

## **Do the Eritrean Opposition Political Organizations own the struggle from Dictatorship to Democracy in Eritrea?**

### **Part 2**

By Fesseha Nair

Assessing and reassessing these conferences, dialogues, seminars and workshops that have been held in Ethiopia in the past 20 years are important requirements as experiences of bringing together the stakeholders. The aim of the meetings held in Ethiopia to unite the forces for democratic change in Eritrea to go forward and renew energy to those who really struggle for democratic change in Eritrea. They were instruments but not ends in themselves.

This article is part 2 of the article titled, "**Do the Eritrean Opposition Political Organizations own the struggle from Dictatorship to Democracy in Eritrea?**"

This article will delve on addressing the real causes of conflict in the Eritrean political life. The kind of conflict inside the Eritrean Opposition is a deep-rooted conflict based on identities. This deep-rooted conflict has never got the right solution from the very beginning of Eritrean political struggle for self-determination and later during the armed liberation struggle and now at this time of struggle from dictatorship to democracy.

Eritrean leaders have inherited violent and destructive conflict management and this authoritarian and totalitarian culture of excluding, ignoring or attempting to eliminate others has never brought peace inside and outside Eritrea.

Developing a national awareness requires objectivity, tolerance of cultural difference and knowledge of the diverse Eritrean people's history and their struggle for independence and freedom. Tolerance is understanding cultural differences inside Eritreans and accepting and working with them. No culture is better or worse. The discussions going on in the social media are harming the Eritrean diversity. The arguments by some elements have no historical traces but oral defamations by some retarded individuals. Arguments such as Muslims cannot lead or such persons from lowland or other places in Eritrea cannot lead or come to leadership is not objective and realistic.

Leadership or management skills have no relationship with your religion or ethnicity. Such arguments simply coming from those who in desperation living in the western world are not from the reality and objectivity of living together does not mean that you must have the same culture and religion. Human beings live together by respecting each others diversity at national and global level. Let us tell these irredentists that the Eritrean Independence and territorial integrity is irreversible. Eritrean people has lived together in peace before the birth of Eritrean nationhood even before the world's nations were formed.

The Eritrean conflict is deep-rooted conflict and deep-rooted conflict demand deep-rooted conflict management. What we need is not leaders but leadership- management who have the knowledge of managing conflicts whether they are internal or external.

What we see inside the Eritrean Opposition leaders as incapable of solving their internal conflict reminds us that still they lack the skills of managing conflicts. What can we the grass-roots do in order to help them come together. What we need is open mind and heart and discuss the issues of conflict in the Eritrean political arena.

What we see and experience in the opposition camp is the same campaign that was during the political struggle of the 1941-1952 between the pro-independence of Eritrea and union with Ethiopia. There are two elements often combined in the Eritrean conflict. One is identity. What is now going is a mobilization of the people in their communal identity groups based on race, religion, culture, language and so on. The other is distribution of sharing the political, economic social and cultural resources. It is the unjust combination of these two that are the main causes of the Eritrean conflict. We failed to build an "shared Eritrean identity" in the past, and now at the present. The leaders have been manipulating and exploiting these elements of identity for their narrow benefits, this is the main issue of conflict we as the victims of such politics must give a lesson to such leaders to change their destructive attitude of conflict management and search new tools for conflict management suitable to our case in Eritrea. We must say now enough is enough no more walls of hate and disintegration but building bridges for peace and harmony to win the dictatorship inside Eritrea and transfer the power to its owner the Eritrean people.

### **Tools for conflict management in the opposition camp**

The Eritrean internal conflict is identity -driven and emotionally charged mobilized to violence instead of building trust and harmony. It has gone far beyond its borders. Several examples can be given since the Eritrean nationhood.

### **Foreign Saviours**

Here I would like to quote from Gene Sharps studies on foreign reliance:

*" Some foreign states will act against a dictatorship only to gain their own economic, political, or military control over the country"*

Neighbouring governments with their own interests can escalate such internal conflicts for destabilization or stabilization. Such beyond border connections have been experienced in many nations of the world and resulted with destruction and cleansing of people.

In such political situation it is difficult to identify the parties in conflict how much they independent from reliance on foreign country. The situation of the Eritrean Political organizations is more confused as some facts are being seen by the sponsor country, kin state operating in support of one group against the majority, such intervention can reduce the possibility of the conflicting parties to resolve their conflicts. It makes the conflict management process prone to abuse and disruption.

Freezing such deep-rooted conflicts or leave them latent is not sustainable solution. What we need is a new range of flexible and adoptable tools that can take consideration of the interests that helps us solve the identity-related conflict. The aim of this article is to concentrate on developing the resources and materials by assisting the construction of the process of negotiation and its outcome. Designing good conflict management based on the democratic values is criteria to come together and negotiate. Democracy itself is not a panacea itself but if we in the opposition camp believe in democratic principles we must first resolve our internal

conflicts peacefully without external intervention. We must own the process. An imposed solution cannot resolve our internal conflict, such imposed or coerced conflict management failed in the post world war and even after the post cold war era.

In this article I would like to propose that negotiation is the only possibility and in this case we must assist the Opposition forces

- enter the process of negotiating a political settlement by helping them generate creative scenarios for progress towards an acceptable outcome.

- provide them with a wide range of political options both for designing the most appropriate negotiations process for them and selecting the democratic structure suitable to our situation

- assisting them in developing solutions which are acceptable and appropriate with our situation

- provide information on the range of varied approaches to building sustainable democracy inside the Opposition camp to gain the people's trust and legitimacy.

In conclusion, I would like to remind all the internal and external stakeholders both success or failure to peace building in Eritrea should first owned by us before siding with external kin or neighbouring governments. Let us keep it inside the border instead crossing borders that never benefits the Eritreans or its neighbours.

#### References:

1. Gene Sharp, " From Dictatorship to democracy" A Conceptual Framework for Liberation.
2. International Institute For Democracy and Electoral Assistance IDEA, " Dialogue for Democratic Development, Policy Options."
3. IDEA, " Dialogue in Pursuit of Development."
4. IDEA, Democracy and Deep- Rooted Conflict, Policy Options