

# **PFDJ NATIONAL CHARTER**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Today, Eritrea finds itself on the verge of a new chapter in its history. For fifty years, the country and its people suffered under colonial rule. The colossal task of ridding itself of this colonial rule, and establishing national independence and dignity, has been achieved. For the first time, the people of Eritrea have become masters of their own country and hold their future in their own hands. What appeared to many as a dream, has now become a reality. We fought against enemies who had superior capacity, with meager outside support, relying on our people and own capacity, with heavy sacrifices, tremendous effort, vigilance, political maturity and ingenuity. Our struggle was not limited to combating the enemy; we laid the proper foundation for an independent country. Finally, in a referendum in which the entire population consciously and enthusiastically participated, 99.8% voted for national independence. It would be no exaggeration to claim that such an achievement has few equals in the history of liberation movements. It is a testimony to, and a manifestation of the political maturity of the people of Eritrea and its leadership. Achieving national independence and sovereignty is the conclusion of an important chapter in the history of the people of Eritrea, yet at the same time, the beginning of a new chapter. Today,

the people of Eritrea face the task of building a peaceful, just and prosperous society, a task which is more difficult and more complicated than the past task of achieving independence. Unless peace, justice and prosperity prevail in Eritrea, the independence we won with heavy sacrifices will be meaningless. That is to say, if we do not lift people out of poverty and deprivation, safeguard their human and democratic rights, and improve their material, cultural and spiritual lives, attaining independence will not amount to anything. We must pass on to our children a country that is free from war and conflict, a country of which they can be proud, a country in which independence, peace and prosperity prevail.

The struggle to build a better future for the people of Eritrea starts in earnest after independence. We, the generation that brought about independence, have shouldered the historic responsibility to pass on to future generations the basic elements for modern and just society. The current transitional stage presents simultaneously both a historic responsibility and a challenge. The actions we take and the choices we make at this historical juncture represent a rare opportunity, the proper use of which is a heavy responsibility and thus, a big historical challenge. The main and timely question is thus: is the generation that successfully concluded the independence struggle equal to this historic task?

The answer is, it must be. Otherwise, all our generation's struggles and contributions to Eritrea and its people would have been to no avail. It would mean the mission is only half-complete. The mission must be concluded by building an independent and modern Eritrea. This is the mandate of our country, of our people and our martyrs.

That the building of peace and development is more difficult and more complicated than winning war has been repeatedly proved. Several African and other countries which started with high hopes following their attainment of independence or conclusion of victorious revolutions are cases in point. The experience of such countries has been the replacement of old exploiters by new ones, deterioration of national economies and people's standard of living: all experiences of failure.

To repeat such sad experiences would amount to making all our costs and sacrifices worthless and condemning ourselves and future generations to further wars and suffering. However, we are not condemned to repeat such mistakes. We can bring lasting peace, justice and prosperity to our Eritrea. We owe it to ourselves, to our martyrs and to our children to make Eritrea a country to be proud of and worthy of the tremendous sacrifices we paid for its independence.

Good intention alone, however, is not sufficient. Other countries failed, not for want of good will. To bring about independence, we needed political programs, military strategies, and strong and mature organizations. Similarly, to build a modern and just society, we need a sustainable political program based on clear principles and an effective, broad-based, organizational structure to enable the full participation of everyone. The purpose of this document, "A National Charter for Eritrea," is therefore, first, to clarify the basic guidelines needed for our future national and democratic journey; second, to identify a political program which can effectively guide a broad-based national and democratic Movement; and third, to develop the appropriate organizational procedures and basic principles for such a political program.

"A National Charter for Eritrea" is not copied from books or from the charters of other countries. It starts from the realities of our country and society, and from our rich experience. It does not borrow wholesale any analyses or formulas that are fashionable in today's world either. Rather, by critically examining all ideas and relating them with the realities of our society and our experience, the purpose is to chart an independent line that works.

Our Charter is not a dogmatic, closed and dry document. It is open to new ideas and experiences; it is a dynamic document which develops and is enriched through practical experience. Because the document describes our vision and ideals, it should not be taken as something that will be implemented in a short period even within a few years. It is something that will be implemented stage by stage over a long period of time. It is a document of general principles and goals that guides our journey, directing us to our destination and what we need to do to reach that destination.

### 1. **Nation Building and Nationalism in Eritrea**

Even though Eritrea, in its current borders, was established by Italian colonialism, it is important to remember that the history of its people did not start with Italian colonization. The people of Eritrea had their own history and civilization, their own laws and administrative systems before colonialism. They had political, economic, social and cultural lives of their own. Successive colonial rulers over the years did influence Eritrea's life and administrative systems, but did not destroy them. The colonizers have left behind traces of their legacies; at the same time, Eritrean tradition, though it underwent changes and adjustments, has maintained the basic characteristics, which have been passed down through the generations. Thus, to fully understand our country's current situation and plan for the future, it is critical to understand the internal dynamics of Eritrean society, in addition to the legacies of the various colonizers.

Italian colonialism lasted over fifty years. It did not completely change Eritrean society, nor was its influence evenly distributed. However, its lasting impact on the history of Eritrea cannot be denied. Italian colonialism, as was true of all European colonialisms, forcefully established Eritrea's boundaries; and by bringing under one administration all peoples within these boundaries, opened up a new chapter in the history of Eritrea. Using Italian skills, but mainly relying on Eritrean human and material resources, Italian colonialism built cities and ports, highways and railroads, factories and modern farms. It introduced conscription. Further, it created a condition where Eritrean citizens from all corners of the country were introduced to each other and gained common experiences. The extent of colonial influence may have varied from place to place (some might not have been touched), but the ever expanding interaction among Eritreans, combined with their reaction to increasing Italian oppression and racism, sowed the seeds of Eritrean national consciousness. The establishment of the first modern Eritrean political association, Mahber Fikri Hager (Love of One's Country), at the conclusion of the Italian colonial era and the coming of the British, is a clear testimony to national consciousness.

The British Military Administration in Eritrea was temporary and short-term in nature and thus, has a limited legacy. Although the BMA expanded educational opportunities and allowed political activities and freedom of expression, through "divide and rule" tactics, it strove to create division among the people of Eritrea. Further, it laid the ground for the eventual Ethio-American plot to deny the people of Eritrea their right to self-determination. The British Administration also destroyed several Eritrean economic establishments and some infrastructure. During the British rule, the then infant Eritrean nationalist movement could neither withstand the conspiracy hatched against Eritrea nor save itself from divisiveness. Consequently, what followed was Ethiopian colonial rule whose cruelty had no equal in the history of Eritrea.

In the beginning, Ethiopian colonialism in Eritrea was neither direct nor overt. This was because the internal as well as external conditions in Eritrea were not conducive to direct Ethiopian rule. It was under the pretext of the United States-initiated United Nations Resolution on Federation in 1952 that Ethiopian rule started. The Federation period (1952-1962) witnessed the erosion of Eritrea's internal independence, aggressive expansionism of Ethiopian rule, and the growth of Eritrean resistance. One of the significant accomplishments of this period was the visible expansion of our national struggle, which had started in the forties: the emergence of workers' and students' movements, and especially, the establishment and expansion of the Eritrean Liberation Movement (Mahber Showate).

Colonial Ethiopia, by all standards, was more backward than Eritrea. Consequently, there was nothing that Ethiopia constructed or improved in Eritrea; it only destroyed. Through crude repressive measures, it systematically undermined Eritrean political, economic, social and cultural life. It uprooted the then budding political democracy in Eritrea and brought a period of cruel dictatorship. By destroying Eritrea's economy and infrastructure, Ethiopia turned Eritrea's clock back 30-40 years. The worst, most difficult and intractable colonial legacy that Ethiopia left, however, was the backward and corrupt culture of its ruling class. Certain traits in the Eritrean culture, of which we were proud, such as discipline, honesty, a strong work ethic, initiative, inventiveness, self-sufficiency and loathing of dependency gave way to bribery, cheating, laziness, and dependency on handouts during Ethiopian colonial rule, especially in the urban areas.

Ethiopia was able to keep the more developed and advanced country, Eritrea, under the yoke of its rule for forty years mainly due to the support of big world powers, firstly, the United States and later, the Soviet Union. The tremendous support Ethiopia received prolonged Ethiopian colonial rule and the suffering of the people of Eritrea, and made the price of independence much higher than it would otherwise have been. This limitless support for Ethiopia, on the one hand, and the isolation of the Eritrean revolution, on the other, helped us look inwards, to the resources of our country and our people, and encouraged inventiveness and ingenuity in all fields. It is no exaggeration to state that this resulted in the establishment of one of the world's most

developed liberation struggles, which has greatly contributed to Eritrea's national reconstruction.

The liberation struggle of Eritrea was not advanced right at the beginning. When in 1961, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) began the armed struggle; it did reflect the desire of the people of Eritrea. However, the ELF's outlook and approach were not conducive to the unity of Eritrea's people, nor were they helpful to nation-building and to the success of the struggle. The ELF's major shortcoming was that it submerged itself in divisions in the Eritrean society along ethnic, religious and regional lines, and fomented such divisions instead of working to mobilize all Eritreans. There have been tremendous political developments in Eritrea since then, yet the tendency to exploit differences in the Eritrean population for narrow political gains, and to play on narrow-minded attitudes has not finally disappeared from Eritrean politics.

The ones who employed this kind of divisive politics to the maximum were the Ethiopian rulers. Realizing that they could not defeat the Eritrean people with bullets and fire-power, they strove, until the day of their demise, to sow discord among the people of Eritrea, pitting one section against another. In the sixties, they burnt mosques while sparing churches. Later, they tried to appear to be advocates for the lowlanders. They relentlessly practiced their divisive politics even at the lowest social level, creating conflicts between villages, and even among people within a village.

The Eritrean liberation movement, and in particular the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) managed to thwart the intrigues of the Ethiopians and their Eritrean collaborators, by cultivating nationalism and unity among the Eritrean people. The EPLF created a forum of struggle in which all Eritreans who opposed colonial rule, and were desirous of independence, could participate regardless of their religion, language, ethnicity, class and gender. The EPLF became a melting pot for hundreds and thousands of Eritreans who came from rural and urban areas, from highland and lowland regions, and from the most marginalised localities. It enhanced Eritrean nationalism, and prepared the ground for national unity, overriding all divisive and narrow-minded attitudes. It taught and practiced equality of all citizens. In all its policies and actions, the EPLF cultivated nationalism and unity of the people of Eritrea.

Through, a century-old history of colonial experience, and primarily from their own historical activities, the people of Eritrea have become one people and one country, composed of several ethnic and linguistic groups, and several beliefs and cultures. The journey of nation-building is long and complicated. Even though the bases of Eritrean nationalism have been firmly established through our long liberation struggle, it has yet to be concluded.

The population of Eritrea, whose unity is rooted in a long tradition of peaceful and harmonious coexistence, and was reinforced by the long struggle, is one of the most unified populations among societies with similar social structures. Because of this unity, victory was achieved, and peace and stability now

prevail in independent Eritrea. And the establishment of Eritrea's government reflects and reinforces this broad-based unity.

We have briefly explored the hundred-year history of the people of Eritrea. Over that century, the natural history of the people of Eritrea was interrupted by colonialism. Eritreans experienced colonial oppression, including the worst kind of fascistic racism. Unlike other similarly colonized peoples, Eritreans were denied their right to independence. Further, while similarly oppressed peoples who conducted liberation struggles were obtaining wide international support, the people of Eritrea were obliged to conduct their struggle single-handedly, against an internationally-supported enemy. This struggle was written off by many observers as futile and foolhardy.

The people of Eritrea emerged victorious from this extremely difficult test. The heavy firepower did not weaken them; instead, it hardened them and strengthened their determination. They earned Eritrea's independence and sovereignty, intact and unconditionally. In several countries where national independence struggles were conducted, conflicts, and sometimes civil war, at independence have followed. In Eritrea, however, thanks to the strong national unity built through the struggle, and mature political handling, peace and stability prevailed. A broad-based, popularly supported Government has been established for a transitional period. Transitions are usually difficult and, but Eritrea is expeditiously finding solutions to the problems faced during this period. With high hopes, the country is poised in the direction of the more difficult and bigger historical challenge of building a modern and stable society.

To say that the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) was the biggest contributor to the remarkable victory of the people of Eritrea is merely to state a historical fact. As was already mentioned, the Eritrean, armed struggle was in a state of crisis and thus on the verge of defeat in the late sixties and early seventies. What gave the struggle new life was the establishment of the EPLF. It was the, EPLF that maintained the revolution. By challenging and withstanding Soviet-backed military campaigns of the biggest army in Black Africa, achieved the final historic military victory, established a broad national front and made popular participation a reality, organized a Referendum so that independence was the outcome of the free and legal choice of the people of Eritrea and not of a military victory alone, and established a solid foundation for Eritrea's independence and its international relations.

The EPLF has successfully achieved the basic goals with which it started, independence and peace for Eritrea. As a liberation front, it has accomplished its mission with resounding success. The EPLF, however, has never viewed independence as an end in itself, but rather as a precondition for building a democratic and modern society in which justice and prosperity prevail. Given the fact that the EPLF is a political organization embracing all sections of the Eritrean population, and brings unity and rich experience, it has the capacity to make a great contribution to the development of Eritrea. However, this new chapter and the pending new challenges demand new organizational structures, new mechanisms and directions.

This new structure cannot be divorced from the rich experience of the past. It must build upon the strong foundation already established by the EPLF. It must inherit and improve the exemplary policies and practices gained from past experience, and on the other hand, avoid past and existing weaknesses and shortcomings. It must develop political programs, organizational structures and work procedures that are appropriate to the new tasks in this new chapter. The new structure must take into account the nature of our society and its developmental stage, and lessons gained from our past experience as well as the experiences of the Third World. For this new structure to be constructive and become equal to the tasks of the new phase, it must be a broad-based Movement, embracing all patriotic and democratic Eritreans, as opposed to a narrow-based party. Most EPLF members have a strong commitment to the progress of the country for whose independence they sacrificed dearly, and to the improvement of the living conditions of oppressed sectors of Eritrea's population. Thus, it is only natural that they become active players in the Movement, as do others who love the country and its people, but have been outside the EPLF due to the way the liberation struggle developed, or for other reasons.

During this new phase of nation building - political, economic, social and cultural - when we are embarking on a broad-based political movement to effectively guide our future journey, we need to clarify our basic objectives and the means by which to achieve them. We were victorious, in spite of all the difficulties and dangers, because as a liberation movement and a people, we had clarity and a common vision of the goals of independence and peace. Today too, we must have a vision of future Eritrea and its people; and it is of utmost importance that such a vision enters into the hearts and minds of all Eritreans so that they can organize and strive for its realization.

## 2. **Our Vision of a Future Eritrea**

What is it that we, as a nation and people, desire at this stage? As we converted yesterday's dreams of peace and independence into reality, what are today's dreams that we desire to convert into reality? In short, what is our vision?

Our vision is for Eritrea to become a country where peace, justice, democracy and prosperity prevail. Our vision is to eliminate hunger, poverty and illiteracy from Eritrea. Our vision is for Eritrea to preserve its identity and uniqueness, develop commitment to family and community care, and by advancing economically, educationally and technologically, find itself among the developed countries. Our vision is for Eritrean society to be known for harmony among its different sectors, gender equality, love of country, humanity, discipline, hard work and love for knowledge, respect for law and order, independence and inventiveness. Our vision is to perform miracles in peaceful nation-building as we did .in the war of liberation.

Our vision can be summarized into six basic goals:

### 1. **National Harmony.**

For the people of Eritrea to live in harmony, peace and stability, with

no distinction along regional, ethnic, linguistic, religious, gender or class lines.

2. **Political Democracy.**

For the people of Eritrea, to be active participants and become decision-makers in the administration and conduct of their lives and of their country, with their rights guaranteed by law and in practice.

3. **Economic and Social Development.**

For Eritrea to progress socially and economically in the areas of education, technology and the standard of living.

4. **Social Justice (Economic and Social Democracy).**

Equitable distribution of wealth, services and opportunities, and special attention to be paid to the most disadvantaged sections of society.

5. **Cultural Revival.**

Drawing on our rich cultural heritage and on the progressive values we developed during the liberation struggle, to develop an Eritrean culture characterized by love of country, respect for humanity, solidarity between men and women, love of truth and justice, respect for law, hard work, self-confidence, self-reliance, open mindedness and inventiveness.

6. **Regional and International Cooperation.**

For Eritrea to become a respected member of the international community, by coexisting in harmony and cooperation with its neighbors; and by contributing, to the extent of its capability, to regional and global peace, security and development.

This is our new dream and vision. It is not an easy task that can be accomplished tomorrow or the day after. There is no doubt that it will require time, strong commitment, hard work and continuous creativity. But, there is no doubt either that it can become a reality.

As we set forth to carry out our new mission, we can learn many lessons from the rich experience of our liberation struggle. It is important to consult our experience and draw relevant lessons so that the future journey of our country and our people does not proceed haphazardly. The basic principles and views which were instrumental for our victory can still serve well as a foundation for nation-building, and for enhancing justice and prosperity.

The Six basic principles which can serve as guidelines for our activities are **national unity, active public participation, the human element, linkage between national and social struggles, self-reliance**, and finally, **a strong relationship between people and leadership**. Let us examine each of them.

7. **National Unity**

Eritrea would not have attained independence if we had not conducted our struggle, rejecting all sectarian, divisive -attitudes and activities,

believing in the unity of Eritrea and its people and uniting the latter for one goal. At the beginning, in the 1960s, our armed liberation struggle was in a state of confusion and decline, and had reached the verge of defeat because it lacked leadership and organizational form. But, the struggle overcame this danger because it was eventually guided by a national political line and leadership, and was able to organize hundreds of thousands of Eritreans who came from all over the country, regardless of their ethnic or social backgrounds, and finally achieved victory.

Now also, unity, equality and participation of all sections of the Eritrean society should be the bases of all our programs. Unless all sections of our society are active participants in the political, economic, social and cultural lives of their country, and if government is perceived as close to some but remote to others, let alone to build and develop Eritrea, we will not be able to preserve the peace and stability we now have.

Thanks to the long experience and the sacrifices made, independent Eritrea now has national unity with which to start. But, like everything, in order not to lose the impetus, it is essential to preserve and enhance that unity. During peacetime, unlike in wartime, it is evident that certain tendencies and thoughts that gradually weaken unity may emerge. We have to take such tendencies seriously and combat them. Beyond this, because nationhood is a long, complicated historical process with political, economic, social and cultural aspects to it, and as in other Third World countries, this process is not yet concluded, we should consider the development and strengthening of Eritrean nationalism and the unity of its people as the major tasks we must undertake.

For national unity to develop, it requires institutional guarantees. Thus, it is primarily necessary to build a national government which ensures unity and equality of the people of Eritrea, rejects all divisive attitudes and activities, places national interest above everything else, and enables participation of all sectors of Eritrean society. All political establishments must be built on a national basis, and all sectarian political tendencies must be categorically rejected. All forms of discrimination and domination, including ethnic and regional, must also be rejected. The diverse cultures of Eritrea should be a source of power and unity. The national system should be secular, separate from religion, yet respectful of the equality of religions. In short, nationhood must be the basis of all political institutions and policies.

**8. Active Participation of the People.**

Our liberation struggle succeeded because it was founded on people. Had there not been a strong connection between the liberation movement and the people, the struggle would not have survived, let alone succeeded. The support was effective because it came in an organized form. The slogan that the EPLF used right from the

beginning, "Politicize, Organize and Arm -the Masses," is one of the basic foundations of the victory achieved by the people of Eritrea.

Today too, active and organized participation of the people, based on political consciousness, is a basic condition for the success of the current journey. When we say people's participation, we do not mean merely voting in occasional elections. Rather, we mean, that the people should participate in all decisions that touch their lives and their country, from the inception to the implementation of ideas. Without public participation, there cannot be development; it is vital for people to participate at all stages of development projects - from planning to implementation and assessment. However, the participation cannot be effective unless people are organized. Thus, not only should people have the right to establish organizations, they should also be encouraged and assisted to do so.

9. **Decisive Role of the Human Factor.**

The secret of our victory in the struggle was found in the dedicated fighter who was committed to one goal. It was this selfless individual who made it all possible, beating all odds, defeating Ethiopian colonialism and its powerful backers. In the Eritreans' experience of the struggle, is confirmation that a conscious and determined human being, committed to a just cause, is stronger than steel and brute force.

The decisiveness of the role of the human element, however, was not limited to the war. In building an economy too, the most decisive factor is human resources, not natural or capital resources, or foreign aid and investments. There are countries with limited natural resources which have reached high levels of development. By contrast, there are several countries with abundant natural endowments, which have remained backward and still cannot even feed their people.

What we understand from our own experiences, as well as those of others, is that in all our programs and activities, we must realize the decisive role of the human factor. Even though we need foreign aid and investment, it is primarily the human aspects by which we build Eritrea: strong will, diligence, efficiency, the work ethic, discipline, ability and skills, and inventiveness. Just as the liberation of Eritrea, would have been impossible without committed people, similarly, the prosperity and modernization of Eritrea is also unthinkable without them.

Thus, the human element should be accorded a central position in our development strategies. These strategies must primarily be people-oriented: they should aim at meeting the material and spiritual needs of people. To emphasize the importance of the human element, we should put as many resources as possible into human development (education, training, health and so on). In general, we must strive to build a people-oriented society in which every Eritrean can develop his/her capacity, free from oppression, fear, poverty and ignorance.

10. **Relationship Between National and Social Struggles (Struggle for Social Justice).**

Our experience has proved that the struggle for independence and the struggle for a better future cannot be separate. We remember that in the initial stages, when our struggle lacked progressive programs, its continuity was even in doubt, let alone making any advances. If our struggle had not been linked to the social struggle, reflecting people's interests, it would not have resulted in victory.

Be it during a liberation struggle or national development, it is impossible to advance without the participation of the people. For people to sustain participation, however, there must be programs that help them bring about real changes in their lives. Mere political campaign promises are not sufficient; only when people actually see that the political movement or government works in their interest, only when they see that promises are kept, do they become enthusiastic participants in programs. Such was the experience of our revolution with respect to people's participation because they saw - modern educational, and health services provided and development projects initiated, based on locally available materials and the involvement of people.

Progressive social philosophies and programs were another of the main characteristics of our liberation struggle. The establishment of peoples' assemblies and associations, initiation of development projects, expansion of social services, changes in the conditions of Eritrean women, in general, the awakening of the rural population, were all witnesses to such policies. Further, the liberation struggle possessed a strong social consciousness characterized by love of truth and justice, support for the oppressed, intolerance of oppression, respect for human rights and equality, and awareness of people's daily problems. The philosophy that guided these programs is the philosophy of social justice. Social justice is a very broad and flexible concept open to different interpretations. However, for us, based on our actual experience, social justice means narrowing the gap between the haves and have-nots, ensuring that all people have their fair share of the national wealth, and can participate in the political, social and cultural life of the country, to creating balanced development, respecting' human rights, and advancing democracy. To be meaningful and have a stable foundation, political democracy must be accompanied by economic and social democracy.

As in the past, Eritreans are convinced that in the absence of justice, neither stability nor, prosperity are attainable. Thus, in order to, motivate the people of Eritrea to strive for social justice and development with all their might, we should not limit ourselves to talking and teaching about social justice. The movement must provide" the most oppressed sections of our society with the means to participate in planning a better future, as a matter of priority.

## 11. **Self-Reliance.**

This is another of the foundations for the victory attained by our liberation struggle. If we had not relied on our own abilities, both in developing our principles, and in practice, we would certainly not have succeeded.

Self-reliance in all fields - political, economic and cultural - is a basic principle. Politically, it means to follow an independent line and give priority to internal conditions; economically, to rely on internal capabilities and develop internal capacities; and culturally, to have self-confidence and develop one's own cultural heritage. Self-reliance does not mean to isolate oneself from the international community. It only means being as independent and self-confident a player as possible in the international community.

The history of our liberation struggle is the history of self-reliance. We succeeded because we planned according to our own experience and conditions, without copying anybody else's political models, foreign policies or military strategies. We dealt with problems we faced in our daily lives and programs, not expecting solutions from outside experts.

This proud tradition, which has been the basis of our victory, must continue. In matters of democracy and economic development, we must chart our own programs which work for our conditions. Going to the market for ideas in vogue can only make us victims of the vagaries of fashion. Although we need outside expertise and experts, we have to rely on our own abilities and experts, and give priority to developing our own capabilities and expertise. We need to challenge the tendency to worship everything foreign and avoid imitation of foreigners as observed in some sections of our society, especially among our youth.

## 12. **A Strong Relationship Between People and Leadership.**

We have learned from bitter and difficult experience that honest and mature leadership is another of the decisive factors in attaining victory. If we had not had qualified and effective leadership that could mobilize our limited and weak resources, a leadership that could turn resilient and committed people and fighters into an impregnable force through proper organization and guidance, we definitely would not have won.

Here, when we say leadership, it should be evident that we are referring not only to the higher executive body, but in a broader sense, to the organized broad political force that provides leadership. In our experience, in addition to the top leaders, decisive leadership roles were also played by the platoon leaders who led their comrades into battle, and by the middle-level leadership and lower cadres, who actually carried out the organization's guidelines, and policies, and who were reinforced by the feedback they received from the people and the experience they gained. Our own experience, as well as those of others, confirms that it is impossible to provide proper leadership by leaders residing in foreign lands, or even when residing inside the country, if

they are isolated from the people. It is because we lived among the people during our struggle, leading their lifestyle, sometimes even more simply than they, understanding their thinking, demonstrating interest in and striving to solve their problems, and winning their hearts and minds, that we were able to make them active participants in the struggle and lead them to victory.

Today also, in order to awaken the efforts and creativity of our people, who performed miracles in the past, and direct them to building the Eritrea we desire, we must preserve and strengthen our relationship with the people, not only in thought and spirit, but also through our daily physical presence among them. We know of several revolutionary movements that started in rural areas, and achieved victory at the cost of and through the support of the rural sector. Once they entered the city, they directed their whole attention to solving pressing city problems, ignoring the plight of the majority rural population that sustained them; thus, fulfilling the adage, "out of sight, out of mind." In the final analysis, they -lost the support of both the rural and urban sectors and failed. To avoid such a failure, our leadership and cadres at all levels, and the activities of the government and the political Movement must spread to all corners of the country, including those distant areas which until recently served as our base areas and headquarters.

To continue the proud leadership tradition of our liberation struggle, and prevent regression, leaders must be free from corruption, refrain from misuse of power, be teachers and humble servants, become positive role models, continuously learn and update skills, and be accountable at all -times. Our experience is a living testimony to the need for a collective leadership, yet clearly defined individual responsibilities and procedures, respect for the law and adherence to the legality of actions. Finally, our own experience, as well as those of others, also confirms that, periodic change of leadership, and infusion of new blood into, leadership, are important for a smooth transition and for a healthy political life. Thus, in this new phase, by clarifying the duties and obligations of leaders (in its broader sense), by introducing clearly defined accountability procedures, by ensuring the proper functioning of institutions at all levels, by constitutionally defining the duration of stay in leadership positions, we must guarantee qualified, accountable and democratic leadership.

The above outlined thoughts constitute our vision and our fundamental objectives. Further, they are basic principles to guide us to reach targets; they describe our political thoughts and philosophy. Our philosophy is the philosophy of pragmatism, social justice and humanism. It is based on the practical realities of life, on the realities of Eritrean society. It gives more priority to knowledge gained from the experiences of other societies than from textbooks. It is a philosophy that assesses the validity of an idea on the basis of its practical application.

We, in Eritrea, are committed to build nation-building and strengthening the unity of our people. We are committed to economic- growth, but in conjunction with- social justice and the protection of the natural environment. We stand for modernization based on national identity and culture. The goal we aim for is an Eritrea which satisfies the material, and spiritual needs of its people, individually and collectively, in a climate of peace.

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## **II. THE BASIS OF OUR POLITICAL PROGRAMS**

### **1. Building a Democratic Political System**

We Eritreans, for the first time in our history, are starting to build our own state. This is a great opportunity which we have gained after a long struggle. It is natural that we now desire to build the best political system and government we can, as any people would. History has recorded that the human race has desired to build the ideal political system, and that its best philosophers have studied and written about such political systems. Although it is impossible to achieve the ideal political system, it is vital to strive to establish the best political system. Thus, in Eritrea, at this important historical juncture, we should raise and answer the following two questions:

- **What is the best possible political system appropriate for independent Eritrea?**
- **What type of government should we build?**

In independent Eritrea, it is our basic desire to build a stable political system which respects law and order, safeguards unity and peace, enables all Eritreans to lead happy and peaceful lives, guarantees basic human rights, and is free from fear and oppression. Because such objectives can only be guaranteed through laws and duly constituted institutions, we must establish a constitutional political system in Eritrea.

The constitutional system must be based on and reflect the historical development and specific conditions of Eritrean society. It must be a national, constitutional system that guarantees unity and balanced development for the people of Eritrea, and ensures national independence and security.

It must be a democratic constitutional system based on sovereignty of the people, on democratic principles and procedures, on accountability, transparency, pluralism and tolerance.

The mere existence of a constitution, however, is not sufficient. For the constitution to actually work and be respected, constitutional institutions must exist. To uphold the constitution, in society and in all governmental bodies there must be a strong consciousness (i.e. constitutional awareness).

Constitution and constitutional systems can have guarantees only when constitutional awareness and culture are developed, and when constitutional institutions are established and strengthened.

Nationalism and democracy must be the basic principles upon which we build the constitutional political system in Eritrea.

The Eritrean political system must be built on nationalism, i.e. safeguarding national interest, developing and strengthening the unity of our people, and preserving independence. All political institutions should be established on a national basis, free from divisive sub-national sentiments and activities, strengthening and developing nationally coordinated efforts of our people. In other words, the political system must have a broad social basis, enabling participation of all people in both rural and urban areas.

The political system must be based on democracy. Democracy, however, is a controversial concept. Democracy is sometimes narrowly viewed in terms of the number of political parties and whether regular elections are held. Such a view, which limits the meaning of democracy to its form, is superficial and not historical. Viewed in its broader and deeper historical perspective, democracy means the existence of a society governed by democratic principles and procedures, the existence of democratic institutions and culture, broad public participation in decision-making and a government that is accountable to the people.

We can correctly understand democracy when we relate it to the historical development and actual conditions of Eritrean society. Our understanding of democracy should emphasize its content rather than its external manifestations. In the context of our society, democracy is dependent not on the number of political parties and on regular elections, but on the actual participation of people in the decision-making process at community and national level. What is being questioned here is not political parties as a manifestation of political pluralism with rights to organization and free expression, and elections. Rather, it is the equating of democracy to the number of political parties and the fact of organized elections. This kind of interpretation is wrong and dangerous. This is because it has been established from the experiences of several countries that the existence of several political parties and organized elections alone do not guarantee the existence of a truly democratic system. If we look at the experience of some African countries, political parties dominated by the interests of an elite are imposed from above.

This does not foster democratic development in state or society. Such political parties, serving narrow internal and external interests, have become instruments of oppressive systems. With respect to elections too, the widespread corruption observed all over the world during elections is an indication that holding elections, in itself, does not guarantee democracy.

Thus, for democracy to be true and guaranteed, it is essential to plan the process by which it can properly develop. It is primarily necessary to have people-based institutions - political parties, various grass-roots associations, mass media and decentralized governmental agencies. Governmental and non-governmental institutions must exist to ensure public participation from the grass-roots to the national level. The national government must abide by a

constitution, be accountable to the people, coordinate and balance its legislative, executive and judicial bodies, and have diffused and decentralized power. The development of people's associations and trade union movements, in general, the development of non-governmental institutions, are additional manifestations of the development of democracy. Independent, free and responsible mass media is yet another important set of factors for the development of democracy. In short, a democratic government, an active civil society and an independent and reliable mass media are the three pillars of democracy. It is only when these three pillars of democracy are present, and when democratic culture prevails in the whole society that democracy can be alive and guaranteed:

This democratic process, however, is not a project that can be accomplished in haste: in a few years. Necessarily, it is a long historic process. The experience of several developed countries in the past two centuries shows that democratic development is a complex process. Especially, in societies like ours, which have diverse structures and are at a lower stage of development, as in the case of other African and Third World countries, there are socio-economic conditions that make the development of democracy even more complicated and difficult. Such experiences also confirm that democracy, as a concept and culture, as a process and practice, in order to exist and develop, requires as its foundation, strong nationalism alongside social and economic development. Thus, in the context of our society, and at our stage of development, we must foster the development of democracy in conjunction with the process of nation building and socio-economic development. It is when based on such objective understanding that our hopes for democracy in Eritrea will be realized.

Thus, our objectives are:

- To establish a constitutional system whose constitution is drafted and ratified with broad public participation, which respects basic human rights, whose legislative, executive and judicial bodies check and balance one another, in which the rule of law prevails throughout Eritrea and which anchors the unity and development of the people of Eritrea.
- On the basis of a constitution, to build a strong government and society which accelerates nation-building, guarantees national unity, creates a suitable climate for economic and social development, has broad social foundations in both urban and rural areas, is open and participatory to all sectors of society, guarantees balanced development, respects citizens' rights, is free from corruption, gives priority to national interest, safeguards national independence and develops national consensus.
- On the basis of a constitution, to strive to uphold basic human and political rights, which include freedom of faith and of the press, the right to political organization, peaceful demonstration, information, work and education, freedom from fear and suppression and equality under the law.
- To have a political system that fosters harmony among Eritrean people, rejects and weakens all divisive tendencies, develops national

institutions, and guarantees that nationalism and secularism are the basis of all political activities. We must ensure that the political system is based on the principle of complete and developing nationalism.

- To ensure that the political system is founded on people, guarantees the participation of people in decisions on local and national affairs, is built from the grass-roots, operates on the principles of decentralization, political plurality, openness, tolerance and accountability, respects basic rights to political organization and freedom of expression and is a democratic, pluralist and participatory system.
- To make the political system a multi-party system in which political parties legally participate, and compete among themselves in a peaceful and democratic way.
- To strive to establish and develop democratic institutions such as a free and strong judicial body, various associations and movements (e.g. those of women, farmers, youth and students), a conscious civil society embracing trade unions and other non-governmental institutions, and a free, trustworthy, critical and responsible press.

## 0. **Building an Economy That Meets the Needs of Our People**

A just political system cannot exist without a developed and just economic system. And political democracy cannot have a foundation in the absence of social and economic democracy.

The economic system is the foundation for the type of political system we want to build. The type of political system we want to build is, in the final analysis, determined by the type of economic system we build. That the two become consistent is a must. An unbalanced and unjust economic system cannot be the basis for a democratic and just political system. The other side of the coin is that a dictatorial and oppressive political system cannot build a just, balanced economy.

Notwithstanding wishful politics and promises, and even the best of intentions, unless there is a strong economy which benefits all, with an equitable distribution of the national wealth, i.e. economic democracy, all the good intentions and promises are an illusion.

The goal of our revolution was not only to gain independence, but also to ensure economic development based on social justice. The people of Eritrea paid dearly for this.

We must build an economic system which satisfies the desires of the majority and improves their living conditions, ensures equitable development, operates through a market economy, encourages private investment, initiative and competition and guarantees balanced economic growth. In short, the economic system we build must enhance social justice.

In economic terms, social justice means:

- Narrowing the gap in economic opportunities and wealth between the rich and the poor, between the haves and have-nots, to ensure equitable distribution of national wealth among all citizens.
- Narrowing the development gap between rural and urban areas, between the center and periphery and ensuring balanced and fair distribution of economic development in the whole country of people's needs.
- Creating conditions, which enable people to reap the fruits of their labor, improve their living standards through work, and honor work.
- Ensuring public participation at community and national levels in decisions on economic affairs and enabling the oppressed and voiceless majority to have a voice.
- Economic democracy means development of the people, by the people and for the people.

Several questions have challenged the best minds in history: How do we solve conflicts and contradictions arising from the historical gap between the haves and have-nots? Is it possible to create an absolutely just and ideal society? No answers have been found yet to such questions, even though the human race has never stopped attempting to answer them down the centuries. Thus, it is only natural that we raise such questions in our new Eritrea. We may not be able to establish the ideal society, but it is our responsibility to strive for a just society where our people are free from the erstwhile conditions of colonial oppression and ignorance. We must strive to improve our lives, as liberated people, to narrow the gap and minimize conflicts between the haves and have-nots, and between rural and urban areas. And social justice is the practical and realistic road that leads to a just society, characterized by advanced economy and culture.

But, does not social justice or economic democracy conflict with economic growth? Is it possible to achieve both social justice and economic growth? To view the two as incompatible is wrong. This is because, if economic growth is to create true economic and social development, it must benefit the whole society, improve the living conditions of the people, and ensure responsible utilization of natural resources. Otherwise, it will be merely quantitative growth and not development: Social justice is not a hindrance to economic growth. By ensuring effective participation of the people, it accelerates and converts economic growth into real development. The strategy of economic growth at any cost and by any means, on the other hand, has been proved in the experiences of several countries, to lead to failure. The result, in the final analysis, is harmful, not only to the people, but also to those few with vested interests. Consequently this creates instability and conflict.

Thus, in Eritrea we must choose the road that ensures social justice and real economic development. The basic principles which can enable this are:

**First**, the Role of Government. The government has the duty to create conditions conducive to economic development, to draw up appropriate strategies and policies, to stimulate the development of human resources, to ensure responsible utilization of natural resources,

and to introduce necessary market regulations which can be progressively relaxed as the market becomes strong and mature enough. Eritrea's economy must be a market economy. The regulatory measures to be effected in the interim should not be seen as a sign of a command economy. In general, it is essential that the government, at this transitional period and beyond, promulgates laws and regulations that enhance economic development.

The government must be a catalyst for economic development. Especially with the current devastated state of our economy, efforts to reconstruct Eritrea's economy should necessarily be led by the government. It is essential that the government take the lead in establishing programs by which the main casualties of the war - fighters and their families, the handicapped, orphans, refugees and displaced people - can be rehabilitated and trained to become productive participants in the country's economic reconstruction and development.

Accepting a significant role by the government is not the same as having an economy that is dominated by the government. The economy of Eritrea must be a mixed economy in which both public and private sectors exist. It must be a market economy and not a command economy. For the private sector to become strong and play a leading role, the government has the responsibility to create a conducive climate. The relationship between the government and the private sector must be complementary, in a spirit of cooperation and not adversarial.

- **Second**, Encouragement of the Private Sector. The private sector we inherited from colonialism was devastated, as was the public sector. In order to play a leading role in our economy, to be viable, free, and competitive, the private sector has to be revived and developed with modern economic knowledge and skills. Because Eritrea cannot reconstruct and develop its economy with national investment alone, it is also essential that the country establish economic policies that encourage and attract foreign investment.
- **Third**, Self-Reliance and the Participation of People. Our economic development strategy must be based on self-reliance and the full participation of our people. We must develop our own human and natural resources and make them the basis of our country's economic development and should primarily depend and rely on them. That outside assistance and investment are needed is understandable and acceptable, but to benefit from outside assistance or investment, we have to have internal capabilities. And our own resources can develop only through self-reliance and full public participation. Eritrea's greatest source of wealth is its people. If our people are trained in science and technology, they can improve their productive capacity and create sustainable development. Thus, the human element must be the basic factor in all our development plans. We should also

remember the importance of cooperatives and community development organizations for enhancing public participation: and development of a people-based economy.

- **Fourth**, the Development of Agriculture, Industry, Commerce and other Economic Sectors. Through a strategy which coordinates public and private sectors and encourages people's participation, we can improve agriculture, industry, commerce, and social services. Today, our economy is completely destroyed, and it will require tremendous effort and resources to revive and develop it. We need policies appropriate to every sector of our economy, policies that work and are result-oriented, policies that encourage private initiative, competition and investment, policies that encourage people to participate, and policies that promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and increase productivity.

Without a developed economy, we cannot make Eritrea a land of justice and prosperity. Thus, our objectives are:

- Gradually to build a strong national economy, based on appropriate agricultural, industrial, commercial and other services, which satisfies the needs of our people, develops our own resources, enables responsible utilization of the natural environment and resources, and is oriented toward a free market.
- To strive to base Eritrea's strategy of economic development on social justice and economic democracy.
- To draw up and implement plans to revive and develop our economy which has been destroyed by the long war, and to rehabilitate those sections of our population whose lives have been disrupted by the war, enabling them to find their rightful place in the economy.
- To ensure the establishment of a government that plays a significant role in creating conditions conducive to building a strong economy, gives priority to national interest, is free from corruption and avoids the vicious cycle of indebtedness (two chronic problems prevalent in Many countries).
- To encourage the development of a dynamic, competitive and self-confident private sector, guided by modern knowledge and skills, which can play a decisive role in Eritrea's economy.
- To develop an economic strategy which puts emphasis on the full participation of people and on the development of internal resources.
- To encourage and strengthen international economic cooperation and investment, recognising at the same time the importance of self-reliance.

#### 0. **Developing a National Culture**

A national culture is the foundation of a developed economy and a modern political system. No society has become modern without, developing its culture.

The culture we developed during the revolution made a big contribution to the independence and peace in which Eritrea finds itself now. Overcoming all sectarian sentiments and divisiveness, we developed a richer and more unified national culture by selecting the best from the diverse cultures of the country. If we had not started to develop a unified national culture, our struggle would have lost its direction and disintegrated. The culture we developed during the revolution was characterized by self-reliance, self-confidence, determination, love of country and people, ingenuity and inventiveness, heroism and sacrifice. They represent qualities that defined the character of every fighter, and without which we would not have succeeded.

The new harmonisation of culture, which began during the revolution, developed through a process of adoption-and-rejection. From the rich cultural heritage of the people of Eritrea, we adopted and enhanced the positive and useful aspects, but rejected the bad and harmful aspects. By this process, we also included good elements from other cultures.

The same process must continue now. We must fully understand and research the rich cultural heritage of our people, and selectively enrich it. By respecting and upholding our own cultural heritage, we will be able to participate in the development of international culture.

A society that does not respect its own cultural heritage is a bankrupt society. Colonialism in all instances tried to destroy the identity of formerly colonized peoples by robbing them of their cultures. Even after the termination of colonialism and independence, the new ruling classes, especially in several African countries, instead of striving to revive the colonially-suppressed cultural heritage, denigrated it and chose to emulate Western cultures. As a result, the countries of such rulers have become victims of cultural poverty and backwardness. Such a nihilist choice can only lead to a dead end.

On the other hand, the East Asian countries which preserved and developed their cultural heritage and identity, and basically adopted only the useful and necessary aspects of Western culture, have successfully established socio-economically developed societies.

Thus, we Eritreans must maintain a cultural balance. We observe from the experiences of other peoples that to lose one's cultural balance is to betray one's cultural and historical roots, and is a sure road towards cultural impoverishment. Without resorting to blind emulation and worshipping of foreign culture, by preserving our cultural identity, we should build our new culture on the foundation we built during the revolutionary struggle.

We must tirelessly strive to make Eritrea a country where culture can flourish. Art, including music, literature and visual art, should freely develop, assuming a national character, but benefiting from the rich experiences of other peoples. Caution should be exercised so that aspects of our heritage such as love of family and people, and community and cooperation, are not eroded by individualism and selfishness in the name of modernization. Further, commemoration of our martyrs, as an expression of indebtedness and

nationalism, should be considered an integral part of Eritrean culture and identity, and be passed from generation to generation. We should, however, keep in mind that all this should be accomplished through constructive, positive and creative approach, rather than through negative protectionism and barren preservation.

Thus, our cultural objectives are:

- To develop a new Eritrean culture which builds upon the culture developed during the liberation struggle by: preserving and enhancing the cultural heritage of our people, drawing from the fruits of international culture, relying on the history and cultural diversity of the Eritrean people.
- To develop a democratic culture which rejects all divisiveness, backward and narrow sentiments and chauvinism, and is conducive to the development of technology, science and the arts.
- To make the cultural heritage of our people the basis of our national culture by adopting the positive and useful aspects, but rejecting the harmful and regressive aspects.
- To adopt from the cultures of other peoples those aspects that are, agreeable to our cultural conditions and conducive to our cultural development, and to establish and strengthen cultural cooperation with other peoples based on equality and mutual respect.
- To make sure that Eritrean cultural heritage, customs and languages are properly studied and developed to enrich our culture.
- To make sure that old historical artifacts of the people of Eritrea are studied and properly preserved.
- To ensure that the commemoration of our martyrs, as a manifestation of our nationalism and heritage, is passed on to future generations with a sense of pride and respect.
- To ensure that artifacts from our liberation struggle, as a historical heritage of the Eritrean people, are preserved and studied so that they can be passed on to future generations.
- To strive to preserve and develop the culture which we developed during our liberation struggle, and which was a major contributor to our success: self-reliance, patriotism, love of people and truth, gender equality, determination, desire for justice, commitment to work, etc.
- To strive to create a strong and progressive cultural life in order to prevent blindly emulating foreign culture in the name of modernity, and to avoid merely blowing whichever way the wind blows.
- To enable the new Eritrean to have a culturally balanced character.

#### 0. **Equitable Distribution of Social Services**

In Eritrea, education, health and other services are not yet developed. Most of our people do not receive social services. Those minimal services available are limited to the towns and their surrounding areas. Thus, in Eritrea, the problem of low levels of social services is made worse by the inequality of distribution.

Education is the foundation of development. To provide equal educational opportunity means to provide equal opportunity for development. We must widely expand education so that our people can be free from ignorance, acquire knowledge and skills through various means, and enhance their productive capacity to build their country. Education is a fundamental right to which every Eritrean is entitled. Therefore, we must expand education to the rural areas, of the country where educational opportunity has so far been scant. We must build an advanced educational system which serves national unity and development, and equips people with knowledge and skills. Without the development of education, we cannot build our country or enhance democracy and justice.

Our greatest asset is our human resource. Therefore, we must assign a high priority to its development. Formal education is one way. In addition, all governmental and non-governmental institutions must provide continuing education and training. Continuous effort must be exerted to develop knowledge and skills throughout the society.

Health service is the other fundamental right. All Eritreans, whether residents of rural or urban areas, are entitled to basic health services. We must fairly distribute health services throughout the country. To spread health education and to give priority to prevention are important aspects of the service.

Our people should also receive fair distribution of water, of shelter, sanitation and communication services.

Providing and operating social services can be very expensive. Even though the government must shoulder the primary responsibility for fairly distributing social services to every part of the country, the people should contribute their share through community organizations and the private sector.

Thus, our objectives are:

- To ensure that the people of Eritrea receive fair and appropriate distribution of social services.
- To expand educational opportunities which serve national unity and development, guided by an effective national educational system.
- To eradicate illiteracy in Eritrea.
- To encourage the expansion of intermediate, higher and vocational skills education, as well as continuing education and training, provided by governmental and non-governmental institutions.
- 5) To ensure fair and appropriate distribution of basic health services.
- To ensure that people receive water, shelter, sanitation and communication services.
- To encourage the participation of local communities and the private sector so that social services can operate effectively and be widely distributed.

#### 0. **Respecting Equal Rights**

We are striving to make Eritrea a, country of justice and equality where

dignity and basic human rights are respected. In Eritrea, social rights of women, workers, children, refugees, the handicapped and others who deserve assistance, must be respected.

The issue of women is a major social issue. A society that does not respect the rights and equality of women cannot be a truly liberated society. During the years of struggle, big changes occurred for Eritrean women. Seen as a weak and passive creature, of less value than a man, the Eritrean woman transformed herself into a formidable fighter when her erstwhile suppressed strength was allowed to express itself. Our revolution would not have succeeded without the participation of women. Even though the changes in the conditions of Eritrean women so far constitute a giant step, they are not sufficient. Eritrean women have not yet freed themselves from patriarchal oppression. They have yet to advance in education and science and take their rightful place in society.

Eritrean women must continue the journey which they started during the revolution under the slogan, "Equality through equal participation in work," until they achieve this. Through organization, they must struggle for the rights of all women, especially for the rights of the poor majority in both the rural and urban areas. They must acquire education and so that they can fundamentally change their living conditions, and become productive and self-sufficient. In Eritrea, there shall not be any position exclusively reserved for men that cannot be attained by women. The role of women in society and in the family should be given greater recognition. Eritrea cannot modernize without the full participation of Eritrean women, as occurred during the independence struggle. The solidarity between women and men, which worked miracles during the struggle, should become the basis for the new Eritrea. Eritrea must be a country where both genders live in equality, harmony and prosperity.

Our liberation struggle relied, too, on the support of workers, farmers and herders. The support of these social groups was decisive. To develop economically, Eritrea must be a country where workers live and work peacefully with secured rights. By improving their knowledge and skills and continuously enhancing their productivity, they should be confident in their respective crafts. Workers should be entitled to employment rights, to vacations, to education and minimum standards. They must be encouraged to establish trade associations which protect their rights. Farmers and herders should also be provided with the necessary assistance to enable them to acquire modern methods of farming and stock rearing, and increase their productivity. They must be encouraged to organize themselves in cooperative ventures so that they can improve their living standards, protect their rights and voice their needs.

Eritrea should strive to minimize infant mortality and to care for its children. The children of martyrs, in the tens of thousands, who were, deprived of the love of their parents, as well as other orphans, must be provided with proper upbringing and care. In Eritrea, the rights of children to education, health, love, safety, play, and to human dignity must be respected.

We must create conditions where the handicapped, veterans of the liberation struggle, the families of fighters and martyrs as well as refugees and displaced peoples can be rehabilitated, become self-sufficient and play their proper role in the country's development.

Thus, our objectives for equal rights are:

- To honor fundamental social rights in Eritrea.
- To respect the equality of women.
- To strive for equal participation of women in all areas, and to encourage women to protect their rights by organizing themselves.
- To respect the rights of workers and encourage them to develop trade associations which protect their rights.
- To support farmers and herders to improve their living conditions, protect their rights and voice their concerns through associations and cooperatives.
- To ensure the rights of children are safeguarded.
- To provide proper upbringing and care for children of martyrs and other orphans.
- To create conditions in which veterans and handicapped people, the families of fighters and martyrs as well as refugees and displaced peoples can be rehabilitated, become self-sufficient and contribute to the country's development.

## 0. **Guaranteeing National Security and Defence**

We were victorious because we built a people's army rooted in the people: an army that had strong linkage with the people, participating in their daily lives; an army which was politically conscious and aware of its objectives; a productive army committed to the cause. The people's army was wholly voluntary and not a professional army. Now we must establish a national army with the people's army as its core.

It is essential to establish a strong defence force which safeguards independence and sovereignty, and defends the country from enemies. It is also necessary to establish security and police institutions that maintain security and safeguard peace and stability.

Our doctrine on national security and defence must be people-oriented. Because the security we desire is not so much the security of the land but of the people, they should participate in the effort. Thus, we must establish national army, security and police institutions which function in close cooperation with the people.

As proved in the experiences of several countries, when security and defence forces are isolated from the people, and become instruments of fear and terror, the result is immeasurable damage. Such army and security establishments become instruments of the few who have wealth and power, and serve foreign

rather than domestic interests. Eventually, such countries become victims of coups and military juntas and their associated evils.

Our army and security establishments must serve the people and the national interest, protect society, operate in accordance with the law and be accountable and open. The army, security and police, in accord with the positive legacy of the people's army must serve the people, be guided by a national constitution, participate in production and in solving, societal problems, must be conscious and committed, and must be highly skilled and have organizational abilities.

Thus, our security objectives are:

- To ensure that our doctrine on national security and defence is people-oriented, and has a national basis.
- To establish appropriate army, security and police institutions which serve public and national interests, are accountable and function openly, and are bound by a national constitution.
- To ensure that the army and security institutions, continuing the good tradition of the people's army, are strong, committed and productive, are guided by love for the people and country, and respect law order.
- To ensure that the army and security forces acquire skills and organizational abilities in order to properly perform their tasks.

## **0. Establishing Regional and International Cooperation**

Our foreign policy, as an extension of our internal policy, should be based on preserving our national interest, working in the interests of peace and stability in our region and in the world, and enhancing cooperation in all areas with all governments and peoples. In short, our foreign policy is that of peace and non-alignment.

First, we must establish good neighborly and peaceful relations with our neighbors and the countries of our region, based on mutual interest and mutual cooperation. Problems related to peace and stability cannot be confined to within our borders. In order to preserve the peace and harmony we acquired after a long struggle, it is essential that we strive for peace and stability at both regional and global levels, notwithstanding our limited capabilities.

Economic and cultural development cannot be achieved in isolation from the surrounding and international countries. Establishing active and comprehensive cooperation with our neighbours and throughout the world is important for our economic and cultural development. Thus, our foreign policy must promote economic and social cooperation between Eritrea and all other countries.

Eritrea must strive for peace and human progress, for international cooperation and understanding. It should contribute its part in fostering good relationships of brotherhood, equality and cooperation, not just among governments, but

more importantly, among peoples. As an independent and sovereign member of the international community and Eritrea has become a member of regional and international organizations. Eritrea will uphold international laws and charters, and play an active role within the international community and its organizations.

Thus, our regional and international objectives are:

- To follow a foreign policy of peace and non-alignment, based on independence and national interest.
- Starting with our neighbors, and our surrounding, to establish relations with all countries, regardless of their political and economic, systems, based on independence, respect of territorial integrity and national dignity, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual interest.
- To build friendship with all peoples, regardless of historical and cultural differences, based on universal brotherhood, equality, peace and understanding.
- To strive for regional as well as global peace and stability.
- To develop economic and cultural cooperation with all countries in order to accelerate our country's economic and social development.
- To abide by all international laws and agreements to which Eritrea is a signatory.

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### **III. ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

If we are to succeed in achieving our objectives, what kind of organizational structure and organizational principles should the Front have? The detailed answer to this question should be left to the constitution, but the basic ideas are as follows:

#### **1. A Broad-Based Movement**

Given the Front's extensive objectives and the structure of our society, given the absence of any positive experience of a multi-party system in the country, the Front, as during the liberation struggle period, should as much as possible be broad-based, embracing all patriotic Eritreans who have at heart the welfare of Eritrea and its people. The Front should not be representative of any particular social class, nor should it be narrow-based, embracing only those who are politically committed. The Front should allow the right to form national political parties, and when they are formed, it must be prepared to engage in peaceful competition. At the same time, organizationally and procedurally, the Front must strive to attract and actively recruit all citizens who are interested in the unity, peace and prosperity of Eritrea, and want to become active in politics. Basically, the Front should be a reflection of the unity of the people of Eritrea, and the guarantor and promoter of such unity. The Front must be the center of political gravity in Eritrea guaranteeing peace and stability, promoting and strengthening nation-building, healthy democracy and political progress.

2. **A Participatory Movement with Lively Internal Democracy**

As an organization that embracing all citizens who love their country and people but, at the same time have differences of opinions over various issues and policies, the Front, if it is to be successful, must be democratic and participatory in its internal life and procedures. It must not approach its goals, or the policies it draws up to achieve those goals, in a dry and dogmatic fashion. Flexibility and pragmatism are essential.

Differences of views and opinions, provided they are within the Front's general goals and principles, must have a place. Tolerance for different opinions, and extensive and continuous debate of issues before or after decision, are critical. Even though a decision supported by the majority must be implemented, criticism should be permitted and encouraged.

Internal democratic life and the cultivation of popular participation are critical not only for the unity of the Front, but also to clarify and enhance its policies, and to identify and correct any shortcomings. For democratic life to take root and flourish, institutional principles are needed. Participation, education and debate require appropriate forums (regular meetings, conferences, seminars, newspapers, etc.).

3. **Qualified, Representative and Accountable Leadership, Subject to Periodic Change**

Because the question of leadership is critical, qualification (in its broader sense, including ability, commitment, skills, etc.) should be taken as the main criterion in selecting leadership at all levels. It is also important that the composition of the leadership be representative of the Front and the society.

If the leadership, at whatever level, is isolated from the members of the Front or from the public at large, it cannot provide correct leadership. It is critical for the leadership to follow closely the problems, opinions and, wishes of the people, continuously provide directions and explanations, listen to views expressed by people, and have continuous interaction with the people.

Leadership is a collective responsibility. It is therefore essential to have a formal institutional procedures which enable the leadership to collectively deliberate, implement and review. It is important that it conducts regular meetings at different levels, that such meetings are taken seriously and become forums for deliberation and decision-making. If this is not done, leadership unity will weaken, enthusiasm may wane, individual rather than collective decisions can dominate, and other undesirable shortcomings will follow. Parallel to collective responsibility, it is essential that the responsibilities and power limits of every individual leader are known, that each one shoulders his/her responsibility, gains, recognition for achievements, can be criticized for mistakes committed and, where appropriate, can be called to account.

Accountability is critical for the existence, continuation and development of responsible leadership. A leader must shoulder the responsibility for the shortcomings observed in his/her own actions as well as 'in the unit he/she

leads. Depending on the seriousness of the shortcomings," appropriate action (criticism, formal public expression of regrets, demotion, dismissal) must be taken. To do this, clear laws and regulations must exist. For accountability to work properly, openness should prevail. Information on policies and programs, accomplishments and failures and their causes, observed shortcomings, budgets and how they are spent, should all be open not only to members of the Front but also to all the people. Leaders should set examples in their work, their manners and life styles. It is also important to have a code of conduct which provides guidelines on expectations, and can serve as a standard by which we measure how our leaders conduct themselves. Because leadership should be a matter of rights and responsibilities, and not hereditary, the term an individual can be elected to a leadership position for should be constitutionally limited.

#### **4. Separation of the Movement and its Activities from Government**

Even though the Front has to play a major and critical role in the government, if it does not have an existence and activities independent of those of the government, it can get mixed up with and swallowed up by the government thereby threatening its existence. Thus, the Front's leadership and membership should not be limited to government employees. The Front should have, separate from the government, its own offices and facilities, its own projects and activities (political, economic and social). It is also essential that there are leaders and cadres who work only on Front activities. In this respect, generally, even though it is the Front's purpose to strive to determine and influence the government's agenda and policies, it would be confusing and inappropriate to interfere in the power structure or day-to-day decisions of the government and its ministries.

#### **5. Encouragement of and Cooperation with People's Associations**

Although the movement is to be broad-based and participatory and embraces all patriotic and democratic Eritreans, it will not attempt to be the only form of political organization. On the contrary, it should encourage and assist the establishment of public associations with objectives similar to its programs, along social, trades and other non- sectarian lines. And after their establishment, cooperation with them is very useful to the success of the Front's own goals or to generally build the foundations of democracy.

#### **6. A Dynamic Organizational Structure Based on People**

It is evident that the Front requires a dynamic organizational structure, based on its fundamental principles, in order to carry out its general goals. In the absence of a proper organizational structure, the best of objectives and principles remain meaningless. Thus, it is crucial to build an active, flexible and effective organizational structure which serves as a strength to the Front, linking it to the grass-roots, facilitating two-way communication, and covering the whole country.

An organizational structure is not something that is designed once to serve forever. It must change with new developments and changes in conditions. An organizational structure should be bottom-heavy, rather than top-heavy, for it to properly function.

The Front must establish its organizational structure and procedures so that its branches and activities are not limited to urban areas, nor its leaders and cadres are isolated from the rural areas, nor that it encourages too much bureaucracy and isolationism.