

Unity: Eritrea's Elusive Endeavor!!

Unity - may mean different things for different people. There is, however, a common understanding that **national unity with diversity** - is a pre-requisite for the welfare, stability, harmony, growth, and sustainable development of any nation-state.

For Eritrea and the Eritrean people, the quests for the realization of **national unity with diversity**, have been an elusive endeavor. Throughout their history, the Eritrean people have time and again, been relentlessly seeking for its realization. Nevertheless, the stake holders have not yet, been able to come up with a unified view and voice on the **core national issues/platform**. Consequently, the establishment of an enduring all-inclusive democratic national unity has, indeed, remained to be an - unrealizable elusive endeavor, to-date (notwithstanding, of course, the short lived constitution of 1952).

For the purpose of this discussion, let's begin and look into the historical periods of the 1940th and 1960th as a starter. Back then, the Eritrean socio-polity was fragmented: at its worst, along feudal and religious lines, and/or at its best - along partisan lines ...etc. Undeniably, there were internal and external adversarial players which have been, throughout Eritrea's history, at play to dis-unite the Eritrean people. As a result, it is imperative - that one has to factor-in the historical prevalence of such adversarial impediments!! The issue here, however, is: despite all these impediments, why are we, the Eritrean people, time and again, failing for decades, to rise above the occasion in overcoming those challenges, and ultimately coalesce around a core national platform?

At the individual level, this question, has undoubtedly, been summoning each and every Eritrean - to conduct both a retrospective as well as a prospective assessment, including self-introspective examination on it; for at times, the lack of unity, has been and is, profoundly threatening the co-existence of the Eritrean people – in a negative way!! At the national level, it has been and is, a vital research question that has been begging for a research to be conducted on it, by researchers, comprising of scholars from different, but applicable fields. Such research findings, at the very least, could and would have provided us with a comprehensive understanding (if not help us find solutions), as to why the Eritrean people have to-date - been unable to forge an enduring all-inclusive democratic national unity. Be that - as it may, however, it was that lack of a unified view and voice around the core national issues, which had predisposed the Eritrean people, to wage - a devastating armed struggle for 30 bloody years (1961 – 1991).

The era of the armed struggle (1961 – 1991)

History attests it, that there were foreign powers as well as unionist Eritreans - that enabled Ethiopia to illegally annex Eritrea by decree, and declare it to be - the 14th province of Ethiopia. That was why, that such a forcible annexation was illegal, because the entire Eritrean people were not even given the opportunity, to hold a referendum, and express their consent, either for, or against it. At that juncture of the Eritrean history, there was no other option left out there, for the patriotic Eritreans, and hence, were **compelled** to wage an armed struggle.

Beginning from its inception in 1961, the armed struggle was led by the Eritrean Liberation Front (**ELF**). Nevertheless, before it went afar, as the solo leading force of the armed struggle, the **ELF** was met with the sad fate of splitting into – ultimately two major political organizations, namely: The Eritrean Liberation Front (**ELF**), and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (**EPLF**). At different stages of the struggle, several attempts were made to forge unity between these two organizations, but to no avail. Not only did these two organizations fail to unite, but also did degenerate into several small scale military skirmishes, and two major fratricidal wars.

During the last major fratricidal war (1980/1981), the **EPLF** conspired with a foreign force, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (**TPLF**), and were both able to push the **ELF** out of the Eritrean land. In addition, it is also an undeniable historical fact, that there was dis-unity within the **ELF** that contributed to its demise too. In the end, the combined effect was that the **EPLF** secured the solo monopoly of the Eritrean field. The Fratricidal war that took place between these two political organizations sadly claimed the lives of so many young brothers and sisters - on both sides. It was, and is indeed, a profoundly sad chapter in our history.

Throughout the armed struggle era, Eritrea sustained a toll order of death and destruction. The Ethiopian occupying forces had been relentlessly carrying out atrocious wars on the Eritrean people for 30 years. When one combines the enormous devastations caused by the Ethiopian army to those innocent lives claimed by the fratricidal wars, the cumulative effect of death and destruction perpetrated on the Eritrean people had been compounding to a scale of an incalculable magnitude. After thirty devastating years, however, the Ethiopian occupying forces were defeated and kicked out of Eritrea. The result was - that the sovereignty of merely the Eritrean land (but not its people's liberation), was de-facto ascertained in 1991. Nevertheless, the process to getting there was indeed, a treacherous and a devastating journey, to say the least.

Note: the purpose and scope of this article, is not to provide a detailed historical account of the Eritrean history, but rather, is to highlight - how Eritrea has been suffering from the lack of national unity throughout its history.

Post independent Eritrea (1991 – To-date)

The current dictatorial regime in Eritrea - is the by-product of the undemocratic culture, inherited from the treacherous processes through which the Eritrean armed struggle had under-went. When there is such a direct correlation between **process** and **outcome**, the two best metaphoric descriptors of such phenomena are: the means justifies the end, and/or similarly, what you reap is what you sow.

Differently said, both before and after the resumption of the armed struggle, not only was there no unanimity on the **core national issues**, but also – there were no **democratically established infrastructures** on the ground (which otherwise, could have been the guarantors for the desired outcome). Consequently, the acrimonious process through which the Eritrean armed struggle had under-went, was instead, characterized - by division, unabatedly committing homicidal acts over some constituent members of each organization, and including waging devastating fratricidal wars between the political organizations. The end result: - is the dictatorial regime, we have in Eritrea - today.

Regarding the nature of the oppressive regime, suffice is to say, that almost all the sinister disguises which this regime has been using, all in an attempt of deluding the world, have already been disclosed, partly by its own totalitarian miss-deeds, and in part, by the collective effort of all the opposition forces. Currently, there are no more covers: costumes, veils, or even caves left, where the oppressive regime could hide. As a result, the regime has been – stripped off naked - for the world to see. In that regard, therefore, the opposition camp has done a significant dent, or in-road towards the entire process of liberating the Eritrean people from dictatorship. There are, however, some areas of concern, where the opposition forces have not been successful at, as of yet; and hence, it becomes imperative to transition the discussion and delve into the opposition camp.

The opposition camp

Exposing the totalitarian nature of the regime – for the world to see unambiguously, is only the first key milestone towards - the long process of totally dismantling the oppressive regime, and ultimately, instituting fundamental change, in the country.

When we delve into assessing the affairs of the opposition camp, we have to be brutally honest about our-selves. To the dismay of the Eritrean people, the opposition camp has been plagued with all sorts of unmanageable differences and conflicts. At least, two and half decades, have been squandered in un-necessarily quibbling within and between each other. The track record of either effectively managing and/or resolving those differences and conflicts - has not been commendable. There is no adequate time left for us, to show complacency. In fact, we are currently, in an acute state of urgency, and time deficit, towards realizing the common goal of

liberating the Eritrean people from dictatorship, and replacing it with a democratic system of constitutional governance - that is of, by, and for the people. Each day, the country is going from bad to worse. Suppose, the dictatorial regime unexpectedly implodes by its own weight - what would be the possible scenarios that could occur in the country - then? What - if an unforeseen geo-political alliance, at either the regional or international level emerges? How could the emergence of such developments adversely affect our struggle? Those are only some examples of the crucial issues that we, Eritreans, not only have to ponder about, but also have to act and act swiftly to forge national unity.

Let us all pose here and ponder – about what the impediments to realizing our unity are? Well, throughout our history, there have been numerous and complex detractors. Nevertheless, specified below are some of the most prevalent shortcomings that exist within the current opposition camp. All members of the opposition forces, therefore, are being summoned to remain vigilant on these divisive issues and keep them under-check - at all times. They are:

1. The animosity and unhealthy political discords that exist within and between individuals, organized civil societies, as well as political parties and organizations
2. The failure to utilize effective communication modes - both within and between each other, including disproportionately focussing on secondary or non secondary issues that divide us, rather than on those core national issues that unite us
3. The failure to see beyond narrow, chauvinistic, individual, partisan, organizational, regional, religious, as well as nations and nationalities' political confines
4. The insatiable hunger for power, including an expressed in-fighting for it, and as well as the craving to remain in leadership positions indefinitely, without due regard to introducing the inevitable process of power-succession – by or to the younger generation (add to it, at a reasonable pace). Alternatively, the failure of the younger generation to understand that the transfer of power from the old to the young, is an evolutionary gradual process, and hence, attempting to untimely and hastily shove and negate its elders (i.e. the prevalence of the unhealthy egoistic tendencies on both sides – though in varying degrees)
5. The un-willingness by political parties, organizations, and/or civil societies, that do share similar political programs to unite, and once united, remaining true to it
6. The failure to grasp, embrace, and/or promote the fundamental concepts that:
 - (a) The sum total of the component parts, the “**Whole**”, is greater than the individual parts, separately
 - (b) In our case, unifying and synergizing all of our social and political forces ...etc., is detrimental to our success. In other words, venturing to “go it alone” is the road that takes us – to no-where
7. The failure to see that - country - comes before any political, religious, and civil associations or affiliations

Dear Fellow Eritrean compatriots, the year 2016, is drawing out, and the year 2017, is setting in. Therefore, in the New Year, we are all (without exception), being called upon to:

1. Place – country/people first – above anything else and urgently forge an all-inclusive national unity
2. Utilize effective communication modes that ultimately yield - “**win-win**” end results, as we interact - within and between each other
3. Define the dictatorial regime (for there is no consensus to-date), and coalesce around those agreed upon definitions, including the ways and means of how to remove it
4. Identify our core national issues in the order of their magnitude/urgency, prioritize them in the form of plan A, B, C, and D ...etc. and remain committed to those consensually agreed upon plans at all times
5. Consensually, depict binding blue prints or “a **Charter & a Road map**” by which we will all be solemnly guided and use them through the transition period, thus ultimately forming a national constitutional democratic government - in the country
6. Be mindful of the fact that power belongs to the people and that their active all-inclusive participation every step of the way – is crucial, and
7. Enjoy life and living while we have it!!!

In conclusion, please all write the slogan “**united we stand, and divided we fall**”- in colored big font size letters and do post it at a place where we can clearly see as well as read it several times every single day. Moreover, as we ponder to make a year-end self-reflection, let us also all pledge to place - country/people – before anything else, urgently forge an all-inclusive national unity, and ultimately establish an Eritrean constitutional democratic government – in the forth-coming New Year!!!

Happy Holidays!!!

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