

Liberty

*Bi-Monthly English Organ of the
Eritrean People's Democratic Party - EPDP*

TIME FOR WORLD DEMOCRACIES TO HEED THE CRY OF A COLLECTIVE VOICE OF ERITREAN ACTORS



The world is well aware of the proud role of peace-loving, progressive and democratic forces of the globe during the period of decolonization in the last century. Unfortunately, these same forces have not played their full part in support of peoples when erstwhile “liberators” turned tyrants, especially in Africa. Thus, those supportive forces of freedom and democracy of the 20th century, regrettably, almost retreated in our 21st century from that noble struggle for human dignity. One of the last to be freed from the consequences of colonialism was the former Italian colony of Eritrea which also met the same fate.

For many years in the past, Eritrean political organizations have been asking those friendly forces to come to the rescue of the Eritrean people suffering under a cold-blooded one-man dictatorship of ‘president’ Isaias Afewerki. Their cries were not listened to.

This summer, the Eritrean Political Forces (EPF) have managed to create a working platform for joint action, initially in key selected areas, including the diplomatic sphere. Their hope is that pro-democracy forces of the world will help the long victimized Eritrean people and their political and civil society actors in forced exile to build their capacities to act. (Continued on p. 2)

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TIME FOR WORLD DEMOCRACIES TO LISTEN

TO CRIES BY ERITREAN PRO-DEMOCRACY ACTORS

(Continued from page 1): To this end, leaders of the existing political formations have started taking steps by issuing joint calls upon regional and international organizations; friendly governments; democratic parties and non-governmental agencies to have a second look at the dire situation in Eritrea and extend a helping hand in finding a lasting solution. One such action from friends can be obtaining political, moral and material support to unify the ranks of the opposition and boost their ability to realize the long deferred dream for a democratic Eritrea.

In a chain of interviews over different Eritrean broadcasting channels during the summer months of July and August 2020, Negash Osman, Chairman of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change (ENCDC); Tesfai WoldemicaHEL, Chairman of the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP); Ogbazghi Debus, representative of the Eritrean National Front (ENF); Afeworki Kidane, Chairman of Unity of Eritreans for Justice (UEJ), and Tesfamichael Yohannes, Chairman of Unity for Democratic Change (UDC).

In their pronouncements, they spelt out that, among the key factors necessitating importance of reaching the accord for joint work and possible merger among themselves, are the following:

- The urgency of bringing together all Eritrean political organizations now to respond to the heightened public call for unity to remove the dictatorial regime without delay;
- Ward off the betrayals of and threats to Eritrea's sovereign existence by the one-man dictatorship which become more apparent than any time before;
- The worsening of the political and socio-economic crises caused by the failed internal and external policies of the regime which are not only increasing the suffering of the nation and the exodus of its youth, but are also endangering the very survival of Eritrea's hard-won statehood;
- The increasing tension and sharpening regional and international competition in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa region. (Continued on p. 3)



Based on their accord, which is expected to draw world attention to the Eritrean pro-democracy camp of change seekers, the sister political formations created an 11-person Coordinating Committee which in turn started forming Task Forces in the fields of diplomacy, mass media, and public mobilization. The Task Forces are in their part working on work plans in their respective areas of action. With the success of the ongoing moves, the Eritrean people can expect promising results in the not distant future – inshallah!!

Only to reiterate, Eritrea and its people have forgotten the meaning of normal life for six decades: first, under a 30-year national liberation war against Ethiopian occupation, and for the last 29 years under the tyranny of Isaias Afewerki and his small clique. One can once again reignite the hope that Eritreans will overcome the odds facing them by massively rallying behind the forces of change. Needless to say, it is also time for all peace-loving democracies in today's world to give attention to the incessant cry of Eritreans both at home and in forced exile.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL 'SEIZED OF THE MATTER' IN ERITREA? – NOT REALLY

The 44th Session of the UN Human Rights Council on 16 July 2020 adopted decisions and recommendations for action in Eritrea and promised to remain “seized of the matter”, the same-same



phrase the UN General Assembly used in its December 1952 decision to link Eritrea in a federal arrangement with Ethiopia, and sort of guaranteeing that it would not look idly by if the Federal Act is violated. Unfortunately, that phrase of remaining “seized of the matter” did not work then and as it is not working now. To wit: the Eritrean regime refused access to the UN Human Rights Rapporteurs mandated by the UN HR Council. The UN system did nothing except of course softening relations with that abuser regime in

Asmara. The UN also wished to forget all about the glaring findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry that recommended accountability against regime elements for committing monstrous crimes, including “crimes against humanity.”

The mandate of Professor Daniel Kravetz was extended by another year (9th year of mandate) with the call on the Eritrean regime “to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur, including by granting access to the country and committing to making progress on the proposed benchmarks.” (For list of benchmarks, (see Liberty No. 63). The victims of the Eritrean regime know well that the requested cooperation and access to the country will NOT materialize. Sadly, the UN system also knows that the asked for cooperation will not be given by the Eritrean regime. Still, the UN HR Council will not, as usual, be “seized of the matter.” This is what it is, and no one can tell where the desperation of victimized peoples will lead. (.p.4)

Anyway, Eritrea, which, ironically, is one of the 47 voting Human Rights Council members, again rejected the decisions of this 44th Session supported by 9 regimes of its type and other 13 abstaining. But thanks to 24 Council members, mainly western democracies, the mandate for Professor Kravetz was extended for another year with recommendations for action that included:

- > Request to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to present an oral update to the Human Rights Council at its forty-sixth session in early 2021 on progress made in the cooperation between Eritrea and the Office of the High Commissioner, and its impact on the situation of human rights in Eritrea;
- > The Special Rapporteur for human rights in Eritrea to continue to assess the situation and present an oral update to the Human Rights Council at its forty-sixth session during an interactive dialogue, followed by written report during an interactive dialogue in the spring on the implementation of the mandate to the Council at its forty-seventh session and to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session;
- > The Council called upon Eritrea to cooperate fully with the Special Rapporteur, including by granting access to the country and committing to making progress on the proposed benchmarks;
- > Requests the UN Secretary-General to provide the Special Rapporteur with all the information and resources necessary to fulfil the mandate; and finally
- > The Council decided to remain seized of the matter.

CRY, THE BELOVED CITY

Cry, the Beloved Country was one of the passionately read books among a few fortunate Asmara high school students in the mid-1960s. At one point, a student used it as his reference in a public debate held at Cinema Odeon in the city. This was a novel written by a South African anti-apartheid activist, Alan Paton, lamenting about the breakdown in family structure and societal fragmentation in his country—just like Eritrea’s problem today. In one chapter of his book, Alan Paton wrote: **“Cry, the beloved country, for the unborn child that is the inheritor of our fear ... For fear will rob him of all if he gives too much.”**

The title of this 1948 novel itself and the narration in it of course remind us, Eritreans, of many aspects of the current breakdown in our country, both at the level of the society as well as its heart-breaking physical disfiguration. (...p. 5)



Inside Africa of John Gunter was also another book that was mainly found in the hands of a few politically conscious teachers in Eritrea of the 1960s. The author-traveller described Asmara as “the jewel of East Africa”, as a clean and lovable small Italian city with few equals in the continent south of the Sahara. He also said it was inhabited by the “small-boned intelligent Eritreans,” whom he rightly or wrongly described to be more conscious and smarter than their neighbours in the region.



But that was six decades ago. Asmara of today is not what it was 30, 40, 60 years ago. Thanks to the reckless and anti-people regime of Isaias Afewerki and his small clique, the all-round breakdown in Eritrea, including its capital city, is already a reality for all to watch with ever deepening sadness.

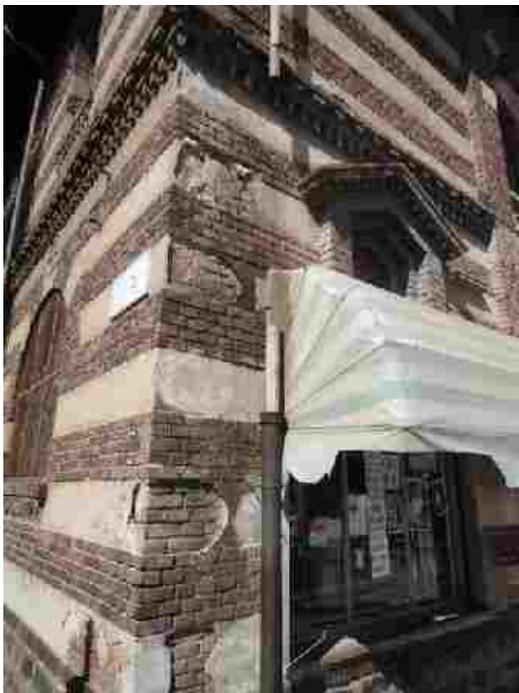
On 25 July 2020, a staff writer for Asmarino.com website posted an article entitled “Eritrea: The Stench in Asmara City Center” and tells a tale much different from what John Gunter told about the city way back in 1955. He/she aptly notes: “Asmara is no more.”

Below is the readable Asmarino.com article and its depictive pictures of dilapidated Asmara of today.

Good reading or re-reading.

Eritrea: The Stench in Asmara City Center

Taking a ‘passeggiata’ in Asmara these days exhibits a unique experience - that the city is dogged by misfortunes. A ‘passeggiata’ is an Italian expression which mostly refers to the late afternoon walks Asmarinos dutifully used to take in their beloved city center. One would see groups



of elderly people taking leisurely walks under the big palm trees. They would occasionally stop to greet acquaintances and have a chat with friends.

Others would stop at bars for a drink before heading home. One could also see boisterous boys out there who would

come out in droves to have fun while young girls would also enjoy the walk arm in arm in Asmara of 1960.



Now the 'passeggiata', according to travelers' stories, belongs to days gone by. Michela Wrong, in her book 'I didn't do it for you', described Asmara as a special place time had forgotten. She writes: "... the Italian architects of the 1930s unleashed the full, incongruous force of their Modernistic creativity."

The author describes Asmara as a city 'whose beauty has a sombre tinge, for it has been premised on tragedy'. She then goes on to write how 'conflict kept Asmara locked in time, creating in the process an accidental architectural treasure'.

Ms Wrong doesn't stop there; she adds that 'these days, the vigorous designs have lost their clean-cut certainty'. It is true the once-lauded, fine Italian-era buildings are ruined and rundown, and have not been renovated for years.



These paragraphs were written after the *Badme* war – early 2000s. One cannot help but wonder how the author would have reacted had she had the opportunity to re-visit Asmara once again.

Fast-forwarding to 2020, Asmara can hardly be described by kind and endearing

expressions for it has lost its lustre and almost all the qualities it used to possess. In simple terms, Asmara is no more.



Travelers' Stories:

Due to loss of interest and unscrupulous nature of the government, Eritreans do not visit Asmara as much as they used to. Visits to Asmara generate unnecessary misgivings and frustrations for the visitors. Asmara is under paralyzing bureaucratic control which has made the city unfit to receive visitors.

One visitor described Asmara as a ghost town. 'It is a town devoid of young people and entertainment', he said. He also said it is 'a depressed town that has nothing to offer to visitors anymore'. A lady who was born and raised in Asmara said 'Asmara is just

a notion in my head because it has lost the glow it once had when I was growing up there'. 'The inhabitants seem resigned and drifting aimlessly', she added.

A third traveler talked about the stench in city center. For reasons unknown, the municipality shut down all the public latrines that were located throughout the city. 'Now', he said, 'people are seen relieving themselves everywhere in full view. One cannot pass alongside the back entrance of the famous Asmara Cathedral'.



Indeed, people are seen covering their noses when they pass through the side street next to the building of 'Education Center' – the stairs that lead to the former Italian school. In the evening the situation is even worse. People, who need badly to relieve themselves, with no bathroom in sight, simply let themselves go everywhere.



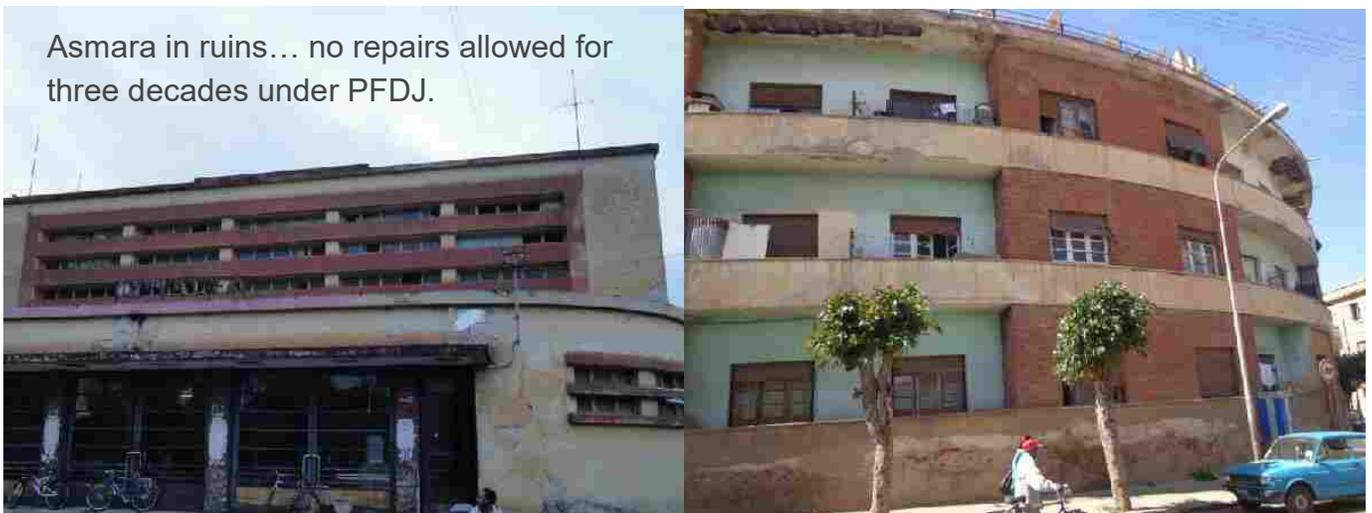
It is strange to witness some PFDJ operatives are continually projecting Asmara as a clean, efficient city that is worth visiting. The truth is Asmara does not have functional public bathrooms anymore, to say the least. Sickeningly, modern dwellings do not have enough water to flush the toilets. In short, Asmara can be described as a big rural village without proper sanitation.

There is no adequate water in the city. It suffices to see recent pictures of 'Mai Jah-Jah', once with a beautiful cascading water feature, now filled with refuse.

Yes, it is strange to read government publicities [of August 2013] that stated "Renovation of public toilets are underway in Asmara" (Shabit.com). The story even produced names of Asmara residents who expressed 'satisfaction with the government initiative taken to renovate the community facilities'.

As Eric Hoffer, American moral and social philosopher put it, Propaganda does not deceive people; it merely helps them to deceive themselves. (Author's email: banafthi@gmail.com)

Asmara in ruins... no repairs allowed for three decades under PFDJ.





EPDP ORGANS KEEP MOVING AND ACTING



Many folks may usually take the summer months of July and August to be a period of less action — a leisure time with lots of relaxation. This is not so in for members of the EPDP. Of course major events like the annual Eritrea Festival in Frankfurt were not possible to hold this year for very understandable reasons. But other party activities kept moving with added vigor and motivation reinforced by the significant merger last May with a sister organization having 90% of its members from the energetic generation, the much yearned for young generation!! Told briefly below are some of the Party activities during this summer.

EPDP Central Council Holds Annual Meeting

EPDP Central Council held its annual meeting between 15 and 16 August with all 40 voting members and 5 reserve members as well as the Auditor General attending. At the opening session, EPDP Chairman Tesfai Woldemichael (Degiga), with his full image on the Zoom screen, warmly welcomed Party leadership and presented a summary of his written annual report which was already distributed to CC members in a 61-page compilation that included reports of all nine Executive Committee offices.

His report affirmed that political developments in the Horn of Africa region; the successful dialogue for joint work with other sister political organizations, and the merger with the Eritrean People's Democratic Movement for Liberation (EPDML) last May were the major events for the Party since its 3rd and Unity Congress held in the summer of 2019.

The EPDP leadership discussed within 15 hours of the two-day meeting all the reports submitted to its scrutiny approved them after making necessary changes and following the verification of Party finances by the Auditor General, Fitsum Ghebrehiwet.

At the final hours of the CC meeting, the Party chairman and his colleagues in the Executive Office handed over their mandates to a three-person Election Committee chaired by veteran freedom fighter, Ghirmai (Keshi) Ghebresilassie. However, the Council gave vote of confidence to the outgoing chairman and his team to continue in their posts until the third CC meeting in the summer of 2021. Also re-elected to his post was the Auditor General. Before concluding this year's second meeting, the CC adopted a blue print on diplomatic relations in the region and released a final statement which included the following issues and calls:

- ⇒ Solemnly remembered all victims of the cruel regime at home;
- ⇒ Warmly saluted EPDP members and friends of the party for their generous contributions to further strengthen party activities; (...p. 9)



Partial view of EPDP Central Council at meeting soon after the Party's 3rd and Unity Congress in August 2019

- ⇒ Called on the Eritrean people and army to play their expected roles in bringing about the delayed political change in the country;
- ⇒ Gave its full support to the global Yiakil (Enough-is-Enough) movement for democratic change and encouraged EPDP members to actively support its actions;
- ⇒ Commended Ethiopians who continue to respect and support Eritrean sovereignty;
- ⇒ Called on the Ethiopian Prime Minister to re-examine his personal relations with criminal dictator and his regime in Eritrea, and measure his careless language of undermining Eritrean sovereignty;
- ⇒ Urged the internal community to support the struggle of Eritrean pro-democracy forces.

EPDP Executive Committee's 4th Regular Meeting

The season's regular meeting of the Executive Committee was held on 1 August 2020, and it was at that long stretched meeting that the reports and documents later submitted to the Central Council were studied and finalized. The meeting also reviewed the report on exceptionally generous contributions collected for party activities during the spring and summer months.

EPDP Europe Zone Meeting

On 24 July, the EPDP Europe-Zone leadership held its fifth regular meeting and discussed various issues related to each party branch in Europe and other relevant issues. The Europe Zone leadership was joined by three members from the EPDML whose merger decision is already boosting party activities in Europe.



EPDP Israel Branch Becomes More Active

On 7 July, the EPDP branch in Israel, which started the merger process with colleagues from the EPDML, took further steps to solidify the reintegration process in the branch. It also discussed other issues of national and party relevance. The branch started collection of donations to support party activities with US \$1,050 pledges made only by those who attended the day's meeting.



Denmark Branch Holds Congress



During the current reporting period, the newly revitalized EPDP branch in Denmark reported to have held a successful congress which elected its leadership under EPDP's democratic rules and procedures. The newly elected branch committee again met on July 4 and made division of labour within its ranks as follows: Kahsai Ghebrehiwet, chairman; Kidane Berhe, secretary and Mulu Berhe, treasurer. Bereket Tewelde and Filmon Gaflo were elected reserve branch members.

EPDP Holland Branch Adds Vigor



The once strong party branch in Holland is again rising up with added energy following the act of merger effected with the sister organization, EPDML. Following its introductory and merger meeting of 24 June led by its chairman, Mehari Tesfamariam, the Holland branch again convened on 8 August to discuss serious agenda on boosting the struggle and the party's role in strengthening the opposition camp. Attending and addressing the August 8 meeting were EPDP Central Council members Berhane Zewde and Dirar Mantai.

CC member Berhane Zewde explained the merger process and called on other Eritrean political formations to boldly follow example of EPDML to strengthen long existing and viable political forces in the opposition camp. On his part, CC member Dirar Mantai talked about the ongoing dialogues for unity or joint work in the opposition camp, and that in order to make the effort successful, people must join the work to make unity succeed. The meeting finally drew future work plans and stressed the importance of working with all Eritrean pro-change forces in the Netherlands. At the same time, the meeting saluted a newly joining branch member, Berhane Woldai, who said he studied and fully convinced himself to join the EPDP. Meeting participants said many young Eritreans are seriously contemplating to join the EPDP branch for effective work in the struggle for democratic change.

EPDP Switzerland Branch

On 14 August, the party branch in Switzerland held a successful merger branch with the former EPDML branch in the country. The merger meeting was attended by EPDP Central Council members Rihisti-Alem Ghebreyesus, Yohannes Wered and Woldeyesus Ammar. Following opening remarks by Tesfagaber Ghebre and Mehari Amar, the meeting participants one by one introduced themselves briefly to other branch members.

The meeting was also briefed on recent positive developments in the party and the opposition camp in general. Due to absence of some branch members, discussing future work plans were postponed for the next meeting which is expected to be held within a short time.



EPDP Expands Media Services and Coverage



In addition to the long existing and functioning radio broadcasts for localized audiences in Sweden and Germany, the EPDP North America Zone has of this year started running an effective internet broadcasting channel named EPDP TV. Anchored by Desbele Kahsai, the indefatigable veteran freedom fighter and chair of the NA Zone, the channel gives wider coverage to developments in the party and the opposition camp as well as the main editorial articles of EPDP Information Office. Of late, the channel has been serializing main contents of the EPDP Political Programme and portraits of the nine current members of the Party's Executive Committee.

Active members in EPDP branches run local radios from Gothenburg, Sweden, both in Arabic and Tigrigna, while the radio in Kassel, Germany, broadcasts in Tigrigna.



In the meantime, EPDP Central Council member Dirar Mantai this year initiated and is continually conducting very useful interviews with several figures in the Party as well as in the wider Eritrean camp of justice seekers.