

Interview with President Isaias Afwerki: On Global, Regional, and Domestic Issues- November 2024



Mr. President: currently, our world is facing numerous crises and conflicts. The situation in Ukraine, the geopolitical rivalry in the South China Sea, and the ongoing conflicts involving Israel, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and the Houthis are resulting in significant loss of life. Additionally, the circumstances in the Horn of Africa are increasingly alarming, with the civil war in Sudan and internal strife in Ethiopia and Somalia raising serious concerns. In this brief interview, we intend to field questions on global and regional issues as well as domestic matters of greater relevance to our people.

Question: We will begin our interview by addressing significant global and regional issues. The first question pertains to the recent Presidential election in the United States, where President Trump has secured a decisive victory, (after an interlude of four years), for another term. With the inauguration of the new Administration, what potential changes or implications might we expect in the current policies of this superpower and the existing global order?

Answer: The United States has historically played a significant role in global affairs, and the return of Donald Trump to power should be examined within this broader context. What was the role of the U.S. following the end of World War, and how has its position evolved in the realm of global politics? What impacts has it had on international relations? In the past three decades, particularly in the post-Cold War era, how have various administrations in Washington sought to establish a unipolar world order? What influence have changes in presidential leadership had on this effort? During his first term, what signals did Trump convey regarding U.S. foreign policy? Looking ahead his Presidency after his re-election, what can we anticipate?

Will there be changes, and if so, what type of changes might we expect? It is essential to analyze these questions in relation to past and historical policies.

Let us begin with the concept of "Make America Great Again" (MAGA). This slogan has been prominently featured throughout the election, manifesting in various forms, including symbols on apparel, and has been a cornerstone of Trump's campaign rhetoric. Essentially, MAGA embodies a commitment to restoring America's preeminent strength and influence on the global stage. This perspective implicitly acknowledges that the United States is no longer the dominant global power it once was. Trump's support among many Americans reflects a shared sentiment that the U.S. is no longer the unchallenged leader in international affairs.

What are the primary factors contributing to the decline of American power? Why is it essential to restore that power at this juncture? These questions merit thorough examination. Presently, the United States does not wield the same level of influence it did during and immediately after the Cold War. While it is challenging to generalize, there is a prevailing perception among American elites that resonates with these realities.

Following the conclusion of World War II, U.S. administrations played a dominant role in global affairs during a tumultuous period. For nearly 50 years, the world was marked by intense power rivalry known as the Cold War, whose hallmark was the competition between the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact and the U.S.-led NATO Alliance. Ultimately, the Cold War came to an end with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This outcome was not solely a result of U.S. strength; rather, it stemmed from the policies of Perestroika and other reforms introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, alongside strategic miscalculations by Soviet leadership. Consequently, this period is often perceived as a victory for leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

The end of the Cold War fostered a desire for a unipolar world order, which in turn gave rise to the US notion and predilection of "dominating and conquering the world." This mindset was accompanied by the belief that no power should compete with the United States in terms of economic, military, or technological capabilities. It can be said that the end of the Cold War led to a misguided perception regarding U.S. global standing. The ambition to impose and consolidate a unipolar system and the aspiration to assume a role as the "global leader and enforcer" resulted in significant miscalculations. As a response, the policy of "containment" emerged, aimed at limiting the influence of those perceived as rivals. Over the past three

decades, particularly during the Administrations of Bill Clinton and his successors, U.S. foreign policy has been fundamentally shaped by this principle.

Indeed, the ramifications of this philosophy are evident in ongoing conflicts such as the situation in Ukraine; the tensions surrounding Taiwan; as well as in the various other global disputes which have been fueled by the desire for increased influence and power. For the past 30 years, this policy has been executed through direct interventions or by utilizing proxies or “Anchors”. The consequences can be assessed in greater detail and on a case by case basis.

Initially, Trump introduced the concept of "Make America Great Again" during his first- term so as to restore America’s dominant and unassailable global power; which had diminished in his perception. He identified China and Russia as the principal rivals of the United States, with China being viewed as the foremost competitor. While Trump believed that relations with Russia could be improved to some extent, he regarded China as the primary challenge to U.S. dominance.

The pronounced intention of imposing tariffs - ranging from 10% to 25% - is rooted in the objective of strengthening America's position and containing China's expanding global influence. The details can be further elaborated with accurate statistical figures. In any case, the indisputable fact remains that it is China which has constituted the greatest threat to U.S. preeminence; indeed, the principal cause of America's loss of power relative to China's ascendance. One may skim through various statistical data and indices on global ranking of nations. But the fact remains that no nation surpasses China, at this point in time, in economic power. Those who contend otherwise must provide persuasive metrics that establish their claims. The United States is not in a position to compete with China on economic grounds.

When it comes to military power, the question does not revolve around the sheer number of nuclear warheads; this is not the sole determinant of superiority. First, it is essential to define what constitutes military power? Globally, what criteria must a nation meet to be considered as a superpower in terms of influence and dominance? In this context, the economy emerges as a primary factor.

While the United States has historically been seen as a military powerhouse, China's advancements cannot be overlooked. The notion of a unipolar world, predicated on perceived technological, economic, and military superiority, does not align with the current reality. Since the 1990s, China has significantly enhanced its role on the global stage, making substantial strides economically, technologically, and

militarily, as well as increasing its influence across Asia, Africa, Europe, and even within the United States.

Compared to the Chinese economy, the U.S. national debt has soared to approximately \$32 trillion, with projections suggesting it could rise to \$34 trillion or even \$36 trillion. This raises critical questions: Why has this debt escalated to such levels? How did the United States arrive at this point? What factors have contributed to the decline of the world's former leading economy?

Notably, 25% of this debt is owed to China. This situation emerged from a prevalent assumption in the West that regarded itself as "superior" while underestimating China's capacity for innovation; viewing it primarily as a nation limited to copying or reverse-engineering rather than possessing the endowment and capability for original invention. The perception that China's labor and energy costs were low prompted many companies to relocate factories offshore in order to capitalize on these perceived operational advantages.

Ultimately, economic strength is measured by production capacity. In this regard, China's industrial output has grown exponentially, positioning it as the world's leading economy. Furthermore, China operates without the burden of a national debt. The case of Europe can be discussed later. To revert to the main point and in view of the factors spelled out above, it is evident that America is no longer the preeminent economy globally and has diminished in its status as a superpower.

At the onset of the unipolar global system, Russia was viewed as a significant threat due to its vast geography, technological advancements, and military capabilities. However, this perception has evolved, and the current landscape presents a different reality.

To restore the United States to its previous status as the greatest power, it must regain dominance in the global economy. In this context, the U.S. has sought to counter China's rising influence through increased tariffs and taxes. The objective is to reclaim lost power, which is likely to involve restricting the entry of Chinese products into the U.S. market. This approach is predicated on and emphasizes bolstering domestic production, both in terms of quantity and quality. Furthermore, the declared intention of applying similar measures to imports from Mexico and Canada, including proposed tariffs of up to 25%, illustrates the extent of volatility in the US economy. These strategies highlight the vulnerability of the U.S. economy, which has increasingly transitioned from being a dominant producer to a consumer market. Consequently, the U.S. is pursuing a protectionist policy aimed at

limiting foreign products from entering the domestic market. It can be asked, however, whether such measures are feasible.

The current Administrations in Washington, particularly under President Biden, have faced challenges, and the US economic, technological, and diplomatic stature appear to have diminished in global prominence, revealing signs of weakness.

This situation prompts further and related inquiries: Is NATO a reliable alliance? Is the European Union still strong? What are the underlying dynamics of these alliances? Are they still perceived as sources of support for the United States? These issues warrant critical analysis from various perspectives.

It is not surprising that the challenges currently facing the United States can be traced back to policies implemented over the last 35 years. The concept of MAGA represents a reactive response to lost opportunities and deteriorating conditions. To genuinely restore America's greatness, it is essential to adopt policies that align with this vision. Presently, existing policies primarily focus on “containment”, as illustrated by the current situation in Europe, where the strategy of containing Russia has taken precedence. However, the landscape has evolved, with the emergence of another more powerful country – that is China. Consequently, the central issue shifts on "the containment of China."

In this respect, strategies for the “containment of China” have included addressing the situation in Taiwan, fostering new alliances, capitalizing on disputes between China and India, and forming partnerships with countries such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines in the South China Sea. The situation in Taiwan is often cited as a rationale for these containment efforts. Nevertheless, the feasibility of these strategies remains questionable.

The dynamics of economic change and growth in Asia, particularly the collective advancements in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam, cannot be overlooked. Additionally, North Korea's technological progress poses a significant concern. The economic resurgence of Japan and South Korea also raises uncertainties for the United States, as these nations have emerged as strategic economic competitors. Consequently, a pressing issue has become what the future portends even to these alliances.

Implementing the MAGA initiative is not a straightforward or easy task; it requires a nuanced understanding of how to navigate these emerging dynamics effectively. The situation in Europe is similarly precarious, raising critical questions about the extent to which the U.S. can rely on its European Allies. Furthermore, NATO's role

in military, technological and economic dimensions must be reassessed. Many European economies have experienced significant depletion, resulting in reduced capacity to make substantial contributions to collective defense. Despite assertions from economic elites, European nations may lack the economic strength needed to support robust commitments.

The European Union is attempting to expand by incorporating former members of the Warsaw Pact, such as Ukraine and Georgia. This raises further questions about the reliability of U.S. alliances with the EU in promoting the MAGA agenda. Trump has suggested that dependence on NATO may not serve America's interests, especially given that many NATO member states have not met their financial obligations. His approach towards NATO and Europe, along with its potential ramifications, warrants careful examination on a case-by-case basis.

Though it is not a priority, the situation in Latin America remains a significant topic in its own right. For the US, the primary focus, at the moment, is on Asia, followed by developments in Europe. The issues raised by Trump regarding Canada and Mexico can be viewed as its regional concerns. The historical confrontation between the United States and Latin America can be traced back to the Cold War era, particularly during the crises involving Cuba.

The current landscape across much of South America is marked by instability. One of Washington's major policies has become the restriction in the flow of migrants, primarily through initiatives such as building barriers and seeking collaborative solutions with South American nations. But these approaches fail to address the root causes and potential remedies for migration. The discourse surrounding migration has become heavily laden with emotional considerations.

US much-diminished production capacity has contributed, so to speak, to a superficial and artificial quality of life. It is no longer a matter of what you earn for the work that you do. The notion of America as a "promised land" drives the mass exodus from Latin America, including Mexico. Indeed, many migrants from Latin America find themselves unable to support their families back home through remittances. The political landscape, combined with manipulation of the migration narrative, has further exacerbated the issue, making it a prominent item on the agenda.

Moreover, domestic challenges in the United States are becoming increasingly pronounced, particularly regarding access to healthcare and other essential services.

These issues compound the difficulties faced by both migrants and the broader American populace.

What is expected of Trump in such circumstances? What measures could he implement on a global scale across critical sectors – military, technological, political, diplomatic, and, above all, economic? What position might he adopt regarding Europe? What actions could he pursue concerning the ongoing crisis in Ukraine? How will he handle relations with Putin? In which areas might they find opportunities for collaboration? What new proposals can they develop together?

These questions are numerous and complex. Therefore, it is essential to reference historical contexts to analyze whether Trump, following his significant electoral victory, can bring about meaningful change. The challenge of making America great again is substantial. What responses or outcomes might arise from Trump's efforts to implement the MAGA agenda?

The international landscape is not a "one-player game." How might other nations react? What position will China take? What is Russia's trajectory amid its current circumstances? How will Europe respond? Additionally, how will key players in Asia—such as India, Pakistan, South Korea, Japan, and Australia—react? What does the future hold for Latin America?

One has to put all these factors into consideration to have a clear image. Can the attempt to revive the previously unsuccessful unipolar world order succeed after 30 years since its inception? How much support can this concept garner? Were the foundational pillars of the unipolar world system effective, and where are they currently headed? What changes may emerge from these shifts? These pivotal questions necessitate thorough exploration. Trump's initiatives could potentially come to new developments, but the critical concern is where these efforts will ultimately lead?

Today, there is a widespread demand for a new global order—one that is not dictated by one or two superpowers, but rather an order that is just, fair, and inclusive. A multipolar world system is one possible approach; however, the concept of multipolarity itself requires further clarity. What constitutes this new global order? Various forums are emerging, such as BRICS, alongside numerous initiatives and attempts to reshape international relations. These efforts reflect aspirations for change, yet they also raise questions about whether this new global system can offer a coherent vision and a clear roadmap for the future. Is it truly inclusive and successful?

Given the current global situation, what is the impact of Trump's re-election? What short-term and long-term changes could he implement? The potential trends cannot be deciphered by throwing a dice or a speculative mind-set. Still, there are indications from his first term that can guide our understanding. Even now, he is providing hints that shed light on his potential approaches. How can he effectively address pressing issues while navigating significant challenges? While it is possible to speculate and envision various scenarios, now is not the time to draw definitive conclusions. Ultimately, what matters is how we prepare to confront all potential outcomes so as to address the challenges effectively.

Africa is often marginalized and overlooked in discussions surrounding global issues. However, it is important to consider our own region and how Trump's policies might affect it. What potential policies could he implement regarding our region, and what impact might they have? This topic is broad and intricate, leaving many questions unanswered. On our part, any meaningful discussion or analysis requires a comprehensive and detailed perspective to provide a clear understanding of the situation. This is a challenging task, but it is essential for drafting and implementing effective policies. Addressing any issue necessitates a proper framework and a thorough understanding of the underlying dynamics at play. The points raised here serve as indicators that can help tackle major challenges. US Domestic issues, too, warrant in-depth examination.

What has Biden been communicating, and what about Harris? Their discussions have often centered on minor or trivial issues. Were these truly the most pressing topics? Could they not address more significant issues relevant to America and the American people? Is this a challenge they can overcome?

As we consider what Trump might do upon assuming office again, it is essential to approach the situation with critical analysis and caution. This is not a new topic for us. We had indeed undertaken similar exercises and initiatives when Trump took office during his first Presidential term. We explored what the possibilities were and what our policies of engagement should be? We are aware and recognize that we must avoid a self-centered perspective and instead consider the broader context. In the initial years of Trump's Administration, there was an expectation of a shift in U.S. policy. Unfortunately, that policy remained largely unchanged, and hostilities and sanctions against Eritrea continued without any concrete improvement throughout his term.

Where do we stand at this moment? It is imperative that we conduct a thorough analysis and full appraisal, and be ready engagement by develop appropriate working documents. We cannot simply wait and hope for favorable outcomes.

What is expected of us now? How do we engage in the context of various possible developments and scenarios? We must be fully prepared for these tasks. And as the current year is coming to an end, we can confidently say that we have done our homework and are looking forward to what may unfold.

Question: Mr. President, various initiatives were taken to resolve the civil war in Sudan that broke out in April 2023, but they have not succeeded. Why? In view of General Al-Burhan's working visit to Eritrea this week, what should be the role of the Sudanese people, Sudanese political forces, as well as the international community?

Answer: There are two concepts within this discussion that require careful articulation. First, the term "political forces" should be extracted from general rhetoric, and I will elaborate on this point later. There is also the phrase "international community", which conveys a misleading impression of a cohesive global entity capable of shouldering responsibilities.

Returning to the situation in Sudan, the conflict has now dragged into its second year. This situation is, for evident reasons, a pressing issue in our region. Looking back at the tragic situation that has unfolded in the country, one must question whether this conflict is rational or justifiable by any standards. To fully comprehend the unfolding current reality, it is essential to examine the geopolitical significance of Sudan, along with the origins and dynamics of the raging internal strife.

The situation in Sudan is not a distant issue; it has indeed a direct impact on us. The Sudanese people have played a significant role in our struggle for independence and our nation-building efforts. Their contributions cannot be underrated. To understand the current dynamics, we must reflect on the state of affairs before and after the 1990s. How did we engage with Sudan during these periods? What was the nature of our bilateral relationship, as well as our regional interactions? Our stance during the discussions surrounding South Sudan serves as a pertinent example.

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was established in Asmara with the explicit aim of addressing the challenges in Sudan. Although it operated from

Asmara, it ultimately did not achieve its objectives. The people of South Sudan were largely opposed to secession. Key figures like John Garang and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) advocated for unity, expressing a near-unanimous, 99% preference for a united Sudan, with secession seen as a last resort at 1%.

Regrettably, a myriad of complexities and external interventions—often driven by hidden agendas—led to the secession and subsequent independence of South Sudan in 2011. The primary goal of the extensive efforts and sacrifices made was to realize the vision of a 'New Sudan'—a nation founded on the principles of citizenship, where individuals are not differentiated by ethnicity, tribe, clan, or skin color. This vision was widely discussed and resonated deeply within society. It was not a new invention, but rather a fundamental human aspiration. Had a conducive environment been established, this idea could have flourished in Sudan. However, certain individuals within the regime, motivated by religious and other agendas, were not willing to embrace this idea as a solution. Their actions—both direct and indirect—contributed to the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

The situation in Sudan, which has persisted for 30 years since 1989, has become increasingly intolerable for its citizens. Numerous conflicts and developments have unfolded during this period, and we have been firsthand witnesses to these events. Since the arrival of Osama bin Laden in Sudan until 1996, the emergence of various alliances signaled troubling developments. Nevertheless, we remained optimistic and continuously sought to contribute to positive solutions.

At the end, a popular uprising (Intifada) erupted. This uprising was spontaneous, not organized or led by any political party. It would be inaccurate to suggest that we anticipated this eruption. The ongoing challenges faced by the Sudanese people culminated in this spontaneous uprising, which succeeded in ousting the regime.

The key question is: what were the aspirations of the people? Despite its spontaneous nature, the uprising demonstrated the political maturity and consciousness of the population. The citizens were acutely aware that the existing system was not compatible with aspirations and needs of the country.

The situation in Sudan is primarily the sovereign matter of the Sudanese people. However, as we live in the same neighborhood, close consultations to explore viable solutions is imperative due to the obvious ramifications. Our past experiences have provided important lessons in this regard. We recognize that to foster peace in Sudan, it is imperative for us engage actively in this process. This commitment is not merely

based on perceived concerns; rather, it stems from the understanding that stability in Sudan can yield positive outcomes for our own nation. For this reason, we submitted a proposal in mid-2022, which represents our modest contribution and fulfills our responsibility to promote the mutual interests of both countries.

Like many regions around the world, Sudan faces a significant challenge in the way of nation-building. While the political journey of Sudan since gaining independence in 1956 has been relatively unique and more successful relative to many regions in Africa, it has not been without its difficulties. The emergence of the issue surrounding South Sudan presented a substantial obstacle. As the South Sudan situation remained unresolved, additional challenges arose, particularly in regions such as Blue Nile, Kordofan, Darfur, and Eastern Sudan.

Later, the accession to power by the National Congress Party - "*Muetemer Watani*" - further disrupted the nation-building process and severely undermined Sudan's economy. Their actions isolated the country and compromised the interests of its people, ultimately leading to a significant degradation of Sudan's status.

In the event, the Sudanese people declared that they have had "Enough". What is the way forward? There are no new (miraculous) novelties; the only viable solution lies in the concept of nation-building. Sudan must evolve into a nation that embodies the citizenship aspirations of all its people. But how do we achieve this? Despite numerous initiatives and efforts to address the issues at hand, the problems remain unresolved. The root cause does not lie with the Sudanese people themselves but rather with external interference. The notion of "*Huruya Weteqeyr*" (The Forces for Freedom and Change) emerged from various quarters.

What does "*Huruya Weteqeyr*" represent in the first place? Historically, there were traditional political parties. What role did they play in this context? Is it necessary to discuss these old political parties at this juncture? Can we instead focus on new political parties? For now, let us set these considerations aside; there is no need to debate this issue at this juncture.

The Sudanese people are fully aware of their needs and have successfully removed the previous regime, expressing a collective desire for a bright future where they can thrive in peace. In this context, the Sovereign Council has assumed responsibility for the transitional period. It is essential to focus on the nature of the Sovereign Council itself rather than the identities of its members. When the popular uprising occurred, the Sudanese Army took on the critical role of maintaining order to prevent the situation from deteriorating further. Thus, the Sovereign Council is entrusted

with this trusteeship by default, acting as a bridge to guide the Sudanese people towards their desired future. The notion that other individuals or groups can assume this responsibility or effectively resolve the ongoing challenges may complicate matters further.

It is evident that no other entity can provide innovative or exceptional solutions. But, this does not mean that the Sovereign Council is the sole decision-maker. For those familiar with Sudan's history, the Sovereign Council represents the most viable solution, and we have affirmed our position on this matter without any ambiguity or equivocation. The Sovereign Council is the body entrusted with steering the country towards the path/destiny of stability and internal peace. This is the central premise. Dwelling on the viewpoints of groups such as “*Huruya Weteqeyr*”, as well as the traditional political parties, will not be constructive at this juncture. Necessary discussions or agendas can be revisited or accommodated once the Sovereign Council fulfills its entrusted responsibilities.

In the current situation in Sudan, rivalry among political forces and individuals is unproductive and will not lead to any solution. Internal acrimonies and rivalries only opens the door to external agendas and meddling, which is detrimental to prevalence of enduring peace. The ongoing meddling has caused the situation to spiral out of control, leading to a scenario where the core issues facing Sudan are no longer in the hands of its people.

New political forces have emerged recently. We have to ask who are these new political forces and what basis are they organizing conferences and holding meetings? Such activities appear to be entirely driven by external agendas, particularly given Sudan's pivotal role in the region.

The primary agenda involves utilizing Sudan as a strategic platform or springboard to expand interferences from Libya to Chad, the Central African Republic, and South Sudan. Numerous “initiatives” – which are in essence bazaars of meddling – have emerged that primarily serve external agendas. Such initiatives facilitate external interventions, which we strongly oppose. The situation in Sudan must be approached with utmost seriousness.

In May 2022, we submitted a proposal that advocated for the Sovereign Council to assume responsibility for the transition. Needless to emphasize, the matter fundamentally concerns the Sudanese people, who are well-acquainted with their own circumstances and do not require external advice. However, sharing our perspectives on the matter cannot be misconstrued as improper. Our proposal was

not controversial, and it was accepted by the Sovereign Council. We never claimed that our proposal is the best possible option; if there are better alternatives, we encourage their presentation. We submitted our proposal in the spirit of making our modest contribution; without any publicity or media fanfare. The feedback we received indicated that our proposal was well-received and recognized by the Sovereign Council as a viable starting point.

There are certainly additional points that could enhance the proposal and accommodate necessary suggestions and improvements. However, there is no substitute for the framework that we originally proposed in mid-2022 and that can be examined today by any interested person. We are, therefore, not inclined to engage in unproductive discussions. In the event, wranglings at this stage will not be fruitful and we should not dwell on pronouncements and opinions of diverse political parties and combatant forces etc., regardless of whether they hail from the East, Blue Nile, Kurdofan, or Darfur. As I stressed earlier, it is essential that the Sovereign Council take responsibility for realizing the aspirations of the Sudanese people. This does not mean that the Sovereign Council should seize or control power; rather, it suggests that the Sovereign Council should guide the Sudanese people towards a stable situation. Once stability is achieved, the Sudanese people will determine what is best for their future.

Accordingly, we should refrain from engaging in discussions about meaningless meetings and initiatives that may lead to endless debates, whether they occur within a specific country, the UN, the African Union, or regional organizations. Proliferation of initiatives often prolongs the situation and complicates the issues at hand. Time is of the essence and should not be wasted in fruitless efforts.

Those who have alternative political views, philosophies, ideologies, or options should prepare their proposals for the post-transition period. Individuals with diverse economic, cultural, social, military, or security programs can present their ideas then.

Our position on these matters is longstanding and consistent. Recently, Al Burhan visited Asmara, where we focused on this issue; we had no other agenda. We have not extended any special support to him or assumed a position on his side. It must also be recalled that Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) was visiting Asmara frequently until the very last moment before the war erupted. We shared our perspectives equally with both of them while also considering their viewpoints. It is surprising that despite all these consultations, conflict ensued. Outsiders may offer their speculative interpretations or analyses, but neither side has a clear explanation for the outbreak of the war. There were no justifications whatsoever for resorting to

armed conflict. Even those claiming to understand the reasons fail to provide valid answers.

In our view, the conflict is in essence a proxy war. The complexities of the ongoing situation are extensive, involving factors such as geography, military mobilizations, logistical supplies, diplomacy, and media coverage. External interventions are exacerbating and prolonging the conflict, with various actors exploiting the situation for their own interests. This is often presented under the pretext of “humanitarian concerns”, with exclusive focus on lingering starvation and displacement while glossing over the fundamental underlying causes and enduring solutions.

If genuine efforts had been undertaken since 2021/22 when our proposal was presented, the desired transition to enduring peace and stability would have been smoothly achieved and the conflict that ensued avoided. The suffering of the Sudanese people has been unnecessarily prolonged by proliferation of meaningless meetings which have only resulted in prolongation of the conflict, the sufferings and displacement of the people, and the expansion of makeshift refugee camps.

I call this hypocrisy and the shedding of crocodile tears. Why do we postpone addressing a problem that could be resolved today until next year? This procrastination is perpetrated by those who claim to represent the people. Such actions are illogical and unacceptable.

External meddling must cease if we are to resolve this issue. The core concern is not about supporting or opposing Al Burhan, nor is it about conspiring against Hemedti; rather, it is the welfare of the Sudanese people that must take precedence. Despite Sudan being the breadbasket of the region, makeshift camps continue to be set up here and there. Sudan possesses abundant resources, and the Sudanese people do not wish to abandon their homes unless they are forced to do so. They are capable of addressing their challenges without external assistance. Unfortunately, fomenting internal strife will only serve external agendas and vested interests.

In this context, we have no choice but to fulfill our moral obligation. This is not an act of charity; rather, it was our duty to submit our proposal at the appropriate time. However, excessive external meddling complicates the situation.

The interventions are coming through various routes: Libya, Chad, South Sudan, and Ethiopia.

In our recent meeting with Al Burhan, we reaffirmed our position: there must be constructive contributions from all regional stakeholders. Eritrea, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other neighbouring countries should engage in meaningful consultations, not only to address the situation in Sudan but also to tackle other pressing issues in the region. Collective efforts can yield significant results, and this has been a central theme in our discussions.

Ultimately, peace must prevail across our entire neighborhood, which comprises four components: The Nile Basin, the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the Gulf. This entire region must be at peace; as true peace is achieved through collective effort. One cannot claim to be an “island of peace” while the rest of the region faces turmoil, and Sudan is a pivotal part of this dynamic. This is what we discussed with South Sudan during our recent meeting at an International Summit. The meeting had no other purpose than to foster mutual understanding and encouraging South Sudan’s positive contribution. I emphasize this because the situation in Sudan requires a detailed understanding. The international community has no compelling reason to intervene.

Recently, Ramtane Lamamra visited Asmara to discuss the situation in Sudan. We welcomed him and shared our proposal, engaging in a three-and-a-half-hour discussion to convey our thoughts.

What is the benefit of the "aid business"? What does Sudan and the region gain in the continuous displacement of the people? Clarity on these matters is emerging with time. All actors, particularly the Sovereign Council, must bear their responsibilities.

Following Al Burhan’s visit to Asmara, some have alleged that Eritrea seeks to support him... that Eritrea has its own agenda. What agenda could we possibly have? Why would we assist Al Burhan? Against whom would we be acting? Our primary interest lies solely in the well-being of the Sudanese people and the stability of Sudan. The interests of the Sudanese people must come first. Any other intentions appear designed to deliberately complicate the situation. Over the past two years, there have been efforts to keep the issue unresolved by establishing forums in various locations to obstruct viable solutions.

As I have emphasized earlier, the deliberate prolongation and attendant suffering of the people cannot be accepted passively. In the event, it is imperative that we enhance our efforts. All our previous engagements with various countries, including discussions with Al Burhan, center around a singular, clear position articulated in the proposal we presented to the Sovereign Council two years ago.

Question: Mr. President, the people of Ethiopia continue to suffer from persistent internal conflicts. Furthermore, tensions between Somalia and Ethiopia regarding Somaliland have escalated concerns in the region. Some parties, including certain media outlets, are attempting to depict the Tripartite Summit between Eritrea, Egypt, and Somalia as an alliance directed against Ethiopia. What insights can you provide on this matter?

Answer: Most of messages disseminated through various social media platforms and other media outlets are misleading and largely speculative. It is in fact distortion and disinformation. In today's context, distortion and disinformation have become weapons in their own right. What does it mean to label this alliance as being against Ethiopia? I would ask which Ethiopia they are referring to. Does this emanate from concern for Ethiopia, or is it merely intended to stoke conflict? They speculate about the Tripartite Summit while distorting its objectives so as to foment discord. This is a clear indication of an external agenda at play.

Anyone genuinely interested in analyzing the issue would not arrive at such conclusions. On what basis can one claim that this is an alliance against Ethiopia? How? And quite sadly, such peculiar speculations have come to be accepted as “normal”. This acceptance stems from a lack of objective questioning. In any case, which Ethiopia is being referred to? There are so-called experts who specialize in spinning false narratives. Why do they not choose to view the situation from a constructive perspective? Why frame it as a conspiracy? Presenting this as an alliance against Ethiopia serves no purpose other than to further external agendas.

The Tripartite Summit did not invoke any new issues. We visit Egypt, and officials from Egypt visit us routinely and periodically to discuss our common concern: the stability of our region. Regional destabilization stems from imbalance. Therefore, all countries in the region must play their part in fostering stability. We urge Egypt to fulfill its role in this regard. Similarly, Saudi Arabia and other regional players should also contribute to this effort. It is essential that we resolve our own problems in the region without externeous intervention. For over 30 years, we have worked tirelessly to deter such outside interference across various issues.

How should water resources in the region be managed? This is a critical discussion. Why is the Nile issue a source of conflict? Where does the problem originate? Why are there speculations about an alliance between Eritrea and Egypt?

One of the tools for fomenting discord is speculative lies revolving around the Millennium Dam. Much has been said about the Nile. During the armed struggle, it was referred as the Tana Beles Project, managed by Salini, an Italian company. The agenda of that project may warrant further elaboration at some appropriate time. Rumours were rife; one of which claimed that “Egypt wanted to sell water to Israel through the Suez Canal.”

In 1993, I traveled to Cairo with Meles to participate at the OAU Summit for the first time. We exchanged views on those rumours.

Melles asked for my opinion whether he should the matter with the Egyptian authorities. My frank opinion was that this was not necessary in view of other pressing matters in our first attendance of the OAU Summit. He agreed with my opinion.

Later in the afternoon, Melles was visibly upset. I asked him what was wrong? .

“I should have followed your advice. I just met Omer Suleiman and spoke to him about the rumor,” he told me.

He continued: “You know what he said to me?”

“He asked me who I was to even broach the issue. But I’ll show him; I will bring him to his knees,” he asserted.

This is how the problem developed. Subsequently, there was a push to rebuild the Ethiopian Air Force, directly related to the Nile issue. Then, the Millennium Dam became a focal point. Statements were made about subduing the Egyptians, akin to Turkey's actions with Iraq and Syria. When such perilous ideas are raised, one must consider their ultimate trajectory. Shortly thereafter, they began sending their MiG fighter planes to Bulgaria and Romania for maintenance. However, this was not solely Meles’s issue; other players were ready to exploit the scenario. They offered to construct the Millennium Dam for him. Therefore, when construction commenced in 2011, it was not just an Ethiopian initiative; it was a direct continuation of the Tana Beles project. Numerous issues arose later, including utilization of the Setit River, which we ultimately opted to abandon. I have digressed into these details in very broad terms in order to underline the historical perspectives.

The Millenium Dam is slated to produce 5,000 to 6,000 megawatts of energy. However, what real value would 6,000 megawatts have for Ethiopia? Essentially not

much, in view of its aggregate needs. Issue is why would Ethiopia risk conflict with Sudan and Egypt over this?

In spite of the pronounced intention of selling electricity to neighboring countries, the fact is 6,000 megawatts would barely meet a quarter of Ethiopia's energy needs. Total output of 30,000 to 40,000 megawatts would be necessary to truly support Ethiopia's development objectives. In this context and in relative terms, it is plainly unreasonable to go to war over a project like the Millennium Dam.

I am dwelling on these details to dispel the erroneous notion that the Tripartite Meeting represents an anti-Ethiopia alliance. Why would Ethiopia be marginalized? What motives do we have to conspire against Ethiopia? Why would we invite various parties solely to attack Ethiopia? Such ideas are unfounded. Ethiopia has every right to seek stability. We have no interest in entertaining notions that foment regional tension and instability. We cherish agendas of regional cooperation, coordination and complementarity and we are prepared to engage in open discussions with all interested parties.

It is quite easy for certain parties to disseminate false information, instigate unrest, and escalate tensions to serve external agendas. They seek out topics under the guise of news, aiming to provoke crises. Their motivations and agendas are clear, but we should not engage with or entertain these misleading agendas.

We have come a long way, avoiding involvement in such dramas. Indeed, all the meetings we have conducted have nothing to do with Ethiopia. Ethiopia is facing its own challenges, and we do not aim to exacerbate its internal problems. If there is an alarming situation in Ethiopia, it should concern us as well, and it requires consultations for resolution. This is not a secret. However, if someone is accusing us of conspiring against Ethiopia, they must be out of touch with reality. Such inciting narratives must be countered by our media outlets and the public events we organize.

Continuous distortion and the twisting of facts have become ingrained these days. We need to debunk these false narratives. We must challenge these falsehoods and demonstrate their fallacy and inaccuracy.

Any agenda regarding the Millennium Dam, the Nile Basin, or other regional issues do not originate from local actors; they are driven by external agendas. These entities seek to stir up conflict to destabilize our Neighborhood and undermine peace and stability. We cannot stand by idly while this occurs. It is our duty to counter such disinformation by presenting the truth and making our constructive goals known. This remains a priority in our efforts. True, we normally avoid entanglement in

unnecessary acrimony. This does not mean that we will keep mum in the face of preposterous lies and distortions.

Question: Mr. President, the leaders of the TPLF instigated, despite advice to the contrary, a war of insurrection that have inculcated massive calamity to the people of Tigray. As a result of these crises, the leadership in Tigray has become fragmented, and the political situation has reached a critical climax. In this context, there are claims that the Government of Eritrea is dissatisfied with the Pretoria Agreement and is opposed to the peace process. What message does the Government of Eritrea wish to convey to the peoples of Tigray and other peoples in Ethiopia as well as to their political forces.

Answer – There are several points that should be stressed. This situation – this “game” – has been ongoing for over 50 years, and, yet, satisfactory explanations/justifications remain elusive. Our primary focus has always been clear: we do not need such conflicts. For instance, when the issue of the Millennium Dam arose, the rationality of its construction should have been evaluated soberly and objectively. Unfortunately, this was not done. Searching for solutions after the damage has already occurred is an evasive exercise in futility.

We are committed to addressing the genuine needs of the region, not for heavenly reward but out of a sincere desire to contribute positively. This does not mean that our efforts are solely self-interested; rather, we aim to promote stability in the region as a whole, which is crucial for us.

The stability of all our neighboring countries is fundamental. Much can be said regarding the nature and actions of the regimes in Ethiopia in the entire period after the Second World War. Since the early 1970s, we have recognized the potential for collaboration and consistently rejected any actions that do not serve the collective interests of the region.

If the source of these problems stemmed from their own agendas, it could have been addressed. However, it transcends their own local agendas. The issue of Badme, for example, was a surprise to us. As it is well-known, there are no good-faith controversies whatsoever on Badme. But, influenced by external agendas, it became a pretext for fomenting conflict as it was indeed the case with Hanish and other putative disputes.

When I learned about what was brewing up regarding Badme, I communicated with Meles over the phone although I am not keen and usually avoid this mode of communication. I stressed to him that we should avoid any escalation. I insisted that any presumed dispute could be resolved through bilateral dialogue, and if necessary, we could seek the facilitation of a third party. If these mechanisms fail, we could also go to court as a last resort. We had learned valuable lessons from the Hanish situation. I emphasized that we did not draw the boundaries and were not in a position to alter them.

These suggestions were made prior to the submission of the Badme case by the Ethiopian Government to the Parliament.

Unfortunately, war erupted and escalated to an unnecessary level.

Finally, the Algiers Agreement was signed as a resolution to the conflict. As previously noted, the border dispute was not the primary cause of this conflict. It is well understood that the borders of many African, Asian, and other countries were drawn during a specific historical period. We have no option but to respect these boundaries and refrain from engaging in warfare under the pretext of territorial disputes. The Hanish issue served as a significant learning experience for us; we were unable to resolve the border dispute through bilateral discussions or mediation. In the end, the only viable option was to seek legal resolution, based on the sanctity of colonial boundaries.

Prior to the Badme case, they had raised the issue of customs, suggesting that all cross-border transactions of various commodities, even petty trade in poultry etc. should be conducted through bank accounts. As it may be recalled, we had previously been working to establish a body for policy harmonization aimed at keeping our borders open for the flow of goods and services. However, this initiative was abruptly abandoned, and a new modality introduced which lacked the necessary institutional framework to facilitate its implementation. In practical terms, requiring the opening of a bank account for cross-border transactions proved unfeasible. The putative border dispute occurred against this backdrop. These facts are well-documented, with detailed records of daily interactions.

Eventually, the Algiers Agreement was signed, serving as a final and binding resolution with no latitude for appeal. The case was settled legally, with the verdict based on ‘colonial boundaries’ and ‘applicable international law’, with colonial boundaries serving as the primary reference point.

As elaborated in my response to the first question, these conflicts ultimately stem from Washington's hostility towards Eritrea. Their intention was to impose punitive measures – the word “punish” was used – which raises significant ethical questions. Why would one embroil a nation in turmoil and bloodshed? Every conflict in the region, including the issues of Hanish, Badme, and other subsequent border disputes, does not stem from governments and political groups in the region. It is rather driven by Washington's agenda.

Physical demarcation was supposed to be implemented following the verdict, without the need for further negotiations. However, this was obstructed. Nevertheless, the border was precisely and virtually demarcated using modern technology. This process utilized Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to accurately delineate the border, leaving no room for ambiguity. As such, the border issue has been fully settled once and for all.

Yet, this legal solution was not embraced by the State Department, which called for revisiting the matter and initiating new discussions under the pretext of facilitating dialogue among residents on both sides of the border. This was argued under the false premise of avoiding division of homes.

It is unnecessary to divulge now the names of the particular US officials who were pushing for this unwarranted process. However, one must question why legally-settled matters were being raised in a verdict that was final and binding. In the event, the two-decade stalemate between Eritrea and Ethiopia can clearly be attributed to Washington's deliberate meddling.

Furthermore, and as another instrument for compounding the situation, the issue of imposing sanctions on Eritrea emerged in 2009 by falsely accusing it of extending support to Al Shabaab. It is well known that we have long been engaged in the fight against terrorism. How can we be accused of supporting terrorism when we actively fought Al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden during their presence in Sudan, even severing diplomatic ties with that country? Such accusations were baseless and unfounded. Eventually, sanctions were imposed against us during the Christmas holiday of 2009, a time when most delegations at the UNSC were on holiday. The sustained hostility, which spans 80 years, cannot be confined to, and goes beyond, Ethiopia.

Recently, change or reform was proclaimed in Ethiopia. What constitutes reform? Will it effectively help Ethiopia in overcoming the challenges that it is facing? The issue of ‘Ethnic Polarization’ primarily stemmed from the political system established in Ethiopia in 1995. However, delving into the specifics of the current

situation is not possible at this point in time. We had our own perspectives when the concept was first floated in 1995. In this context, we can discuss the historical relationship we had with the Marxist-Leninist League of Tigray (MLLT)/TPLF for the past 50 years; in its broader dynamics and challenges. We are well-acquainted with the issue of ethnicity in Ethiopia, which has been a focal point in our political discourse all along.

There is no need to revert to outdated structures and frameworks of feudalism in order to achieve nation-building in Ethiopia. Such a mentality is incompatible with the goal of building a cohesive nation. I regularly engaged in consultations with Melles on various issues, exchanging ideas similar to those discussed during our 1993 meeting in Cairo. We also participated in the 1991 conference on "Transition to Democracy" held in Addis Ababa, where the 'question of ethnic groups' was a central topic of discussion with all Ethiopian political forces at that time.

In 1994, Melles visited Asmara to seek my opinion on the draft Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, informing me that I was the first person to see/review it. Recognizing the seriousness of the matter, I requested some time to read the document thoroughly. After my review, I conveyed to him that the Constitution would not serve Ethiopia, nor would it be suitable for any other country. I expressed my concerns that it was impossible to build a nation upon such a framework. I warned him that this constitution could lead to unnecessary complications and, if escalated into conflict, could ultimately spiral out of control. Article 39 was not the only problem; the overall content and spirit of the document were not applicable to Ethiopia.

He was not comfortable with my comments and responded, "I knew you would say that. We cannot govern Ethiopia without such mechanisms; you may have your own opinion, but that is the only way to govern Ethiopia. You plant a time bomb here and there, and if things go wrong, you explode the bombs." I reiterated that once ethnic polarization occurs, it is extremely difficult to reverse it. It poses significant economic, cultural, political, and security risks and is fraught with precipitating disintegration instead of fostering national cohesion. I advised him to reconsider the implications before proceeding with implementation.

Is it possible to build a nation with such ideas? How can one draft a constitution for a country under these premises? Will it be possible to avoid the resulting consequences? Finally, I thanked him for seeking my opinion on the document.

In any case, the constitution was implemented in 1995. A Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia was established along ethnic lines. The current problems are direct outcomes of this framework. It is important not to divert attention to irrelevant topics to obscure this reality. Ethnic polarization, conflict, perpetual clashes, and a weakening of national cohesion are all byproducts of the Constitution.

This issue ought to be rectified; Ethiopia needs to resolve its internal problems to achieve stability and effectively contribute beyond its borders. This is the only viable solution. The issue is not whether Ethiopia will be dominant or not; rather, it is essential, first and foremost, for the people of Ethiopia to attain stability. The experiences gleaned in Ethiopia over the past 30 years should not be underrated. For Ethiopia to make meaningful contributions to its neighbors, it must ensure its internal stability. Stability cannot be achieved while engaging in ethnic politics. The question does not revolve on the number of former provinces or districts. The central issue is the need to discard ethnic administrative structures.

There are numerous lessons to be learned from other countries. For example, Somalia was dubbed a “Failed State” for pursuing clan politics, despite being a nation with a common language and religion. Why repeat this experience? It is crucial to learn from it.

We used to discuss with Melles on the situation in Somalia too. Since 1991, we maintained that Somalia should not become a failed state. We held similar apprehensions regarding Sudan and South Sudan. The discourses of the past notwithstanding, the current events remain preoccupying. It is unproductive to continue discussing the various ramifications at play currently and that essentially stem from the aforementioned approach.

Our discussions (with Melles) extended beyond the Badme dispute; we addressed any disagreements as they arose. On our part, we preferred to handle matters at a low level, without publicizing them unnecessarily. The discussions we have had over the past 50 years are well-documented and would amount to thousands of pages. We have consistently opposed inciting hatred and stoking conflicts. Particularly when tensions seemed to escalate toward war, we adhered to a policy of ‘preventing war’.

Reverting to the current situation, war was declared when the idea of reform was introduced. It is surprising to anyone who reviews the documents. Why was war declared at this particular juncture? Was it because reform was proclaimed? Was it to avoid addressing the prevalent problems in Ethiopia? I will further dwell on the matter in order to amplify the concrete facts. I informed the Prime Minister, “They

[TPLF] will unleash war and are planning specific measures to this end... they have already identified over 70 targets within Eritrea for missile attacks, preparing them for the intended assault... We must address this issue.”

The Prime Minister recognized the gravity of the situation and suggested that I speak with the TPLF. I indicated that I was willing to do so, but it might be too late and virtually unproductive. Later, when the Prime Minister brought Debretsion to our meeting in Omhajer, I reconsidered and spoke with him in spite of my previous reservations. We stepped aside with Debretsion alone for a brief conversation, during which I asked, “Why are you planning to go to war?” He responded, “It will not happen.” My final reply was, “You say ‘it will not happen,’ but in practical terms, you have decided to do so”. This encounter lasted no more than two or three minutes.

Was there a need for war at that time? Actions were taken hastily, and aside from the propaganda aspects, the details of the operational plans and preparations were extensive. What was the necessity for such measures? If one really cherishes peace and stability in Ethiopia, can it be achieved in this manner? The war resulted in the disastrous consequences, of unprecedented magnitude and not seen in the last 50 years, that we are witnessing today. Our efforts until the very last moment were focused on preventing war, as it is the people who ultimately bear the brunt of war.

We prefer not to dwell on the current situation. Why engage in acrimony and confrontations? What purpose does this serve? This is not merely about holding a Congress or not. After all these experiences, there should be no need for further confrontations. The Pretoria Agreement was designed to conclude the war, and ending the war is good in itself. However, the Pretoria Agreement does not directly concern us. We have no reason to either support or oppose it. Had the Pretoria Agreement been managed and implemented by the key internal protagonists, the current complications and hurdles would have been avoided.

In reality, the Pretoria Agreement was soon discarded by its principal architects, leading the issue down an undesired path instead of implementing it in good faith. What was the rationale of unleashing a new conflict by deciding to disarm the Amhara? First and foremost, the agreement must be implemented. The agreement contains specific details and timelines outlining the framework for disarmament and demobilization. Once the war concludes, the next steps can be broached? The enormous damage inculcated by war must be healed in order to think forward; beyond the confrontational status. The people deserve to be relieved from their sufferings. Why ignore this vital task to make preparations for yet another war? This is an evasive act and entirely baffling.

The defamatory campaign waged under false pretexts of “perpetrated genocide”, “... occupied territories”, etc. is a fantasy designed to advance a new agenda. Moreover, internal conflict can only entail detrimental consequence to the people. Why is it occurring now? We are not only focused on preventing war, but we also assert that such a crisis is not in the best interests of the people of Tigray or the broader Ethiopian population. If the MLLT/TPLF has genuinely learned from past conflicts, it should adopt a forward-looking perspective.

What is the fate of the people of Tigray? What can be done for the other peoples in Ethiopia; and, the region as a whole? These are crucial considerations for moving forward. What benefit is there in looking back to stir up internecine conflict through social media and other channels? Why provoke people and incite hatred? Is it logical to believe that this approach is meaningful?

We had consistently maintained against war and that we must strive to avoid it. But, the message was not heeded, and we are all witnessing the consequences. Why invite another crisis when their forces are already in disarray? This situation is unacceptable to any rational mind. Our firm and longstanding policy is to avoid such conflicts. What is the benefit of continuously stoking tensions and perpetuating animosity between the people of Tigray and the other peoples in Ethiopia; as well as neighboring Eritrea? We should learn from past experiences. Internal conflicts, heightened tensions, and hostility are unnecessary. Our position remains unchanged: there is no need for conflict.

It would have been beneficial if the Pretoria Agreement had led to greater stability. The question of whether we support it or not is irrelevant. As intimated earlier, the Pretoria Agreement does not represent the agenda of local actors; it originated from external agendas. These agendas seek to perpetuate endless conflicts among communities; pitting Tigray against the Amhara, Afar, and others. The United Nations, European Union, and similar organizations are often instrumentalized and used as an umbrella for intervention. Representatives from various countries come and promise relief aid and support and float demobilization programmes. But there is no need for engaging in such endless initiatives. The priority should be to ensure stability for the people of Tigray, enabling them to implement their development programs and coexist harmoniously with other communities. Promoting peace and unity must be the central agenda.

These challenges have persisted for over 50 years? What is the mystery; why has it eluded an enduring solution? We have a moral obligation to prevent such unnecessary conflicts from recurring again. It is essential to engage in consultations

and foster cooperation to overcome these challenges. We must not lose hope at any moment as the experience gleaned is substantial indeed. What is the purpose of issuing statements and counter-statements on social media? Such actions should be avoided, as they incite hatred and promote provocative campaigns. The most important and urgent message to the people of Ethiopia is that the situation that has engendered ethnic polarization must be addressed. All citizens of Ethiopia should strive to co-exist in harmony, on the basis of mutual respect, cooperation and complementarity. Furthermore, peaceful coexistence within the neighborhood is crucial. There is no benefit in perpetuating grudges and hatred.

Our primary focus and overarching goal is regional stability. It is not our concern to engage with what is being said or who is making those statements daily. We are unwilling, and do not have the appetite, to indulge in these meaningless and acrimonious platforms. Our hopes and objectives are for the people of Tigray to be relieved from the calamity they are enduring to enjoy peace and stability.

What purpose does it serve to raise unnecessary issues that fuel animosity between the people of Tigray and Eritrea? We will never engage in, or entertain, such follies. What is of paramount importance is the resolution of their internal problems before they reach a point of no return. This can allow full focus on their essential priorities.

As I underlined earlier, the issues that have arisen over the past 30 years are driven by external agendas. This is not mere analysis. It can be substantiated with detailed evidence over time and across various contexts. Their intention has been to foster animosity and instigate conflict between us. Dwelling on innuendos on current events in Ethiopia would be futile.

The political awareness of the peoples of this region must be elevated to keenly and fully realize that it is external intervention which is exacerbating the problems. We need to challenge external meddling. We believe we have shouldered our responsibility in this regard and we will continue to do so. We can draw valuable lessons from 50 years of experience as we contemplate and chart out future plans; also because we know full well the main culprits.

From 2025 onwards, our primary objective will be to defend against such interventions. We will not engage in other unnecessary and peripheral conflicts, and we advise those who are involved in such matters to refrain from doing so.

Domestic Issues

Question: Mr. President, with the New Year 2025 approaching, let us now turn our attention to domestic issues. What development programs are currently in progress and what new priority programmes are envisaged?

Answer – We have been diligently refining our national development plans, with a top priority placed on water security. By considering various factors, we have successfully upgraded our water development programs. Over the years, we have enhanced our capabilities and can confidently say we are now in a stronger position.

Our efforts have focused on the integrated management of watersheds, and we have developed comprehensive water programs at the Zoba, Sub-Zoba, and local administrative and village levels. We have constructed relatively big macro-dams with a capacity of up to 330 million cubic meters, as well as micro-dams capable of holding between 20 and 50 million cubic meters.

Our water development initiatives go beyond these efforts. To maximize our water resources, we have and continue to implement various strategies, including terracing, leveling, and the construction of small- and large-scale water reservoirs. Additionally, in areas where water-wells are required, including where desalination is possible, the programme is being pursued rigorously to ensure sustainable water security.

We must meet not only current water demands for domestic consumption, livestock, and industries but also ensure water security for future generations. Proper utilization of water reservoirs is also essential. It is imperative to introduce modern water technologies to maximize the use of conserved water for livestock, agriculture, and industrial purposes. We need to adopt innovative approaches in managing our water resources. For instance, instead of using a specific amount of water on ten hectares of land, we should explore ways to extend that usage to one hundred hectares.

Moreover, it is crucial to develop our human resources in areas related to water management. Our development programs must be both innovative and sophisticated, and we have formulated detailed plans for implementation in 2025 and beyond.

Our comprehensive plan outlines where macro, medium, and micro-level dams should be constructed, where water conservation efforts should take place, and what types of trees should be planted in specific areas. This plan is not only extensive, covering all levels from the national to village levels, but it will also be integrated with other development programs. Our primary task now is to identify the sequence of priorities for implementation.

In the infrastructure sector, it is essential to develop various components, including the construction of roads, the development of ports, and the establishment of infrastructure that enables us to utilize our marine resources. While some of these projects are very big in scale and may not be implemented immediately, they will be executed over time in alignment with our development programs.

Our infrastructure initiatives are comprehensive, encompassing areas such as railroads, cable cars, ports, airports, and, importantly, residential housing. The development program clearly outlines when and where each aspect of the plan will be implemented.

We will implement our development plans over time, taking into account the needs and conditions of our people. Priority will be given to those living in villages and remote areas, particularly individuals who have been denied access to essential social services such as potable water, transportation, and other critical services. However, this does not mean that other issues will be overlooked.

We have also developed detailed plans to ensure a balanced approach to infrastructure development and residential construction, allowing the two sectors to reinforce one another. This signifies that our current development plan is more refined than previous ones.

The next area of priority is the energy sector. Energy is of paramount importance, and little can be accomplished in its absence. Without energy, it is challenging to irrigate agricultural areas, implement plans for the manufacturing and industrial sectors, and transform a subsistence economy into one that adds value through processing and manufacturing. Unfortunately, our electric supply service has dwindled to a critical level, with the initial energy plant installed at Hirgigo, which had a capacity of 120 megawatts, but which is not operational to its full capacity at this point in time.

We have developed a revised program for the energy sector to help us progress towards our ultimate goals. As mentioned earlier, we have various plans to utilize thermal energy, install generators of different capacities that use fuel energy, and harness renewable sources such as solar and wind energy. In the future, we also plan to introduce sustainable geothermal energy. It can be said that we have made significant improvements in this area.

The revised energy sector plan includes comprehensive strategies for expanding electric generation and supply lines throughout the country, as well as addressing household-level consumption. Additionally, the third component of our

development plan, which encompasses hybrid sources of energy—i.e., thermal, renewable, and other sources—has also been revised to enhance its effectiveness.

We have also initiated and mapped out a national energy network, as well as the operational plan, for power generation with an initial capacity of 360 megawatts, aiming to expand it to 2,000 megawatts. This capacity will be utilized for various development projects, including agriculture, marine resource development, and the industrial sector.

It is essential to harness all sources of renewable energy to provide electricity to even the most remote areas of the country. For instance, we need to supply water to pastoralists using solar-powered pumps, which are not connected to the national grid. While these proposals are not new, they require alignment with a clear timeline and necessary resources. Therefore, we have been working to refine these plans and make them as detailed as possible.

Next, we turn to the manufacturing sector. We are all aware of the historical context of this sector in Eritrea, and rather than lamenting the past, we must adopt a stronger approach focused on value addition. A subsistence economy will lead us nowhere. Currently, we are not in a better position than many other African countries in this regard. We need to elevate our capabilities to a manufacturing level, producing not only leather, plastic, and metal products but also advancing to the more complex manufacturing of cars.

In terms of specific consumer goods, our ongoing plans include implementation of significant projects for processing meat, milk, fruits, and vegetables, leveraging our fertile lands for these purposes. It is essential to elevate our agricultural sector to its highest potential.

The marine resources of our country are extensive and largely untapped. Similar to our initiatives in infrastructure, water, and energy, we have developed operational plans to fully utilize these marine resources. Additionally, we have outlined priority areas for the fisheries industrial sector.

To implement these ambitious national development plans, addressing human resources is crucial. However, it is difficult to assert that we have made significant progress in this area; we are currently lagging behind our goals. We need to align our curriculum and teaching methods with these objectives to ensure that our workforce is adequately prepared for the tasks ahead.

Implementing the aforementioned major development plans without a skilled workforce would be unrealistic. As we prioritize various sectors, the development of our human resources emerges as the most critical factor for achieving sustainable development. We need to train a skilled workforce to effectively execute our operational plans. Have we successfully achieved our objectives? What challenges have we encountered? What lessons can we learn from projects that did not succeed? Through in-depth evaluations, we can identify actionable steps to enhance our human capacity. This focus on human resources is integral to our social plans. To expand health and educational services in both quality and quantity, we must revise our previous roadmap. Our comprehensive development plan addresses several key issues, including: what has been accomplished over the last three decades, what lessons have been learned from this experience, and what strategies should be implemented for better outcomes.

However, training a skilled workforce is not enough; such talent must be properly organized and aligned with relevant structures. Effective organization and administration are crucial for achieving significant objectives. The plans outlined above are part of the government's agenda for implementation in 2025. This does not imply that these plans are inflexible; rather, they are open to continuous assessment, evaluation, and improvement. They are dynamic, not static, and we must adopt a state-of-the-art innovative approach, ingraining this mindset as part of our culture.

Reflecting on our plans from 2012, twelve years later, we can recognize past flaws and consider how to rectify or correct those mistakes. What we are doing now is similar, and we are therefore moving in the right direction. Our strength lies in our ability to acknowledge our shortcomings and failures, which in turn helps us understand the challenges we face and design new plans accordingly. Thanks to this approach, all our plans are very realistic.

For the next two to three years, our plans will remain open to improvements, as new innovations and ideas may emerge. During the implementation phase, fresh concepts may arise that can enhance our programs. Therefore, we will not be constrained by a rigid adherence to the blueprints of our plans.

In fact, we will not execute our major development strategies in isolation; we have various stakeholders involved. How we interact with our partners—from prospective African States to Russia, Saudi Arabia, China, Italy, and others—is crucial. The partnerships we forge must align with our national development plans. We engage

in open discussions with our partners about our priorities, the timelines for these priorities, and the resources needed to implement such projects.

Thus, our development plans are continually subject to progressive improvements. We can confidently assert that their implementation is assured over time.

Question 6 – Mr. President, thank you for the detailed information on energy and housing. Let us now shift our focus to the public transport sector, which has been a topic of significant public concern. Does the government have any plans to address the key issues within this sector?

Answer – This issue is not controversial. We need to ensure the availability of high-quality buses—not only for urban areas but also for rural and remote regions. It is essential to have buses capable of traveling on gravel roads and providing comprehensive service to every corner of the country. Our public transport sector must prioritize marginalized areas. Key considerations include the number of buses needed, the types of buses required, and sourcing options. The current provision of public transport is clearly inadequate. When citizens can travel freely and affordably, the role of these services in economic development becomes critically important. Access to expansive and dynamic transport services enhances national development.

Moreover, transport services should not only be reliable but also subsidized. There is a rationale for subsidies. The argument is not that citizens should bear all costs related to fuel, labor, and other operational expenses. Instead, by facilitating transport services, we aim to enable beneficiaries to contribute to the economy of the country more effectively.

Similar support can extend to other sectors, but the transport sector is particularly critical. Providing transport services for people is not sufficient; we must also pay attention to livestock and agricultural products that need to be transported from remote areas to cities and towns. The creeping inflation we are witnessing in basic consumer goods affects not only imported items but also locally produced products.

This phenomenon is closely linked to the prevalence of inadequate services, particularly in transportation. For agricultural products to reach end users and be sold at reasonable prices, there must be a rational cost associated with transportation. We need to create conditions where both producers and consumers can benefit equitably. It is vital to conduct a thorough evaluation to identify issues related to the quantity of domestic products, their pricing, and their impact on the standard of

living for the general public. This is not a new philosophy; to achieve fundamental solutions, it is imperative to bring producers and consumers closer together. Government subsidies can play a crucial role in alleviating the burden on the public, particularly for those living in remote areas.

For citizens to move freely from one corner of the country to another at their convenience, we need a vast network of roads. This need extends beyond just roads; we must also have efficient land transportation services. This includes enhancing transport services along the coastal areas of the Red Sea to boost the tourism sector.

The transportation sector should not be limited to land; it must also encompass waterway transportation. We have not also overlooked the aviation sector. On the scale of priorities, land transportation is our primary focus. However, it is important to note that, currently, coverage may not exceed thirty percent. Our relentless goal is to achieve 100 percent coverage in this area.

Question: Mr. President, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has recently issued a revised proclamation aimed at boosting the trade sector. In relation to this topic, are there any plans to encourage investments from Eritreans living both inside and outside the country?

Answer – The proclamation issued by the Ministry of Trade and Industry is directly related to the issues we discussed earlier. It addresses concerns regarding illegal trade, uncontrolled trading activities, and trade practices that evade taxation, and above all, protecting consumers from the negative impacts of such illegal activities.

For instance, it makes no sense for a sheep purchased for seven hundred Nakfa in Haikota to be sold for two thousand Nakfa in Asmara. Those who work hard deserve fair compensation, and consumers should also be able to purchase products at reasonable prices. Additionally, intermediaries who facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers should also benefit. Otherwise, it is unjust to reap illicit gains from both parties.

The primary sources of public burden stem from the unfair increase in prices of consumer goods, particularly those associated with illegal trade. Government employees are among those who suffer the most from these inflated prices, making it difficult for them to afford basic necessities. There must be fair trading practices that benefit everyone.

While these issues primarily concern those living in the country, we must also consider Eritreans living abroad. Regardless of where their money is deposited, the economic capacity of individuals and families abroad represents a significant national economic asset. Given the advantages that come with living overseas, these individuals often have better opportunities and capabilities for investment.

There are significant investment opportunities in the agricultural sector, as well as in various other sectors. The hospitality sector is not the only available option. We have ambitious plans for sophisticated outputs in metal, plastic, electronics, and other industries. While some projects will be executed with government capabilities, the government cannot reach every corner of the country on its own. As we strive to transform our economy from a subsistence and subsidy-reliant market to one focused on manufacturing, it is essential to invest in all economic sectors, including mining. The involvement of Eritreans living abroad is crucial to this effort, but it is important to ensure that we do not engage them in areas beyond their capabilities.

Our economy has been significantly impacted by relentless sanctions, which have hindered our latent capabilities fully. One of the underlying motives behind the unfair sanctions imposed on us was to undermine the role of Eritreans in the Diaspora. To encourage their participation in the economic development of their country, it is imperative to create conducive conditions for investment. Achieving this requires not only a conducive environment but also the establishment of clear investment laws and regulations.

All the issues we have discussed regarding infrastructure, water, energy, and other development plans are aimed at creating favorable conditions for investment. Once we successfully establish these foundations, it will be easier to consider the types of investments, financial aspects, and strategies for accessing regional and international markets.

The primary tasks involve developing roads, ensuring reliable electricity and water supply, and producing skilled labor to foster a supportive investment environment. Given the challenges we have faced, opportunities for the local population are currently very limited, and most potential investors are from abroad or the Diaspora. However, the timeframe for implementation should be viewed objectively.

It is true that the interest and awareness of our Diaspora are unmatched. Still, we have to recognize the timeline for investment until the necessary infrastructure are fully in place.

Our long-term plan is to transform our subsistence economy into one focused on industry and manufacturing. To achieve this, we must create a conducive environment that allows citizens to invest in areas of their interest. Over time, local citizens will gain the necessary capabilities to participate effectively in this transformation. However, we should not initiate such efforts without proper guidelines and mechanisms in place.

In this context, we must also consider the state of our banking services. What is the current status of our banking infrastructure? Can it adequately support these investments? There have been previous attempts to enhance banking services through institutions such as the Commercial Bank, Bank of Investment, and Housing and Commerce Bank. However, our banking services have faced significant challenges due to ongoing external hostilities and pressures. It is essential that our banking services develop in tandem with our investment policies and plans. These realities must be taken into account when discussing investments. Setting aside external conspiracies and pressures, is our current banking service efficient? Clearly, there is a need for improvement and development in this sector.

Investment, industry, and trade encompass all the factors I have been discussing, both sector-wise and industry-wise. Irrespective of the magnitude and of the number of individuals involved, their contributions to the economy cannot be underestimated. The proclamations and policies we have been introducing and refining over time aim solely to create a conducive investment environment. This is no easy task, and we are continuously working toward this goal. However, the issue of skills remains a significant challenge. Continuous improvements and structural changes in our policies are necessary to address these challenges effectively. Mobilizing resources involves assessing our human resources and identifying what is feasible and what is not.

In general, we have not overlooked our trade and investment plans; there are promising potentials. However, we must be efficient in implementing the necessary infrastructure that is vital for creating a conducive environment. Operational details can be monitored, and appropriate actions will be taken at the right time. Investment should prioritize citizens, with our Diaspora receiving utmost priority for obvious reasons. They should invest within a defined framework and roadmap, rather than in a hasty manner.

Returning to the issue of housing, as I mentioned earlier, we have not yet achieved our previous goals. Therefore, we are making adjustments to our institutions to

address this. Construction companies will be fully engaged in completing the delayed housing projects, including from the Armed Forces.