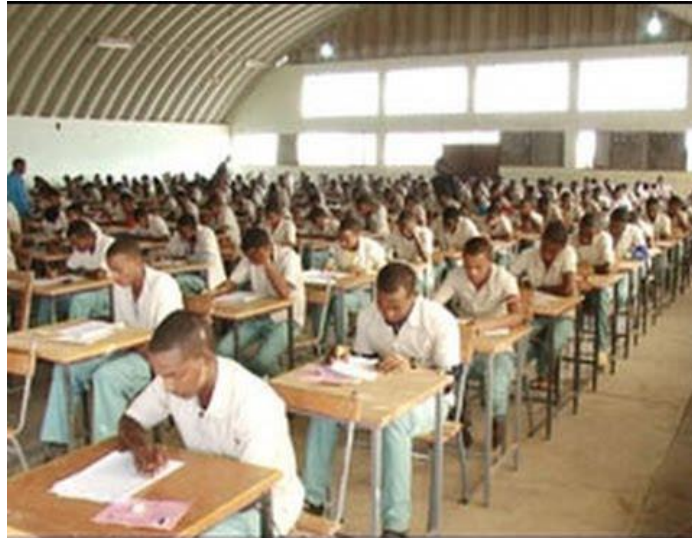


Sawa:

A Place of Restoration, Centre Of Patriotism and Education



Starting from 1994, it's been a tradition for the Eritrean youth to devote one year to Sawa to complete their high school education and to attend military training. The purpose of this national tradition is to connect the Eritrean youths to their history and to make them realize and accept certain roles, and duties. Thus, the academic, military and political education carried out in Sawa is one form of political socialization, which helps the youth stand behind the national goals of Eritrea.

Sawa as an institution teaches not only rights and duties but also a sense of tradition, community, and identity. Sawa fosters national consolidation, encourages patriotism and promotes national values. Thus, we can safely argue that the aim is to strengthen national identity and to nurture youth. It provides the youth with knowledge, skills, and the value of tolerance and prepares them to take active roles in the social, political, cultural and economic sectors of the country.

After independence, Sawa has played a great role in the patriotic upbringing of Eritrean youth. Patriotism can be defined as love and loyalty to one's homeland,

a determination to serve its interests, as well as readiness to protect the country up to the point of self-sacrifice. Patriotism as a concept is not new to Eritrean culture. Sawa education is expected to develop responsible citizenship. It is associated with the building of a just and prosperous state and patriotic education aimed at consolidating the nation, strengthening the state, and bringing up a citizenry that is aware of its responsibilities and duty to the country.



Patriotic upbringing in post-independence Eritrea was initially aimed at raising the cultural and consciousness level of the Eritrean youth and preparing young males and females to develop and defend their country and also to restore and inherit the revolutionary values that made Eritrea independent. In addition to regular academic life the basic means for fulfilling these aims include military training, political education and various extracurricular activities. Eritrean patriotism demonstrates love for the country and pride in the national achievements in various areas. Eritrean patriotism is tolerant because it shows respect to other people's attachment to their homeland. Eritrean patriotism is not of ignorance and irrationality. It is about engagements in everyday life, kindness and helpfulness for people and hard work to be useful to others. No one is born with love of his/her country. Patriotism and nationalism is something which has to be taught and acquired through learning. The aim of Sawa, among many things, is to teach the young to respect their national laws, institutions and to promote unity and harmony of Eritrean people. Above all it teaches tolerance and hence rather than spreading blind or uncritical form of patriotism it instilled constructive patriotism. In the last 24 years of its existence, Sawa has produced

thousands of young patriots in education, innovation, social change, medicine, engineering, art and other professions. Young Eritreans who have gone through Sawa have expressed their love for the country through active engagement in various development projects. The sons and daughters of Sawa have proved themselves to be the backbone of the country by serving in civil and military duties.

Sawa, as a national institution, has made unprecedented efforts to preserve national sovereignty, consolidate Eritrean national identity, ensure social harmony and political stability and facilitate nation-building projects. It instills the best national practices and ideas and helps to appreciate and understand cultural diversity. National identity may be defined in different ways, including: ‘bonds of solidarity among members of communities’. In this case Sawa served as a melting pot where Eritreans from all parts of the country joined regardless of their differences and together experienced the same things. It has been said that in Eritrea, the struggle for independence was a political melting pot. So, the creation of Sawa is the continuation of the cultural, social and political process of nation building that started during the armed struggle. President Issaias Afewerki speaking, about Sawa, said “As an idea, Sawa did not emerge because we anticipated wars or other hostilities. On the contrary, it came as a continuation of the political process on the basis of which Eritrea was built throughout the armed struggle.” Sawa prepared Eritreans to undertake their national service of defending and constructing the country. Sawa is a place where the “imagined communities” become acquainted communities through a shared interactive sense of “we-ness” based on knowledge, affection and actions that motivate people to act together.

The objectives of Sawa education can be summarized as the inculcation of discipline, raising of the moral tone, development of self-confidence and sense of responsibility, and the development of common ties among the youth. After independence no other single institution in Eritrea can claim a greater impact than Sawa in strengthening national unity.

Sawa teaches young male and female to give service and respect to the people, to be useful members of the society, to live according to the moral values of the

society and to be law-abiding citizens. From my personal experience I learned all these values in Sawa. As Eritreans, we are born into the nation-state of Eritrea. We have no choice but to be brave citizens standing to defend our rights.



In Eritrea, every able individual expresses citizenship as Eritrean through the new ritual of fulfilling national obligation of going to Sawa. Sawa has now become one of the most enthusiastically visited places by Eritrean young boys and girls. In Sawa the chains of history are connected, intergenerational solidarity enhanced, and the responsibility to uphold the cause of our martyrs renewed. As a free and confident country Eritrea is not just an area of land, of mountains, rivers, and sea, but it is a principle and going to Sawa is understood by the youth as a manifestation of loyalty to that principle.

For years our enemies, in collaboration with certain defeatist elements, targeting Sawa as their foremost propaganda item have labeled it as a military camp. But it is in fact, a school that provides mental and physical fitness to the Eritrean youth. Whoever denies this fact, as President Issaias Afewerki once said, has the right to say whatever he/she wants. But, for us, Sawa is the reincarnation and continuation of nation building.

The choice of Sawa as a centre of Eritrean youth who have come together for academic, vocational, political and military training is historically appropriate. The first Eritrean martyr, Abdu Mohammed Faid fell and was buried in Sawa and his final resting place is near the school building 02. Abdu Mohammed Faid was one of the pioneers of the Eritrean revolution and a hero honoured and remembered. It is also believed that at different times, the ELF and EPLF have

used Sawa as a safe training place. Thus, Sawa has sufficient story of the past and contribution of the present that makes it as important as Nakfa and other historical sites of Eritrea.

Sawa is the stronghold of Eritreans and a shelter when the blast of the terrible ones is stormed against us. The candidates of Sawa cover the land, sea and sky of Eritrea with their pinions and under their wings, Eritrea will continue to march forward safely. Their education, determination and patriotism will continue to become reliable shield and armour for ever. Sawa is a place of restoration of our old tradition and a place of education for the modernization of new Eritrea.

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On Aug 8, 2018