

Liberty

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

AFRICAN SOLIDARITY: HIGHLY VALUED 2014 GIFT TO ERITREA



Until recently, there was little African attention to the disquieting distress of Eritreans under the most repressive regime in Africa. Fortunately as of 2014, African Civil organizations have become additional voice calling for the most urgent need of change in Eritrea!! ...page 3

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IN NEW YEAR 2015 MESSAGE, EPDP CHAIRMAN

URGES FOR UNITED ACTION TO REMOVE EVIL REGIME

In his New Year 2015 message, EPDP Chairman Menghsteab Asmerom saluted all past and present sacrifices of steadfast Eritreans struggling for freedom and democracy, and urged the entire nation, in particular the young generation, to do all what it takes to realize soon the aspirations of our people. He reminded all political and civic organizations to take stock of their shortcomings and start the struggle anew in 2015 to shorten the days of the regime in power. He



said he was encouraged by the increasing participation in the movement for change by youth, women and religious leaders and reminded that this action must be redoubled to give fruit soon. The message made it clear that the Asmara



regime is isolated by self inflicted misdeeds and this has been an opportunity for the opposition forces to deepen their international public diplomacy to obtain solidarity for the struggle for a better Eritrea.

HISTORIC SOUTHERN AFRICAN SOLIDARITY WAS MOST VALUED 2014 GIFT TO TROUBLED ERITREA

Africa has been late in giving attention to the disturbing situation of Eritrea since 1991 under the most repressive regime in the continent. Nor was Africa kind to Eritrea during its long struggle for national liberation that raged between 1961 and 1991. But now, the continent is moving from the bottom up to see to it that Eritreans receive what they deserved: an African attention to its suffering under a cruel regime that need to be pushed to leave, preferably within 2015.

Between 27 and 30 July 2014, the 10th Southern African civil societies organized under the three Apex Organizations, namely, the Southern African Development Community – Council of NGOs (SADC-CNGO) in 15 countries; the Southern African Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) and Fellowships of Christian Councils in 12 Southern Africa states (FOCCISA) deliberated in Harare the problems of peace and democracy in four countries, including Eritrea. The conference decided that Eritreans struggling for change and democratization in the country deserved their attention for solidarity and support.



Insignias of some organizations in the SADC Solidarity Task Team that attended the Johannesburg workshop

The declaration on Eritrea partly read:

“We are deeply concerned with the political situation in Eritrea and the oppressive conditions facing the people as a result of absence of respect of human rights and democratic governance. We are alarmed by the widespread and systematic human rights violations perpetrated by the government of Eritrea against its own people. Welcomed the recent decision of the UN Human Rights Commission to establish Commission of Inquiry to investigate the human rights situation in Eritrea ; concerned especially about the continued implementation of unlimited military service under which the Eritrean youth are kept under slave-like conditions rendering them futureless; indeed, the policy is forcing tens of thousands of young Eritreans to leave their country in search of safety and better future risking inhuman treatment at the hands of unscrupulous human traffickers, death in the high seas and deserts, rape and illicit organ harvesting....”

The conference called on the African Union to put Eritrea on its agenda, and urged all African governments and the international community at large to ensure the safety and the rights of Eritrean refugees, A five-member SADC Solidarity Task Team was formed to promote struggle of affected peoples and coordinate the engage relevant structures under the guidance of the Apex Alliance.

As a follow up of this declaration, the SADC Solidarity Task Team organized a workshop in Johannesburg, South Africa, between 3 and 4 December 2014. An Eritrean delegation was invited to attend the workshop. This joint Eritrean delegation to Nelson Mandela’s South Africa just a year after the passing away of modern Africa’s topmost statesman consisted not only of representatives of three political and civic organizations but also an independent activist Eritrean lady from the Arab Gulf state

The following paragraphs do highlight

1. The main issues raised and decided at the 3-4 December workshop;
2. The Eritrean delegation's press conference and its live interview with the S. African Broadcasting Corporation; and
3. Group meetings with important personalities, friends of Eritrea and Eritrean community members in Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria.

Workshop of SADC-CNGO Solidarity Task Team

The workshop of the regional Civil Society Solidarity Task Team held in Johannesburg in December was attended by the SADC-CNGO Executive Director himself and support staff, as well as senior representatives of sponsoring organizations like SATUCC); the South African Trade Unions (COSATU); FOCCISA) and the Botswana-based Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). Invited civil society and political activists from Eritrea and Swaziland were availed to give adequate updates on the political and human rights situations in their respective countries. Technical hiccups prevented the expected Palestinian delegation from taking part. The aim of the workshop was to further study the situation in Eritrea and other affected countries and see what can be done in the near future.



Executive Director of SADC-CNGOs, Mr. Abie Dithlake, was the key workshop coordinator

The four Eritrean delegates attending the workshop were given the opportunity to present in great detail the ever worsening situation in their country. They also listed what the Eritrean opposition forces would like SADC-CNGO do for Eritreans inside the country and those in diaspora. The delegation members were Ms Salwa Nour, a woman activist from the UAE, Ambassador Andebrehan Weldegiorgis of the Eritrean Forum for National Dialogue (Medrek), Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar from the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP), and Mr. Kulubrehan Abraham of the South Africa-based Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR). Dr. Adane Ghebremeskel, the SADC-CNGO programme advisor also at times joined his compatriots in telling the appalling situation in today's Eritrea.

The Johannesburg workshop thus decided, among others things:

- To establish a solidarity body dedicated to follow up the situation in Eritrea and the other three affected countries singled out for increased solidarity and support of SADC-CNGO and others beyond the region;
- To take action towards putting Eritrea in the African agenda so that it could be reviewed at the upcoming summit conference of SADC member states in February 2015;
- Make approaches to civil society movements in eastern, western and northern Africa and promote solidarity for Eritreans struggling for peace and democratic governance;

Cognizant of the fact that Eritreans being forced to leave their country are not economic refugees or migrants but genuine refugees, the workshop believed that they deserve to obtain appropriate documentation in South Africa and rest of the SADC region and beyond until Eritrea transits from dictatorship to democratic rule.



Eritrean delegation with senior representatives of SADC-CNGO, SATUCC, COSATU, FOCCISA, MISA and Swaziland NGOs

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Press Conference and SABC Interview

On 5 December, the SADC-CNGO organized a press conference to give further opportunity to the Eritrean delegation further explain the ever worsening political and human rights situation in the country. The Executive Director of SADC Council of NGO formations in all the 15 southern African countries opened the press conference with comprehensive explanation of what was discussed and decided at the workshop regarding Eritrea, Swaziland, Palestine and Western Sahara.



On their part, members of the Eritrean delegation expressed satisfaction with the historic solidarity and further pledges for support by the civil society in southern African countries and explained in more detail the distress facing Eritrea and its people under an extremely dictatorial regime. The outcome of the workshop was also disclosed to the attending members of the press, diplomats and civil society movements who came to the meeting in spite of the 5 December celebrations in Johannesburg marking the first anniversary of the death of Nelson Mandela. Among the participants were diplomats from the Ethiopian embassy in South Africa. Delegation members were also given the opportunity for a live radio interview with Channel Africa at the headquarters of South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC).



The channel enjoys big audience all over Africa. Questions asked to and responded by two delegation members included the political, economic and human rights situation inside Eritrea, the plight of its refugees, the border issue, decisions of the UN Human Rights Commission and the Eritrean regime's isolation from the rest of the world.

Meetings in Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria

Ms Salwa Nour had to depart after the 5 December press conference, but the rest of the delegation members took the opportunity of meeting with Eritrean community members, mostly in smaller numbers, in three South African cities. Most of the estimated 5,000 Eritrean community members in South Africa have no valid residence permits and are held as literal hostages of the Eritrean embassy.



Meeting with a group of Eritreans residing in Durban, South Africa

Many of them are self-employed (owning small shops) and are nowadays extremely busy to earn year's income this Christmas/summer season. It was learned that many have distanced themselves from the regime but they cannot manifest this position by attending opposition meetings or, if they do attend, by letting their pictures taken in such occasions.

On 6 December, three members of the delegation held an extensive discussion with members of the Eritrean community in Durban. Problems explained by the delegation members and later raised for comprehensive discussion in the question and answer session included the situation inside the homeland, the changing attitude of external powers towards the regime in Asmara, the disquieting situation of Eritrean refugees in many parts of the world, the fragmentation of the forces opposed to the regime and new initiatives for dialogue and realigning of the struggling forces to create a viable alternative force or forces for change and democratization in the country.

On 7 December, a similar get-together was held with members of the Eritrean community in the Johannesburg region.



A memorial picture with compatriots in Johannesburg

Members of the delegation also took the opportunity of meeting old friends and acquaintances individually and/or in smaller groups for exchange of notes on how the mobilization of the silent majority can be tackled and the forces in the opposition coalesced in an effective manner.

**EPDP CONDEMNS SUDAN/UNHCR FAILURE TO PROTECT
ERITREAN REFUGEES AT SHAGARAB CAMP, E. SUDAN**

Again on 23 to 25 December 2014, the refugee reception camp of Shagarab in Eastern Sudan was once more under chaos, fear and death simply because the host country, Sudan, and the refugee protection agency, UNHCR, could not protect them. The deadly incident started when a group of Eritrean refugees tried to cross the River Atbara near the camp in a small boat. The boat was followed by some Rashaida tribesmen who are usually implicated in human trafficking. In a frantic move by the refugees, the small boat capsized; over 20 of the refugees were reported to have died.



The angry camp dwellers went to a Sudanese village and angrily inquired about the whereabouts of their friends. Sudanese army personnel intervened violently carrying out untold atrocities, including burning of refugee shelters and property. The security forces also loaded to army vehicles nearly 1,000 young people under duress and reportedly took them to three locations in the region. The situation was unresolved till the Eve of New Year 2015.

In an urgent Christmas-day message to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) condemned the continued failure of the Sudan and the UN refugee agency to protect the camp residents.



UNHCR's Antonio Guterres while on visit to Shagarab camp on 12 January 2012

The EPDP memo further expressed anger and frustration with Sudan's and UNHCR's lack of serious action to protect the residents of the reception camp at Shararab which has been for a long time under the constant threat of human traffickers and their accomplices in the Sudanese security forces.

The memo also recalled the High Commissioner's visit to the camp in January 2012 and his promise to boost protection to the residents from all abusers in the region. It also mentioned the tragic incident of January 2013 in which 8 camp residents were taken hostage from inside the camp only a year after that the UN Commissioner's visit.

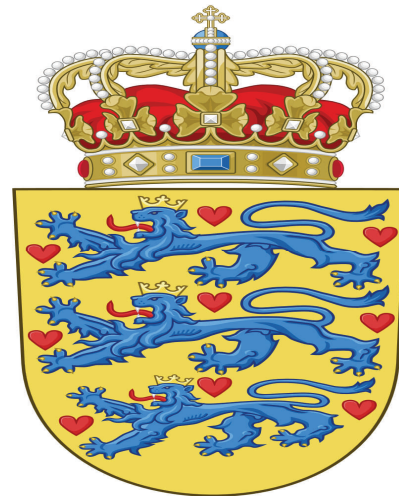
It is estimated that up to 4-5,000 Eritreans cross the Eritrean border the Sudan and Eritrea on monthly basis. The three segments of Shagarab refugee camp houses well over 120,000 refugees.

The EPDP memo, which was copied to the government of the Sudan, concerned EU offices, and the UN Permanent Missions to regional Europe office in Geneva, also called on the international community to make pressure bear on the Sudan not to forcibly hand over the Eritrean refugees to the criminal regime in Eritrea.

DENMARK URGED TO DISCARD REPORT ON ERITREA; HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, UNHCR CALL IT FLAWED

In a strongly-worded memorandum addressed to the Foreign Ministry of Denmark, the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) criticized the recent report of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) which, after a visit to Eritrea, said the situation in the country is not "as bad as reported" and wrongly called Eritrean asylum seekers as "economic refugees".

In the memorandum urging the branches of the Danish government to ignore the report, the EPDP believed that the Danish team's report has "reached an utterly erroneous and dangerous conclusion that we see as a travesty of justice and an added insult to injury to the Eritrean people currently condemned to live under the worst repressive regime in the whole of Africa, if not the world."



The EPDP regretted the wrong picture conveyed by the DIS report which intended to deny all world bodies including the UN Human Rights Rapporteur who has been denied entry to Eritrea while the likes of DIS are welcomed by the Asmara regime. The memo reminded Foreign Minister Martin Lidegaard that Eritrea is a country where no elections were held for 23 years; no constitution exists; no freedom of press is allowed; no free worship is permitted; in private entrepreneurship exists and no proper education is granted.

The Danish Government was told that becoming a refugee is not a choice and that Eritreans who are fleeing the country are doing so because they were deprived of all basic political and human rights under the repressive regime that made the country unliveable for the time being.

On its part the Human Rights Watch found it to be a "deeply flawed" report and advised Denmark and other European governments to await the outcome of the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Eritrea, established in June 2014, before considering any major policy changes concerning Eritrea.

The UNHCR also raised serious concerns about the methodology in compiling the report. It added: "The (DIS) report does not include any reflections on the reliability of specific sources of information. No information is provided in the report about the regulatory framework for the media, NGOs, research institutes and other actors in Eritrea, nor does the report contain an assessment of the impact of these regulatory frameworks on the independence of certain sources and the reliability of information provided by these sources".

IN UK, EPDP CHAIRMAN HOLDS PUBLIC MEETINGS; TALKS TO FOREIGN OFFICE

During his latest duty tour in UK between late November to mid- December, Mr. Menghsteab Asmerom, chairman of the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) led well-attended public meetings in the UK cities of London and Birmingham, and also held talks with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) on hot issues affecting Eritrea and its people at this time.

Meetings in both cities were attended by a good number of national figures and prominent veterans of the much stretched and yet unfinished struggle of the Eritrean people for national liberation and democratic governance.



Accompanied in both meetings by EPDP executive committee member, Mr. Hamid Drar; Central Council member, Mr. Assefaw Berhe, and chairman of the UK branch, Mr. Goitom Mebrahtu, the party chairman took the opportunity to first highlight the ever deteriorating political, social, economic and human rights situation in Eritrea and the insurmountable problems being faced by Eritrean refugees scattered all over the globe.



EPDP chairman leads public discussion with Eritreans in Birmingham, UK

In his comprehensive presentation made both in Arabic and Tigrinia, the EPDP chairman gave adequate outline on the party's role in public mobilization, diplomacy, information and humanitarian spheres, and stressed that these contributions can be considered satisfactory inputs to the collective struggle being waged by forces opposed to the repressive regime in Eritrea. Mr. Menghesteab Asmerom also expressed deep concern about the state of fragmentation prevailing in the opposition camp and believed that the only way out is to come together by narrowing down the existing points of difference. He also stressed the paramount importance of laying the ground to attract the full participation of the younger generation in the ongoing struggle for positive change in our country.



EPDP Delegation at White Hall

Before his departure from UK, the EPDP Chairman visited the UK foreign ministry (FCO) on 15 December; he was accompanied by the party branch chairman for UK. The talks were focused on the worsening situation inside Eritrea and critical issues affecting Eritrean refugees in many parts of the world.

EPDP Chairman Promotes Public Diplomacy in Frankfurt

Earlier on 1 November 2014, the EPDP Chairman picked timely topic on public diplomacy to address a well-participated seminar of German friends in Frankfurt and briefed them on the refugee phenomenon that has bedevilled Eritrea and its people for the past 50 years. Organized by a discussion group at Kirchplatz in Frankfurt, the seminar aimed to create awareness among Germans about the frightening social collapse in Eritrea and the worsening refugee exodus of young Eritreans.



The seminar dwelled on the root cause of the refugee exodus from Eritrea and its possible solutions. The event attracted many German intellectuals and leading figures in Frankfurt. He explained four waves of refugee exodus from Eritrea and explained their causes including all the hazards Eritrean refugees face in their risky ventures while trying to escape the worse things they left at home.

Following his presentation, Mr. Mussie Semere, a young party member, read a summary of the pastoral letter of four Eritrean Bishops on the situation in Eritrea. Seminar participants discussed the presentations and raised very important questions regarding the disquieting condition in Eritrea and the plight of its people.

SWISS SOCIAL DEMOCRATS, FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

BRIEFED ON WORSENING SITUATION IN ERITREA

A delegation of the Eritrean People's Democratic Party (EPDP) on 19 November 2014 held extensive discussions with senior officials of the Swiss Social Democratic Party and with the Swiss Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The EPDP delegation availed itself in Bern upon a formal invitation from the Swiss capital to exchange notes with concerned organs of the Swiss Social Democratic Party as well as for updating the Swiss Federal authorities on the ever worsening situation in Eritrea.

Consisting of EPDP's head for foreign relations, Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar, and Swiss branch leadership members Messrs. Tesfagaber Ghebre and Fitwi Kifle, the Eritrean delegation raised many hot issues that it wished to be addressed by Switzerland in close cooperation with other countries and multi-lateral organizations. The delegation also submitted memoranda: one to the SP/PS president, Mr. Christian Levrat, and in the afternoon to the Swiss Foreign Ministry.



Excerpts from the memorandum to the Swiss Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs can summarize the gist of the issued proposed for action at the level of Switzerland.

Exerting Pressure on the Asmara regime: 1. Assist in organizing international pressure on the dictatorial regime to end the limitless "national service" it started two decades ago; 2. Allow ICRC as well as the UN Commission of Inquiry and the UN Human Rights Rapporteur for Eritrea to visit the over 300 prisons where inmates are kept for many years without recourse to a court of law.

Normalization of relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia: 1. The excuse given as a stumbling block for better relations is the border problem. Both countries can, and must be advised, to show readiness for compromise. 2. In particular, there is a need of pressurizing Ethiopia through different means to accept the final and binding decision of the arbitration boundary commission.

Active support for Eritrean refugees in the Horn, and in Switzerland: 1. Initiate a special package project for academic and vocational education in the Horn using resources suspended from reaching the regime. 2. Young Eritrean refugees in Switzerland to be granted special educational privileges because they were deprived of proper education at home.

Assist in bringing about a positive change in Eritrea: Help change in Eritrea through all means possible. Empower Eritrean non-state actors (mainly by reaching the civil society and political movements in diaspora) through active support for capacity building.

FROM INTERNAL PARTY ACTIVITIES



The EPDP branches in Germany continued to hold their regular meetings without fail. The Frankfurt branch held one of its meetings on 23 November in which political awareness education was given in addition to a briefing on the latest developments regarding the ongoing struggle for change in Eritrea by EPDP Central Council, Mr. Neguse Tseggai and other senior cadres.



The branch in Cologne, North Germany, also held its final meeting for year 2014 on 6 December.

On 5 December, the All-Europe Zone leadership held its year-end meeting to review past performances and draw future plans. The same leadership, chaired by Mr. Berhane Ghebre-Kristos, called on 12 December a wider meeting for briefing of all branch leaderships in the continent.



On its part, the Germany sub-zone leadership held its 2014 performance review meeting on 6 December.

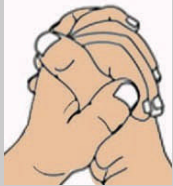


The North America Zone on 7 December held a teleconference for briefing to all party members in the region. Mr. Tesfamichael Yohannes, EPDP Executive Committee member in charge of organizational Affairs, and North America Zone Chair, Mr. Woldu Negassi, took the opportunity to update total membership on zonal and party performances and the challenges



ahead in the year 2015.

It was also reported that the nine-Party Congress, headed by Mr. Tesfemichael Yohannes, held a chain of meetings in the past few months and that its 20 done within the period leading to the



person Preparatory Committee for the Second famichael Yohannes, held a chain of meetings in December meeting finalized the activities to be 2nd EPDP Congress in the summer of 2015.

Meanwhile, on 21 December 2014, the Stockholm branch held a meeting for discussing latest developments and internal party issues in the presence of Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar, head for foreign relations office. Later in the day, TV- Voice of the People seized the opportunity to interview the leadership member for broadcast in Stockholm and its environs.



2014 WAS ALSO A YEAR OF BIG LOSSES

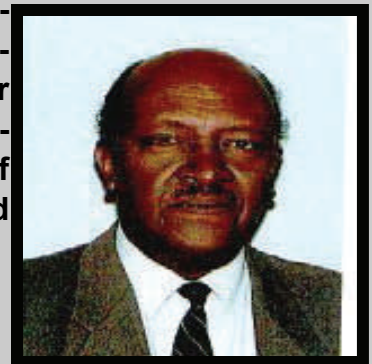
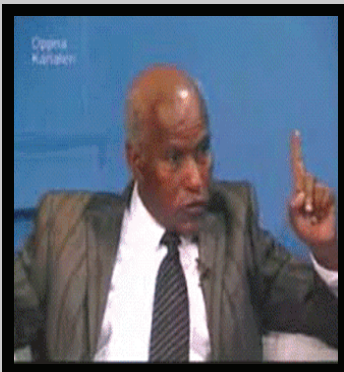
The year 2014 was a period in which the EPDP and the rest of the Eritrean resistance movement lost important members in the unfinished struggle of the Eritrean people for peace, justice, democracy and prosperity.



The losses included three EPDP members: (Ms) Mebrat Beyene (Sudan); the indomitable struggler Asghedom Wedi Bashai of USA and Ali Amir, long-time fighter and EPDP branch chairman in the refugee camps in E. Sudan till his martyrdom only a few days ago.



Among the other major losses during 2014 to the Eritrean camp opposed to the dictatorial regime in Eritrea were Ahmed Nasser, a long-time leader in the prolonged struggle for liberation and democracy in Eritrea, and Omar Jabir Omar of Australia, whose bold and tireless pen and conviction in the advantages of moderation and reconciliation were needed most now.



May their souls rest in peace