

## **H.E. President Isaias Afwerki**



- “The people of Eritrea, and especially the youth, are on the verge of making a miracle”**
- “The administrative restructuring process will be accomplished in the First Half of 2014”**
- “The phased housing project aims to providing home to all those who have toiled for this country”**

It is to be recalled that H.E. President Isaias Afwerki conducted an extensive interview with the national media outlets on the occasion of the New Year 2014, regarding the overall situation of the country and also the regional state of affairs and future scenarios on the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 2014, in the port city of Massawa. Excerpts of the first part follow:

*As this interview is being conducted on the occasion of New Year, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a happy and prosperous New Year. Since New Year is often part of the year when new plans are commenced, the interview questions are mainly associated with future*

***plans, especially 2014 plans. As it can be confirmed from the reports and evaluation of the Ministry of Agriculture, last year's harvest was not satisfactory due to inadequate rainfall. Therefore, what has been planned for enhancing food reserve for 2014?***

When it comes to rainfall in our situation, it is difficult to talk about food security and agricultural plans year by year because of inadequate annual rainfall in terms of magnitude and coverage. This problem is associated with climate change. It may not be impossible to assess this situation based on the magnitude and coverage of annual rainfall. But in this case, our assessment should not be limited to this situation only. While assessing the effectiveness of our food security endeavors, we should take into account our rainfall-based agricultural activities and what can be achieved through irrigation programs. Since the annual rainfall in Eritrea, as I said earlier, is inadequate in terms of magnitude and coverage, it is not dependable to base our food security plans on the annual rainfall we are endowed with. Hence, we should transform our agricultural endeavors by introducing irrigation programs. In this way what we may achieve through agricultural activities that are based on annual rainfall can be complemented through what can be achieved by way of irrigation systems. The point is for agricultural programs to be sustainable, they need to be comprehensive.

However, such comprehensive plans cannot be realized within a year. By assessing the consequences of dependence on rainfall-based agricultural produce, we need to consider the alternatives and conditions for considerably enhancing our irrigation programs so as to ensure food security on sustainable basis. Last year's as well as the previous years' rainfall was inadequate when judged in terms of meeting our food demand.

People may tend to say that there may be good harvest whenever there is adequate rainfall in a particular rainy season. However, we need to take into account the different types of food items that may be produced. Food security should be assessed in terms of producing the different types of food items that are needed in a country. It is also good to note the way different cereals and other food items are consumed. Not only

cereals, but meat, fish, dairy products, sugar and other secondarily important agricultural products should be also considered in the attempt of assessing food security comprehensively. Therefore, each food item needed in the society should be assessed in terms of its sufficiency. However, it is not that possible to have a perfect package of all types of cereals and other food items whenever there is dependence on the amount of annual rainfall and given the arable land available and its quality (level of fertility) as well as the availability of important inputs such as fertilizers and other factors that sustainably increase productivity.

As I said earlier, it is important to consider the efforts associated with introducing irrigation programs. There may be some successful irrigation programs we can be examined one by one. These things have to be assessed by taking into consideration the soil and water conservation efforts such as building diversion canals and dams. But it will take time to introduce the technology required for effectively using all potentially irrigable land. Even the projects that are at hand are small ones when we think in terms of what we intend to do and what we can potentially do.

It is good to have a mix of agricultural activities that are based both on annual rainfall and irrigation systems. The problem in the case of irrigation systems is that having in place the required infrastructural inputs is a considerably demanding task. We need to think not only about the water conservation endeavors (like building dams and the like) but we should also think in terms of the electricity required for the effective implementation of potential irrigation projects. We should also consider the available options associated with irrigation systems and come up with an option that is relevant for our case. In this case, it may not be advisable to limit our focus only on projects that produce the food items we need. It is also important to think in terms of the potential for producing other marketable items so that it will be possible to buy food items with the money earned in such a way.

Our plans should be assessed in terms of the progress in irrigating the potential land available for irrigation. We have three development zones

in the country. One has to think about the progress that is being made in each development zone, in relation to having in place the required infrastructures such as dams, diversion canals, and the like. In other words, the implementation process associated with such projects has to be assessed yearly. For example, so far no dam has been built in the Northern Red Sea Region. Thinking in terms of the area extending from the Sudan border to the environs of Erafaile, how many dams can we build if we are to make an effective use of all the water that flows to the sea and wasted elsewhere? If we roughly estimate that there may be 60,000 to 80,000 acres of land that can be potentially cultivated in aforesaid area, we have not conserved enough water that enables us to reach this potential.

When it comes to the highland, we need to think in terms of the agricultural infrastructures that have been actually established and what can be potentially done in the area extending from the borders of Sudan to the borders of Ethiopia. The same also applies to the western zone. Thinking in terms of food security, if all these things are potentially realized, we can be more than self-sufficient.

We are saying that it is not possible to ensure food security give the amount and coverage of annual rainfall we are endowed with. We are also saying that given the infrastructural inputs required for introducing effective irrigation systems, it takes a long time to effectively introduce irrigation systems for complementing what can be produced depending on annual rainfall. Therefore, it is imperative to have food reserve for filling the gap in our demand for food items. Compared to what is done in the case of some other countries, we think in terms of months. We think in terms of the reserve for strategic food items. Regardless of the magnitude, we should have a strategic reserve of food items that are need in the country. In this case, it is not advisable to think in terms of months. For meeting our food demands on sustainable basis, we should think at least in terms of what can be strategically reserved for a year and if possible for two or three years. This is good not only for the purpose of stability but it is also helpful for managing what we do in a proactive manner. We may say that our ability to keep a reasonable food reserve has been improved. However, it is also good to think or imagine

that it may be possible that there may be lack of rainfall at all in an entire rainy season. The intention in this case is to get proactively prepared when such an imagined situation becomes a reality. As it has been explained above, given our situation, one cannot confidently depend on something that is solely dependent on annual rainfall. That is why proactive measures for strategic reserve of food becomes very important. Furthermore, in addition to the unpredictability of annual rainfall, there are areas that have other problems, for example problems related to overall productivity. Such problems should also be considered in the attempt to have a strategic food reserve and addressed in an appropriate manner.

From our experience in 2013, we have enough reserve for 2014. It may be difficult to effectively have a reserve for every item, but there must be reasonably adequate reserve for the basically important food items.

Parallel to what we do in keeping food reserve, we should do our best to progressively improve irrigation practices. Irrigation practices have to be improved in terms of the infrastructures employed and the magnitude of land cultivated through irrigation systems.

In the west, there are dams built in the areas extending from Badme to Golij, Gerset, Teseney, Aligidir as well as its environs. But such areas have not been yet used for irrigation purposes to the extent required. The same is also true in the northern part of the country in areas such as Himbol. The constraints in this case are mainly electricity and other forms of infrastructural facilities. Some of these problems can be tackled internally but some others have to be provided externally. The issue of electric concerns need to be addressed in the first place. As long as there are no interconnected electric networks in such areas, we should alternatively think on how to introduce independent electric installments or energy sources in the different areas. Manpower issues should not be also overlooked if we are to harvest twice in a year. There should be also quality seeds. All these things are easier said than done.

In sum, what matters more is how we make what we do more sustainable and how we make the measures we take more proactive and comprehensive. There must be also continuously and dynamically

progressive improvements. Our achievements in 2013 must be better than what we achieved in 2012. Similarly, what we should achieve in 2014 have to be far better than the achievements in 2013. Besides, we need to have proactively and strategically helpful reserves parallel to what we do to improve our harvest in general.

***Your Excellency, as you have already mentioned, there have been many important projects related to water conservation that are being implemented in different parts of the country. Since we are talking about 2014 plans, what are the exact plans associated with water conservation for this year?***

As I always say the efforts associated with water conservation should not be assessed depending on the mere water conservation endeavors. Building large dams that can store much water alone cannot be fruitful. There are other important activities that should be carried out parallel to the tasks related to water conservation. The water conservation tasks themselves are not only associated with agricultural projects. Water conservation tasks are also linked with meeting drinking water demands. For example, the demand for water is increasing with the expansion of urban areas and increasing urbanization in the highland. Therefore, priorities must be carefully prepared. For instance, is it better to place more emphasis to improving water supply system for Asmara or instead give more weight, in terms of prioritization, to other places where there can be important agricultural projects?

As part of the different projects related to water conservation, there is a dam that is in progress for further improving the water supply system for Asmara. In the Southern Region, when judged in terms of the magnitude of water required for meeting the demands for drinking and agricultural purposes in such areas as Mendefera, Deqemhare, Adi-Qeyih, Debarwa and other semi-towns as well as taking into account the topography of the region, the tasks associated with water conservation are considerably demanding. Compared with other similar projects, the dams in the region cannot be effectively used for extensive agricultural projects. While there are completed projects within this year, they are mainly helpful not for major agricultural purposes as the focus has been mainly

on the provision of water supply to municipal areas. For prioritization purpose, there are large projects that have been postponed in the eastern plains. These projects may be commenced in 2014.

We tend to feel that it is better to focus on some selected projects. It is also equally felt that it may be necessary to be elastic enough to implement different projects at the same time – we need to be overstretched as far as effectively possible. In this case, being elastically effective is very helpful as such projects can be useful for ensuring food security. In eastern and western lowlands, there are strategically important dam construction projects that have been postponed because we are afraid of being unnecessarily overstretched. For this reason, for a while the focus will be mainly on small and medium dams. The postponed dam projects are really strategically important when judged in terms of their ultimate expected benefits taking into account the magnitude of their areas and their water storage capacity. But for the time being such projects have to be postponed as their implementation takes one through two years and there are budget constraints when it comes to allocation of resources to different development projects.

In theory, there are a number of possibilities for water conservation. If these projects were implementable within a year, we would not talk about the problems associated with the inadequacy and uncertainty of annual rainfall in the country. However, what we achieve in this case actually depends on our capacity and the resources we have. Hence, we should do our best to build our capacity.

If our 2014 dam construction programs cannot be completed before the rainy season begins, thereafter they become part of 2015 plans. Therefore, the programs to be completed in 2014 are a few in number. These programs are mainly associated with the provision of drinking water in municipal areas and semi-towns.

***Mr. President there is a pilot housing project that has just started. What can you inform us about the plan of housing constructions that aims at providing homes to people of different standard of living? Is***

***there any plan to encourage the participation of individuals in this construction project?***

What we have started is a pilot project. Even though this is a new thing, we expect it will enhance and improve our technology and construction programs. This is the pre-cast project that was in Massawa and Asmara; and the third one is going to be established in the western lowland. If we are going to have three development zone it is crucial that we have such kinds of companies nearby. Besides these, there have to be at least three companies to produce construction materials like TM technology and bricks for the success of the projects. In relation to the pilot project around Asmara, we can say that our construction companies are reorganized in to three big companies so that they could head the construction programs in the eastern lowlands, highlands, and western lowlands. These companies are now participating in the Asmara pilot project as an exercise to master the technologies and improve experience. When they got back to their permanent places they will be independent. When we talk about the project in the western lowland, the town of Tesseney has low prospect of growing and therefore the plan to expand Aligeder has finished its preliminary study. Besides these two places there should be construction program in areas where there is sizable number of people as well. This is the current plan, but it should be noted that the pilot project in Asmara is not our priority.

In the eastern lowlands the housing project has strategic approach and will target in constructing economic zones with services like electricity, water, transportation to make the places economically meaningful. The primary beneficiaries of this project are those who don't have houses. Especially people who have sacrificed much and are still toiling for this country have to at least get a house. The housing project that is going to be done in phases is intended to proving a house for such people who cannot pay for it. The village land allocation or *Tesa* program is also included in this plan. It is going to be revised in such a way that will allow us to make the maximum use of the land employing the new technologies. This allocation program has been wasteful and need to be organized in the national skill housing program. There are of course fundamental challenges arising with this issue of which the provision of



cement is the primary one. Due to shortage of electricity supply our ample resource of cement cannot satisfy the demand we have. Other essential building materials should also be produced here instead of buying them from elsewhere with hard currency. Producing these materials domestically will expedite the construction project and will make the price of houses affordable. Individuals contribution to this plan can only be very limited and those who have been built in the past didn't solve the problem. It, therefore, is not a priority. It should not only be for those who has the money, and those who have paid with their opportunity to defend and serve the country should first be considered. Individual effort therefore should be executed within the national framework and contribute in rendering a lasting solution to the overall problem. The program as whole is going to take time. The pilot project is an attempt towards the stated goals but is not going to meet all our demands.

***There was a task force mandated with the investigation and rectification of the problems associated with the misuse and mismanagement of the land allocated as Tesa in the villages. How is it going to handle the issue in the future?***

The problem was identified early on and the task force was established. There was a lot of mismanagement of land allocated in villages. The task force was to study the situation and identify the faults in our policies. There were some construction projects around places like Kushet, Maihutsa, and others that were attempted by our companies. But this was not satisfactory. The kushet area for instance was a failure. With its entire shortcoming the housing project in Asmara and Massawa done by the Korea Company was relatively better. But we have to do more and better than this. Everyone has the right to receive land. But so far the land that was allocated hasn't been used properly and the houses that were built are not satisfactory. This might be due to lack of money, but we couldn't go on wasting our land resources. These resources should give proportional use and the wasteful practice has to be rectified. People can have their preferences but the buildings should meet the standards given by the authorities and should aim at the maximum

utilization of the land. Any misuse and mismanagement should also be rectified, and this is part of the project we are embarking on.

Those people who don't have the ability should get the help from banks and other financial institution. They can rent the house to pay their debt. This way it is beneficial to everyone. Generally these are the conclusions from our experience. We don't anticipate that the current project will go on without problems and challenges. The main thing is that we have been able to learn from our experience.

***You have mention about short and long term plans concerning infrastructure project; which one of these are going to be implemented in 2014?***

It is better to say they will start in 2014 rather than saying they will be implemented. We can, for example, talk about the projects in Massawa that we have been postponing for long. We have to at least divide the task into phases and start doing it. There is also project in Asseb; another big project is the road of Liban, Habela, Mensura. The railroad from Asmara to Massawa needs maintenance. We also have project for dirt road. These are some our strategic infrastructure program. Besides the road from Barentu to Tesseney, the one that is going to link us directly to sudan should be asphalted. This didn't go as well as we had hoped. To the north the road to Qarora should be upgraded for it to give full services. The maintenance of the road between Massawa and Asseb, and also the asphaltting of various dirt roads are all plans for the year 2014. Besides these we have projects of dams, wells, and ports. The project in the port of Massawa will take a long time, but till then we can build extension that will give additional service. Other major undertakings in Massawa are the building of oil depots and power plants. Other programs include the dirt road from Shambuko to Goluj. The roads from Tesseney through Omahajer to Bedemit need to be upgraded. There are also roads from Tesseney to Sebderat, and from Afhimbol to the border of the Sudan. Since there are a lot of contingent developments associated with these roads, they are important projects. These are also project that aim to develop the periphery and hence they will have profound effect

on other programs like agriculture and transportation, and power supply. These projects will start in 2014 and based on their priority will be categorized. Some of these projects will be done by foreign companies who are finishing their paper and about to sign contracts. We are going to see whether or not they are going to be able to start in 2014.

***Efforts have been exerted to extend and also to solve deficit of electricity supply. There has also been an ongoing effort to put in place a network that could be connected to Sudan. What are the upcoming prospects and expectations to be met in this regard?***

Engineer Abrham, head of Electricity Corporation, has given enough briefings about the supply of electricity. Hence, I would not like to repeat what has been said on this regard. However, it is important to mention that plans mapped out to extend supply of electricity remain to be white elephant projects. There may have been various reasons that stand as hindrance. If there is a need to increase the potential supply, there are a number of questions that could be posed. Therefore, to what extent would it be extended and in what shall it be consumed? Once extended, would it be cost effective? There are huge and ambitious projects that have been carried out in a number of developing countries which are costly to maintain and also of financial burden. There are instances where a supply of one city equals to 10 folds of the overall supply of that of our country. So, we could not follow their footsteps. If we are about to increase such a supply, what are the objectives? What we take in to consideration at this moment is just to alleviate the existing problem. It has been said generators have been weakened and have not been able to generate the needed amount of supply. At times, it has also been said that there is deficit of petroleum. The major problem has, however, been the overall potential of the power plant that could not exceed 80 watt. The same is with that of Beleza electricity supply distribution center. The interconnected system has also been over loaded and it has not met the level of demand. Due to such insufficiency, the cement factory and other industrial plants have remained inoperative. A lasting solution to such a demand is to introduce a better power plant that could meet the overall demand. These are huge issues that demand precautions so as to make a right decision. Before reaching to such a

decision, it is a timely issue to see means and ways of alleviating the existing deficit. The cement factory should in the first place have an independent electricity supply. Even though it would not bring a lasting solution to the deficit, the former cement factory should resume production so as to alleviate the increasing demand. As is closely related to all construction works, an increase in the production of cement is among our priorities. Bearing in mind that bringing a lasting solution would not be that much easy, projects need to be prioritized as per their importance.

Next ranked priority is Teseney, Aligidir and its environs. There may be a need to secure supply of electricity in Asmara, but our agricultural projects need to be prioritized above everything else. Since various development projects that have been introduced in aloof areas could not be linked to the interconnected electricity supply, these are to be handled as part of the programs that are planned to be carried out at a national level. There should be, of course, an introduction of power plants that could meet timely needs.

As much as possible, there should be an independent network in the western part of the country that stretches up to Haykota and which there by reaches to Omhajer, Gherset, Fanko, Teseney, and Aligidir. There is also a separate plan in the north that goes to Afhimbol. Taking in to account its importance, this project needs to be implemented as fast as possible. Assab should also have its independent power supply center that corresponds to its minimal demand. We have only been discussing about heat generated electricity supply. As there may be other sources of energy such as solar, wind and other sources of renewable energy, as soon as such projects are implemented in the places with such potentials, we would be able to move towards major national development programs. We should now, in the 2014, work on the cement factory and in the western part of the country in a way which cannot negatively affect major development programs. It has been said that Hirgigo power plant has been renovated. But, there is nothing certain about its sustainability. What could be the final result and as to how the deficit has been alleviated would be seen once the projects are implemented. There are a number of enterprises of higher importance in different parts of the

country that rely on the availability of guaranteed supply of electricity. Could such plants be productive without a 24 or 12 hours of sustainable electricity supply? Is the said renovated power plant capable of meeting the demands?

At this moment, supply of electricity for households is not a priority. National industrial plants need to be ranked in the first place. Sustainability of any activity could not be secured unless supply of electricity generated from the interconnected system is increased in the range between 200 and 250 watt. Thus, electricity supply for the cement factory and projects to be carried out in the environs of Aligidir and Teseney should be viewed among the priorities. Finally, we could map out our strategic plan in electricity and generally energy supply. This is what we have been discussing with different partners. This is not only confined to funds alone but also in making right decisions as regards the type of power plant that we are about to introduce. Parallel to such development, we could move on through continuously addressing timey demands.

We could say all construction programs could not be affected if the cement factory starts production at its highest possible potential in a period of time that stretches between March and May. Thus, given the fact that our construction programs would not be interrupted due to shortage of cement, we could map out plans accordingly. Provided that agricultural and other development programs could be implemented in due time, plans could be charted out parallel to the increased supply. To get rid of high expectations, people need to know the actual situation of electricity supply, and concerned bodies should give an updated briefing as regards such a deficit.

***To what extent of the overall demand could the electricity supply that is said to be distributed from Sudan cover the existing demand?***

We are not solely to rely on Sudan? Any plan mapped out by a particular nation would not have an importance, if any given nation has everything at hand. There would be more economic benefit, if a plan is charted out at Egad, Horn of Africa and generally at regional level. A

transnational infrastructure such as of electricity and other services that would be put in place among neighboring countries would open a venue for complementarity. It could be said that we have learned too much from our past experiences. Thus, any tie we develop with neighboring countries should depend in complementing one another. How this could be implemented on the ground is a major issue though. What we are planning to do in the respect of electricity could not have a major impact towards solving the problem. There are also threats that could come along with it for it is hard to manage what is not in once hands. As every country has its own sovereign choice, when an agreement is reached between two countries, there is a concern whether the supply would be guaranteed or not. Leaving aside such concerns, we have taken initiatives of cooperation based on a good will. What tangible things could we do apart from holding talks and drafting policies? Ours and Sudanese systems of electricity supply is very different. Its nature is also different in terms of technological advancement. Sudanese hydraulic system has vivid advantage over the heat generated energy supply we are using in here. But, we do also have our own advantage over that of the Sudanese. We should ultimately connect these two systems in the western part of the country. But, ultimately, what would be the amount of watt that could be generated and how much would be the expense? What have been produced from the heat generated sources of electricity demands dollar 0.25 cents per one kilo watt. This is indeed very expensive and we could not expect to buy such a supply with that much expense. Hydraulic system may cost from eight to ten cents although this could differ from country to country as per the vastness of investment activities that are to be carried out. It could also be cheaper. While considering whether Sudanese supply would be cost effective or not in relation to the activities we plan to carry out in this country, we are simultaneously working to connect them by erecting a line that stretches for about 60-65 km. This project may start this year. Once connected, it would not be linked with that of the country's interconnected system for supporting infrastructure has not yet been put in place. What is really important is not only to encourage a spirit of mutual cooperation, but also to proceed towards the implementation of

tangible programs. This may start in 2014, nevertheless there are other facilities that go parallel to it and thus implementation of such a project may take time. It is however important to notice that such like projects are not aimed at solving major deficit of electricity supply.

***Internet and telecommunications service is among the major facilitators of economic and educational activities. Are there plans to introduce advanced technology and also to extend the existing bandwidth?***

Apart from being a means for dissemination of information, it is really hard to associate such a service with economic activities. There are of course economic activities facilitated through it. There is a huge gap between the perception of corporations, economic philosophies and the reality on the ground. Internet service could give a distorted image. But, this does not mean to undermine the role internet plays in actual economies. Information distributed through the internet is always coupled with issues that could pose threats that are not to be viewed lightly. Developed countries are, at this time, making huge surveillance on internet services. In our case, let alone to control internet service, a speedy and vast connectivity could not be achieved as long as fiber optic internet line is not introduced in the country. We are making discussions with Chinese partner companies so as to be connected with the fiber optic line that passed along the Red Sea. After connecting the major cities and remote areas of the country to a fiber optic line inside the country, there would be an effective and smooth connection to a global line. But, there is no economic activity in this country that relays too much on the availability of internet service. What is more is that airlines service is almost in a shaky ground. There is poor land transportation system, marine transport has been relying on transshipment. It is hard to say our agriculture sector has reached at highest level of production, we have not yet developed marine resources in a way that could make due contribution in the country's economy. So, there could be no miracle of economic growth that relays solely on the availability of reliable internet service. Once economic growth is realized, internet service or other means of communication could play an important role. This connectivity service could only facilitate but could not bring tangible

economic progress. However, until we reach to a higher level of growth in different economic sectors, a reliable internet service should be put in place. A plan that could connect us to international line has been mapped out to be implemented in 2014. This is not, however, to be decided on our part alone and thus we are working for its realization through a reinforced cooperation with partner companies.

***In the health sector, Eritrea has been commended for the success it registered with respect to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Nevertheless, citizens are still going abroad for better medical services. What plans are there to develop medical technology?***

We shouldn't pay too much attention to these MDGs; we should be evaluating the actual situation of health services instead. What is being done is only a continuation of the medical services we were rendering through our barefoot doctors in difficult situations during our struggle. It didn't progress as desired. The standards for evaluation are not the provision of health services in big cities and limited areas only, but in the remote and less advanced places as well. It's true we might have met global standards when it comes to malaria and other diseases, but that should not put us at ease. It would be wrong to compare your excellence with others' mediocrity. You need to have your own standards. How is the health service in those remote areas without access to roads, power or potable water? Those should be the standards...and not the statistical embellishments given to us by others. We should focus on developing our human resources because no facilities, medical technologies and services can function without human resources.

Citizens being referred to foreign hospitals are with extreme cases and limited in number. We should not be concerned for not having the capacity to address such cases or for not possessing the hi-tech medical equipment; we cannot say we will treat every illness or bring all medical equipment. Even if we did bring the facilities, it wouldn't end there, as there needs to be adequate human resources. So we are developing our human capacity to that end. We might have shown progress in controlling and decreasing the number of diseases but it is not on a



100% scale. If people go abroad for treatment because it's beyond our capacity here, it shouldn't be taken as a weakness on our side.

***There are restructuring activities that started in 2013 in a bid to ensure efficient organization and management. How will these continue in 2014?***

It's not about changing individuals. Systems need to be upgraded through experience. They need to be revised before the new placements are put in place. It has been years since a new organizational plan was drafted. Especially that of the regions, the structure and the general skeleton must be finalized in the first half of 2014.

***In your last interview, you mentioned that emboldening the Front would be one of the programs for 2013. What has been accomplished so far? And what plans are there regarding this country's political building?***

If there is anyone who thinks there is different politics other than that of the People's Front (PFDJ), he can go look elsewhere. For that to be however, the Front needs to evaluate its experience and not live by its fame and reputation of yester years. The foundations might still be in place but the Front needs to be reinforced in every new phase. Nothing can be done without a directing and orientating force. If the front is not strong enough all the economic, social, political and cultural programs at home and abroad can't be effective. So we need to start the organization at the base. You need to boost the awareness and participation of the people at the village, town, sub-region and regional levels and work upward from there. If not all the extremities of the country are organized in such a way, you can hardly find a replacement. The way the different regions, ministries and associations are organized should also be undergo radical changes. This is easier said than done. But if there is anyone that thinks there will be democracy or multiparty system in this country, just as it's fashionable to say nowadays, then that person can think of such things in another world. Since the Front is a tool of the country's political development, we can't say it has no flaws. Of course, there are obvious problems and shortcomings and these need to be

resolved so the front can best serve its cause. And this is not indomitable as we have experienced it for over half a century and grown through such a process.

This Front's economic, political, cultural and social capacity needs to go side by side with progress, as it should be a beacon of orientation. What needed to be done in 2013 in this dimension was postponed and will probably be finalized this year. We need to be pragmatic and not just idealists. The philosophy in the end is political education alongside sensitization and organization. The people's participation should also be based on awareness, because knowledge is the basis for sensitization. And when you add will and popular participation to that, it becomes organization. If there is no organization, no strategy or objective can be achieved. You need to be armed as well, with not only a shotgun but also all kinds of armaments.

Therefore, without making these adjustments, one cannot expect the Front to work effectively in the future. What has and hasn't been done in 2014 will be seen at the end of the year but those programs suspended in 2013 need to be executed in 2014.

***There have been ploys to drain this nation's human resources and especially the youth. One cannot say this did not do any harm. You have actually talked about it in detail last time. What plans are there to expand education and employment opportunities at home and create domestic satisfaction to foil similar ploys?***

I would say we are on a wishing track. It doesn't mean there are no ploys. How is the global rate of unemployment? If we look at Spain, Greece, Portugal, Italy and most European countries, the rate is quite upsetting. So how can anyone without education or profession go and find a job in these countries? The same goes for the US. This is not our problem only. In Sudan, let alone high school graduates like ours, people with degrees from prestigious universities leaving the country have reached up to 60%, which is an alarming number.

Ours' however is not that bad. The problem is that the salary you get for a job here is different than that you get abroad for the same job. What made it dangerous in our case are the well-organized ploys. If the nation is stable and the youth here are settled and become productive, it poses a threat to the different forces in this region. The ploy is therefore how to disrupt this. And those who are leaving are not the laypeople but those who have earned their expertise with the resource of the people and government. It would have at least been worth it, if they managed to find a decent work and sustain themselves overseas but instead they are made to pay exorbitant prices to leave the country and then left scattered in different countries. Those who have learned and acquired a profession have done so with the resource of the people and they should be compensating their families, people and nation. It's a big loss for the country if you are leaving after it paid for your education for 12 years and more. They should be building their nation, if they are to savor it in the future. This is a clear theft.

Those leaving have not even secured a future for themselves. There is nothing worse than the life of those living in Israeli camps. Nor less unfortunate are those living in different European countries. The few Eritreans and non-Eritreans claiming to have glittering lives abroad are individuals taking part in the disruption ploys. But now the time is up. All attempts have worn out. There is nothing to be found there so it's better to say "Come back home!" Otherwise, nothing is affected here by their desertion.

A halfhearted person has hardly anything to contribute to the nation if he remains here so it's better for everyone if he left – he rests and you are ridding of a burden. But as an advice, it would be appropriate to say "better return home as you will not get back what you are losing now. Don't do anything that you will regret tomorrow..." Those few individuals who are being instruments of foreign conspirators can only be told there is nothing we don't know and that we have learned our lessons.

***Stepping to political and diplomatic issues, Mr. President, is there any truth to recent media reports alleging efforts to reconcile Eritrea and***

***Ethiopia? And are there any developments on the Eritrean-Ethiopian issue?***

There is no such thing. You cannot say that the TPLF will refrain from such PR gimmicks until its very end. They have been practically knocking at every door around the world claiming to “have accepted the boundary commission ruling” and that they seek “dialogue” and “mediation.” Such maneuvers might have worked long ago but now we have simply grown tired.

Sometimes I feel sorry for them. Why are they wasting their time? Whom are they trying to fool? They are only trying to look as victims and make us the bad ones. Therefore, it's better if we didn't waste our time and avoided such trumpery. Any Eritrean at home or abroad should refrain from entertaining similar thoughts.

***Mr. President, recently Ambassador Herman Cohen has commented that US-Eritrea diplomatic relationship should be normalized. Others have also supported what he asserted. How does the Eritrean Government see these comments? Does this reflect the stand of the United States Government?***

In the articles you mentioned it is has been commented that there is a need to bringing Eritrea in from the cold. Is the ‘cold’ that people are talking about real or imagined? The wording is surprising. It seems that the metaphoric messages that are being reflected indicate that Eritrea is something wild that has to be tamed. While they themselves caused the problems or crimes that were experienced in Somalia, it was Eritrea that was sanctioned because of these problems. This is a grave crime. It is shameful to sanction the people of Eritrea using baseless excuses that were fabricated for different motivations that were baselessly sugarcoated with pretexts. It is also shameful to assert that things have been improved in Eritrea from 2009 onwards after the decision to sanction Eritrea was passed. This is intended to cover up the unjust nature of the decision to sanction Eritrea. This case surprisingly indicates a situation where one becomes the accuser by fabricating false reasons and at the same time the witness and the judge as well as the enforcer of a decision based on clearly false excuses. Being the cause of

all such problems, how can one sympathetically tend to assert that it is good to bring Eritrea in from the cold?

A large number of young people have fled the country because of the conspiracies that are intended to undermine the country. How are such issues, among other things, to be settled in a just way? It is not sensible to talk about normalizing diplomatic ties and the like without first addressing such key concerns. And it has also been said that President (I) said that the destiny of Eritrea is associated with that of Ethiopia. When did I say this? I can't even think of such things? When we look at it in terms of its wording, its presentation, and the timing, it is nonsense.

When it comes to the normalization of the diplomatic ties between America and Eritrea, it should not be linked with who the decision makers are. What is to be improved or changed in connection to the relations of the two countries? What is wrong in the relationship between them? In relation to this issue, how are the problems to be assessed? It is these concerns that need to be addressed in the first place. It is better to talk about more substantial issues if one wants to really improve the diplomatic ties between Eritrea and America rather than reacting to the aforesaid assertions. There are idle individuals who post any comments in the internet. It is not sensible to base what you have to say on such pieces of comments that can hardly comprehensively address the issue of concern. It is not sensible to unwisely spend our time to consider such public relations games designed by Woyane. It is not even good for them to spend their time in such a way.

***In relation to regional issues, it has not been even two years since South Sudan became an independent state. However, the country is experiencing a serious civil war. What is the cause of this problem? And what is the stand of the Eritrean Government with regard to solving this problem?***

Our stand is crystal clear. What is said in relation to the tribal problems in South Sudan is nonsense. It is really surprising that Reik Mashar stayed that long in the leadership. After Eritrea became an independent state, that is, since we became involved in the issues concerning South Sudan, especially from mid 1990s onwards, John Garang used to assert

that the concerns in South Sudan (the demand for autonomy) could only be addressed keeping the unity of Sudan in mind. At that time, Mashar's strong belief was the reverse - the autonomy of South Sudan could only be possible only if South Sudan becomes an independent state. Hence at that time, there were two different perspectives. Mashar's selfishness and narrow-mindedness is beyond measure. Then after some time, Mashar went to Sudan and started to preach the reverse by reciting the motto: 'Peace from within'. Such contradiction is very shameful.

The current problem was there since the days of John Garang. It would have been better if they had been able to solve it by themselves – internally. It was getting worse and worse over time. However, the main factor that has complicated the problem is mainly monetary corruption. The details as regards who has stolen how much public fund is not that covert.

During the five year transition period, billions of revenue collected from oil was wasted. During the transition years, the leaders were stealing public funds and the money stolen from the people of South Sudan was being deposited in their private bank accounts in other countries. It is shameful to talk about the amount they have deposited in foreign banks as a result of their corrupt practices.

Building a state is not an easy task. It cannot be done within a year or two. It would have not been a problem, if this had been their only problem. The main problem in the case of South Sudan, and particularly the problem of the SPLM leadership, is corruption – stealing public fund. There are also others (accomplices) who collaborate with them in stealing public funds. It is clear where and how the money has been wasted. It is very unfortunate that the country is being divided due to corrupt practices reinforcing the structural problems associated with building a state. When it is hoped that the people of South Sudan, unlike other peoples, can significantly improve the quality of their life standard in a short period of time because of the resources (oil) they are endowed with, it is a serious crime that within the last two years the people are being deprived off the benefits of being endowed with such an important resource.

Those who wasted public funds tried to address these problems along with the middle men, some of whom conspired with them in the corrupt practices and caused instability in the country. At the end of the day, it was resolved that, as it is impossible to return the stolen money, the wrongdoers should be warned. And those who have stolen the public money are abusing the tribal relations in the country as a means to cover up their real problems so as not to be exposed. In this case, they are using the respective tribes as their safe haven. Accordingly, they have started saying that one is doing this and that because he or she is Nuwer or An'wak and it is very unfortunate that the people are being divided accordingly. This is to say that the problem in South Sudan is corruption, as I said above. However, in an attempt to cover up the real problem, they are talking about false causes.

Our stand in such cases is very clear. This issue has to be solved internally. State building is a very demanding task. We did our best to help the people of South Sudan, until the last minute, with the intention of promoting their autonomy by being part of Sudan. But as we cannot, and we should not, dictate what has to be done there, they became an independent state as a result of their preference that was reflected in a referendum. The people paid considerable sacrifices for achieving their independence. Unfortunately, the citizens in South Sudan have not been able to be beneficiaries of the fruits of their sacrifice due to the fact that the oil revenues and the resources of the country in general are being exploited by two-three individuals. This is very shameful.

It is their choice to be an independent state. But regardless of their choice, the central concern is that this has to benefit the people. And those who wasted public resources should be held accountable. The most important issue is that the process of state building has to continue. The state is not the private property of individuals. The government has to function properly and run state affairs properly. Otherwise, civil war is going to have a very detrimental effect for the country. The attempts to solve the problem through IGAD and the like are not going to be fruitful. This is just like a business as managing crisis in Africa has been a business. The government has to solve its own problem by itself. If there are corrupt practices, they have to be solved and the corrupt

individuals should be held accountable so as the people of South Sudan not to be divided ethnically and the country may not be destroyed due to tribal wars. With your bank accounts in foreign banks and with your family residing in foreign countries, one cannot remotely govern. These things can only make the people fight among each other.

As we have been closely observing what was taking place in the country within the last 20 years, this situation is not new for us. It is amazing when those involved in stealing public funds preach about democracy and what can be done to promote democracy. This is not sensible at all. On our part, while our firm belief is that the problem should be internally dealt with, we have moral obligation to do what we can to help the people of South Sudan. Basically, what has to be done externally has to complement what has to be done internally; the key to solving the problem is what can be done internally. The central concern in this case is that those who have been engaged in corrupt practices have to be held accountable and the tribal problems should not be used for covering up or sugarcoating the real problem in the country.

***You have touched upon the relation between Eritrea and Sudan. There have also been agreements signed on various areas. How is the status of their relation at the moment? And what is the expectation in the future?***

Our relation has always been there and we cannot say we have a new policy regarding it. It is here to stay for this and coming generations. This relation should serve not only the two people but also the region as a whole. It should also be complimentary relationship that serves the interest of the two people. All the measure likes the flow of energy, movement of people without visa, economic cooperation, trade collaboration, teaming up regarding regional issues, these have created good atmosphere between us. This can inspire confidence and trust in our engagement with each other. Numerous problems haunt the Sudan, like the conflict with South Sudan, the problem with Darfur, East Sudan, Blue Nile, Kurdofan. We cannot interfere in their internal affairs but since these problems affect us also, we would like to work in partnership with the country on these issues. With time our attitudes and intentions



became clear enough for it to develop from wishes to concrete political will and trust. Now it is at a good stage but it takes time to translate it in to concrete cooperation programs. We still have to make a sober study and analysis to take the relation to the next level but we have created conducive environment to do that.

We don't declare that we have a good relation with our neighbors for PR consumption; it is to engage with them on concrete programs. We see a lot of protocols signed between nations but not a lot of them actually bear fruits. The situation in Sudan for the past 25 years has been encircled with problems mainly due to lack of proper handling and management. The major interest for us is the stability of the Sudan. We hold the stand that the issues of Sudan should be resolved internally and we are against any external interference that has only aggravated the situation. We don't want to meddle in their situation but we intend to work in collaboration with them.

***Mr. President, Eritrea has been engaged in active diplomacy. What is the plan for 2014 in this respect?***

We don't mention it but there are big plans. It is very important to study the situation in our neighbors. Change in the global arena is not something to be taken lightly. We have to read the signs solemnly and craft a way to engage with it effectively. The changes in the global arena and in our region in the past three years are not easy. These can all affect us and hence we cannot remain passive. Our diplomatic activities should take in to consideration this reality. All the diplomatic talks and moves should be interpreted within this global and regional development. Considering these developments, it is imperative that we have an active diplomacy in order to safeguard our interests. In our region for instance the issues surrounding the Middle East, the Red Sea, horn of Africa, and the Nile are all interconnected. Our neighbor the North Africa encompasses all these four part and it is very strategic both regionally and globally. Since we are living in this region, we have concerns and we need to be prepared for it. It might not be the time to talk about it, and some of them we don't need to talk about it. Some development transpires gradually with time.

How to deal with the development in 2014-2015 we have our way, we don't like to talk about it as often. In general however, in this time of dynamic changes in the world and regional arena, we are engaged in getting ready ourselves to meaningfully participate in it.

***We are conducting this interview on the occasion of the celebration of Operation Fenkil. Looking back across 24 years please share your memories of the event, how was it planned? And what was your feeling when the operation succeeded?***

Sometimes, even in silence stories are told. Especially anecdotes about battles are documented with their details. You can find it in the information that was being relayed at those moments in real time. The main point is that the strategy of independence since the strategic withdrawal has gone through a lot of complications. The 1977 incident was a big experience of Massawa. In our struggle experience failing to succeed after an attempt made us stronger. Sometimes you wonder if you could ever have done anything, had it not been for your failures. All the experience has nourished the confidence for the Operation Fenkil. The quality of our manpower was unbelievable. Rarely do you see the endurance, innovation, and power to make history that was demonstrate at that moment. The Operation of Fenkil, just as its name suggest, was the uprooting of colonialism once and for all. Accomplishing the task however, only that kind of man power can do. It is indescribable the kind of people with that kind of organization, execution, one who can win wars fighting from the quagmires of salt. Everything was due to the man-power we had back then, whose intrinsic power words cannot explain.

***The people of Eritrea, and especially the youth has done numerous miracles, one of which is the Operation Fenkil. What do you want to say to the youth who are still accomplishing miracles?***

2014 is different from the year 2013 and 2012. One can say the real nature of the people is returning back. This might not surprise the older generation with experience, but one can say the scenarios of the past 2 or 3 years where the youth were the target and victims of the orchestrated mass departure has settled down. Leaving the few scenarios here and

there the situation is getting back normalcy. According to my understanding they could not get rid of quintessential quality of the Eritrea people. The previous generation of youth has made miracle and now too the people are doing miracles. The youth has learned a lot and all the ploys against him are becoming outdated. The people of Eritrea, and especially the youth, are on the verge of making another miracle.

***Thank you Mr. President.***