some historical incidents and other factors into the details of which I do not wish to go. Several people reached the conclusion that the fall of the Soviet Union was to the benefit of the United States. But the truth was to the contrary. The fall of the Soviet Union came to expose the weaknesses of superpower America. With the march of time, the historical change set in. Industry began to move to other destinations and the world changed unusually. China became the second economic power of the world. India, too, has begun to emerge as one of the strongest economic powers in the world, because, irrespective of the size of its population, it has been registering fast economic development. Within half a century after the Second World War, Japan emerged as an economic power for known reasons. But its economic rank in the world will not continue as before. Europe will also not maintain its current economic status. This does not mean that Europe will fall, but it means that dynamic changes different from what we have been seeing during the past 20 years will come. The weaknesses of these mentioned countries during the cold war remained concealed. But all matters have now been manifested. Can the United States in order to continue as the sole superpower by preventing China, India and other countries from developing their economies, again reinstitute all the industrial capability it once possessed? Is there going to emerge an ideology of polarism in the light of the changes occurring now? The pictures and symbols I visualize of the future world have become clearer.

The United States' or Europe's wishes cannot reverse history. New laws and new active forces are emerging. The role and influence of these newly-emerging forces will be clearly seen after five or ten years. I think this is the development that can take place, because talking about economy ultimately means talking about production, distribution and consumption. The economy of the western countries which developed during the past century or after the 19th century is but built on speculation. I call this "casino" or "bubble" economy. These unproductive institutions used to thrive through financial instruments. They were able to control the economy of the world, because the then existing world order and cold war veiled their weaknesses. Finally, however, the truth was revealed, because as they say "bubble is like bubble does".

These institutions will not continue since they had not been producers. Institutions like Ford or Chrysler and General Motors will not survive because there will be no manufacturing. Perhaps Germany may continue in manufacturing activities. America, too, may learn from its current approach and return to the main principles of building economy by introducing administrative changes in its economy. But, America cannot prevent China or India from developing. If Europe, too, wishes to change its course and co-ordinate with the changes taking place in the world, the US cannot hamper it. Generally speaking, this is the first phase of the fall of the imperialists that had been dominant during the cold war.

The ideology that Fokoyama, Huntington and others were promoting which embraced the idea that a polar or a superpower only will remain, has come to an end. They were professing that the US alone would control the world after the fall of the Soviet Union and that there would be no force in

the world to compete with the US for 50 years during the 21st century. Regarding the talk we had been hearing only yesterday, a book was published, implementing policies and plans were formulated and work commenced accordingly. But the conditions on the ground were different. This idea was not implemented and had only been staggering like a dream in the mind of those individuals who thought were masters of the world. Today, we are entering into a new historical epoch. We have to read matters objectively. The signs which we are observing are not different from those that were used during the past 20 years and portray signs of a birth leading to a new stage.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, we can understand what you just explained that the demise of ideologies such as capitalism and socialism has taken place and that we have entered into a stage conflict of religions and civilizations. What is your reaction to this?

President Isaias: One cannot examine matters with an open mind if one is immersed in discussions of ideology. So, I do not feel it is necessary to talk about capitalism and socialism. If we begin discussions on these well-known ideologies our mind will not be fully open. If we look into socialism or what is called the progressive ideology, you observe that it is consolidated into natural laws beginning from ancient times. When societies left forests and started to lead sedentary lives, economic, social and cultural laws aimed at controlling them appeared. Obviously, minorities could not control majorities based on these laws, which were natural laws. The economy also had to be based on production, distribution and consumption. This was unalterable natural law.

Then there is a thing called social justice. If an ideology or progressive idea cannot enforce social justice, there can be no stability and peace in a society, whether big or small, or in a country, region or the world. Disputes or conflicts arise when a minority group places itself above the majority and controls everything, because natural law does not permit it. Call this socialism or give it another name. Perhaps, there is a verse in the Koran or Bible regarding this matter. But I would not remember it because my knowledge of it is limited. The important thing is that social justice is fundamental law. It is possible that an ideology or political order which does not respect social justice may come into the picture. But may only dominate for a limited time. It cannot continue nor gain acceptance on any grounds forever. In short, nature has its own laws. Human nature, too, has its own values. Anyone who comes to replace these laws and values is only bound to succeed temporarily. Capitalism has limited duration. From what we're observing now capitalism is an economy of casino, speculation and gambling. It is possible that actual capitalism might have had its own laws, values and peculiarities. But that was only for a limited period. Finally what I would like to say is that because social justice is the foundation, there is no other alternative except to have a frankly political order which ensures social justice.

ECSSW: Your Excellency, we thank Your Excellency for consenting to this interview during this special occasion which marks the inauguration of our website.

President Isaias: On my part, too, I would like to thank the Eritrean Centre for Strategic Studies. The questions asked and topics raised are timely. I hope the Centre serves as a forum to promote and facilitate the exchange and dissemination of ideas. I also wish you success and efficiency.