

Eritrea's Voice on the Global Stage: Ambassador Sophia Tesfamariam on the UN, the Global South, and National Development

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Ambassador Sophia Tesfamariam is Eritrea's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. She has extensive experience in global social development, particularly in working with youth and women in the Horn of Africa. Her passion lies in fostering a mindset of possibility among young people. She has conducted over 100 seminars and workshops on leadership and strategy development for youth and women in the USA, Europe, and Africa. With deep expertise in media and public diplomacy, Ambassador Sophia maintains strong networks across Africa, Europe, and Australia, continuously working to promote peace, stability, and security in the region.

Currently, in Eritrea, she continues her impactful work by leading seminars and visiting key developmental sites. Sabrina Solomon and Eri-TV's Raphael Giuseppe sat down with her for an indepth interview. Below are excerpts from their discussion.

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The Global South is increasingly asserting its influence in international affairs. How do you view Eritrea's role within this dynamic, and how can countries of the Global South collectively address shared challenges at the UN?

Well, thank you. That is a very loaded question and timely as well. The Global South has been actively coming together to respond to pressing global challenges. Recently, I attended the UN Summit of the Future, as well as previous key summits over the past two years. The Global South has consistently raised its voice on critical issues such as the unbalanced global financial system, UN reforms, climate change, food and water security, and human rights.

At the UN, the African Group, along with other likeminded blocs, has been working collectively to advocate for these concerns. Over the past two years, serious negotiations have taken place on behalf of the Global South, particularly at major forums such as the G77 conference, the Summit in Kampala this January, and climate summits like COP28 and COP29. Climate financing and energy transition remain top priorities for our nations. The Global South is leveraging every available platform—conferences, summits, and high-level meetings—to ensure that our voices are heard and our developmental needs are addressed.

The global landscape is evolving rapidly with challenges such as climate change, geopolitical shifts, and technological advancements. How does Eritrea, as a UN member, perceive these changes, and what strategies is it employing to address them?

Eritrea's approach aligns with strategies employed by many nations, but what sets us apart is our proactive stance. We have been addressing key issues—climate, food security, water management, and sustainability—long before they became global talking points. On the ground, Eritrea has made significant investments in infrastructure, including dam construction, terracing of mountains, and nationwide tree planting initiatives. These are not just policy discussions for us; they are lived realities.

At the international level, we actively engage in global discussions at summits and conferences, contributing to shaping the discourse on these pressing issues. The geopolitical shifts taking place today were inevitable, and Eritrea has long anticipated the need for a more just and balanced international order. We have consistently called for change in the global system, and we welcome the transformations now taking place.

At the UN, Eritrea participates in thematic discussions on emerging issues such as cybersecurity and artificial intelligence. We are also an active member of the G77+China, a bloc of 134 countries, where we engage in policy dialogues on global development. Within the African Group, we focus on challenges unique to the continent, including the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 and Africa's Agenda 2063. Eritrea uses

platforms such as the Voluntary National Review (VNR) at ECOSOC to share our progress, learn from other nations, and showcase our development efforts.

Eritrea has taken positions that differ from those of major global powers. How does it balance its national interests with its commitment to international cooperation? What mechanisms ensure that Eritrea's voice is heard at the UN?

Eritrea is an active participant in discussions at the UN. It would be inaccurate to say that our positions are isolated or contradictory to global concerns. While a few dominant nations may not always share our perspectives, there is a broad coalition of like-minded countries that share Eritrea's concerns and aspirations.

Every country at the UN prioritizes its national interests, and Eritrea is no different. We are not aligned against any country, nor do we align blindly with others. Instead, we work with nations that share similar perspectives and understand the context of Eritrea's positions. These allies span both the Global South and the Global North, depending on the issue at hand.

To ensure our voice is heard, we maximize our presence at the UN by engaging in discussions on key topics such as climate change, food and water security, desertification, peace and security, territorial integrity, and UN reform. Eritrea does not simply participate; we also initiate conversations to gauge support for our positions and to build coalitions. The platforms, forums, and mechanisms exist—we just use innovative approaches to ensure our concerns are integrated into the broader UN agenda.

In promoting peace and understanding in the Horn of Africa, what diplomatic strategies does Eritrea employ at the UN to foster regional stability?

Eritrea takes a proactive and pragmatic approach to regional diplomacy. We engage bilaterally with our neighbors, while also working through multilateral frameworks like IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development). At the UN, we consistently raise issues affecting the Horn of Africa and advocate for solutions that reflect the realities on the ground.

One of our key diplomatic strategies is fostering honest dialogue. For too long, external narratives have painted the Horn of Africa as a conflict-ridden region. While differences exist, we have worked hard to dispel the notion that our nations are perpetually at odds. Much of the region's instability in the past has been driven by external interventions that distorted local dynamics. Today, we emphasize regional cooperation, recognizing that while each country

has its priorities, our shared interests in peace, security, and territorial integrity must take precedence.

At the UN, Eritrea regularly engages with Horn of Africa resident ambassadors to discuss regional priorities, counter misinformation, and present a more accurate narrative of the region's political and security landscape.

Considering your background and passion for youth development, what message do you have for young Eritreans regarding their role in shaping Eritrea's engagement with the UN and the broader international community?

Eritrean youth have a significant role to play, and we already see their contributions in national development projects. Young Eritreans are deeply involved in building the country—whether in engineering, infrastructure, agriculture, or security. What remains is ensuring their voices are also heard at the international level.

We have started bringing young Eritreans to UN dialogues, including side events and global forums like the Commission on the Status of Women. Youth make up 70% of Africa's population, making their integration into political, economic, and development discussions essential.

Eritrea's national service program is often misrepresented, but it plays a critical role in nation building. Our youth are not only in the military reserve but mainly work in different ministries, infrastructure projects, and international missions, including at Eritrea's UN mission. They are at the forefront of solar panel installations, dam construction, and development initiatives. This is a story that needs to be told. With the rise of social media, Eritrean youth have an unprecedented opportunity to shape the global narrative. This positive story needs to be shared more effectively, and empowering the energetic youth with context and platforms, especially through social media, will amplify Eritrea's voice to a broader global audience. So, hooray for the youth!

You recently gave a lecture titled 'Eritrea in a Changing Global Environment' to members of the Ministry of Information. Could you elaborate on the key takeaways, particularly how Eritrea is adapting to the evolving international order?

Eritrea has long anticipated and advocated for a shift in the global order, and the current changes align with its longstanding calls for justice and equality. The country feels vindicated

as previous narratives against it—on human rights, national service, and development—are now being reconsidered. Eritrea emphasizes that peace, security, and ownership of its development agenda are its core priorities, ensuring a stable and self-reliant society. It challenges external misconceptions about fundamental rights and asserts that many of the concerns it has raised are now echoed by other African nations opposing injustice and resource exploitation. With over 60 years of experience navigating global challenges, Eritrea believes it has valuable lessons to offer and will continue advocating for a fairer international system while sharing its insights with other nations.

Any final remarks?

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss these important topics. Eritreans must recognize that we are part of the UN—one of 194 member states. While a few powerful nations may dominate decision-making, the majority of UN members share our aspirations for peace, development, and justice. We must engage constructively, ensuring that Eritrea's voice continues to be heard.

Thank you!