

PFDJ CONFERENCES OF SUPPRESSION OF TRUTH AND ALTERNATIVE UNIVERSE OF LIES: NATION BUILDING OR NATION RUINING?

Abdu Habib

sabbahar@rocketmail.com

“The concept of the benevolent dictator, just like the concept of the noble thief or honest whore, is no more than a meaningless fantasy.”(Alaa Al Aswany, Egyptian writer, born on May 26, 1957)

It is almost three decades since post-independence Eritrea has become the black sheep of Africa, whose countries, notably our closest neighbours, are showing giant strides in all fields, in a remarkable abundance we tremendously envy them for. Unfortunately, the Eritrea we see unfolding since 1991 is not the Eritrea projected in our minds and in the minds of all progressive forces of the world that had supported the legitimacy of the liberation struggle and had stood in solidarity with our people. To be precise, what has happened to post-independence Eritrea is contrary to the expectations that independent Eritrea would be a perfect model for the rest of Africa, in terms of fundamental rights and freedoms, rule of law, good governance, and sustainable socio-economic justice and progress.

Those expectations are not inexplicable or did not come from nothing. They came from the knowledge about the goals and aspirations of our people for which they fought the most protracted war of liberation in Africa in which they paid the highest price in terms of martyrdom, and unimaginable harsh circumstances and unprecedented hardships. Nonetheless, the bitter reality on the ground is that: Eritrea has become the only nation hurtling towards abyss (that part of hell conceived to be the bottomless pit) and racing to the graveyard, thanks to the enthronement of the criminal gang led by Adolf Isias, who has been showing undisturbed devotion to ruining the nation and putting its sovereignty under assault and at high risk.

The state of decay, collapse, and disintegration in all walks of life we witness in the Eritrean state, in addition to the abject betrayal of the goals of the Eritrean

Revolution and the aspirations of the people, have provoked strong feelings of discontent and anger, manifesting themselves in ways, easy for the brutal regime to feel and understand the level of the danger hovering over its head. It is amid these circumstances that the PFDJ conferences of dishonesty and deliberate falsehood were held inside and outside the country to falsify and twist the truth, misinform, disinform, and mislead. It is appropriate to ask: ***Could anybody convince us that the holding of these conferences has nothing to do, in terms of timing and content, with the circumstances under which they had happened?*** Anybody who cannot see that these conferences show that the ground beneath the beast and his criminal gang is moving, should be either shamefully unfamiliar with the characters of authoritarian regimes and how they work under the state of strong despair, or hopelessly naïve, taking the rhetoric and spin of the PFDJ at faith value or without further proof, verification, or investigation.

Regarding the reasons behind the conferences that have taken place inside the country since January of this year, our people back home, did not need to look hard to see the evidence for the intention of the criminal gang. The ruin, destruction, and havoc implying the irrevocable and widespread damage in all aspects of life are as clear as 2+2. Even for those of us living in Diaspora, we do not need to be mind readers to know the intentions behind these conferences. That is why these conferences, as reported, gave the people the platform to show their resentment louder, finally to end up in disruptions that led to the walk out of the people, sick of the drama, leaving behind the disappointed officials in the hall in panic, absorbed in a deep thought of what and how to report to their boss, who they knew would irrationally reprimand them for poor performance, holding them responsible for the failure of the conferences, despite their undying loyalty. This is a hopeful sign, though it does not mean that the Atse did not take harsh measures on those identified as “trouble-makers” in the conferences. Nevertheless, the violent methods he could use and the brutality he could show against the identified “trouble-makers”, thinking time is on his side, will definitely create more radical opposition and make the demise of the regime more likely and fast-approaching. As we do not want to waste time on the conferences inside the country that have shown unintended devastating results for the regime, we wrap up the issue with

the question: *What does the disruption of these conferences and the way things have happened show for the future of the country?* The answer to this question is the universal truth that the history of a dictatorship is the history of its eventual defeat. As strong believers in this universal truth, we expect that the dictatorship in Eritrea will end in one of the ways we saw other dictatorships ended, in Africa, including the Sudan, Middle East (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen during Arab Spring) or Eastern Europe in 1989 (Romania, Hungary and the former Soviet Union). We leave the task of predicting how the brutal dictatorship in Eritrea would end to the smart minds, while we opt to focus on the recent Y-PFDJ conferences in Diaspora.

There is no more amusing joke than hearing the brutal regime that has destroyed the genius, who could play exceptional intellectual ability and creative productivity, the wealth of the country in the form of human and economic resources, the chances for socio-economic development and progress, the history, the social and cultural values, and the opportunity to build an advanced democratic system that could serve other African countries as a model, claim that it has been engaged in the process of raising and organizing a new generation under the name of Y-PFDJ, preparing the new generation for the leadership role of the country and speed up the process of nation building. Here they are speaking what contradicts the truth, replacing the term “nation ruining” with the opposite term “nation building” to disguise what they have been engaged in since 1991. Let them give the people a 5-minute freedom to speak out their mind, if they want to know whether the image they try to display coincides with the image our people have about the PFDJ brutal rule. Their claim cannot change the realities on the ground. What is there is there for anybody to see: nobody needs a microscope. But the question which haunts the gang is: **Why are we where we are now?**

Interestingly enough, I recently came across an audio clip of a presentation in the Y-PFDJ conference in Diaspora that captured my attention (<https://youtu.be/164FBGom2Qo>). The topic was about transition in Eritrea, its problems, and how to make the transition a success. The premise of the

presentation was that Eritrea has been engaged in transition since 1991 (linking that to nation building), and that the transition will continue for years, if not decades, because the country is at an early stage yet. Further, the speaker in the conference emphasizes that the “mission is not yet complete”, touching on generational foundation (a term he did not even explain), participation of the new generation in nation building, the role of Diaspora Eritreans, and the challenges the youth face at present. He finally concludes, in a laughable and despicable manner, reflecting mental rigidity that the tasks of the transition or nation building, which he did not even bother to identify or enumerate for his audience, could only be done by the EPLF, in the same way it had achieved the independence of the country.

One would wonder if he is not really aware that EPLF does not exist anymore, or he might thought anything he says would be accepted by the audience without any scrutiny. Here, in passing, he adds a flatly false remark that other Eritrean liberation organizations had constituted a real obstacle, which at the end of the day the EPLF could successfully defeat and liberate the country. Additionally, he mischaracterizes Osman Saleh Sabbe and others, whom he says are the remnants of the old order (“Terefrac”), describing them as the “Fifth Column” currently living in the West. I do not want to get into the ELF-EPLF political mess, but here it is appropriate to mention that he conveyed a horribly biased message to young citizens at an age still unfolding to adulthood, without caring for long-term effects.

In a nutshell, one would be tempted to suspect that the person who did the presentation is a new member of the Lying Club because he does not even know how to lie intelligently or disguise the embarrassing display of his intellectual dishonesty. It is difficult to imagine why he lies when he did not need to. In few words, this presentation shockingly shows that the PFDJ plan to set the stage for the worst possible path (it could be establishing Isias’s dynasty) is blooming new leaves daily. For that path, they are working 24/7 tirelessly to create a generation devoted to the culture of obedience and deformed patriotism: tools used to slow down the struggle for change, yielding the dictator and his contemplated dynasty

higher survival odds. These are quick and general remarks on the presentation, but we need to investigate some academic issues.

To examine some of the central issues raised in the presentation (not all), we start with the key question: ***Has post-independence Eritrea really been engaged in transition since 1991?*** As a springboard to this question, we need to see what transition means.

The definition the PFDJ cadre gave to the concept of transition is the simplest (probably taken from grade 4 social studies textbook) and the vaguest one, expected from the students only to commit to rote memory without understanding, just to pass an exam. He says it is a change from one condition or state to another, without even showing whether that change is a step backward or a forward one. If he thought his definition of the term “transition” applies to post-independence Eritrea, the Eritrean people would agree with him because that is an admission that what he calls “transition” in present-day Eritrea, is a change by reversal or backwards. In other words, that definition is perfect when we compare the socio-economic and political conditions of Eritrea, including the rule of law and human rights situation, during the Ethiopian occupation, which was very oppressive (but an angel comparatively speaking), with those of the PFDJ rule (the national devil). This is the only “intellectual honesty” we could give the cadre who did the presentation credit for.

In contrast, the liberal and democratic forces of the world, including Eritreans struggling for freedom, socio-economic justice and progress, and democratic change, have a universally-accepted vision about “transition”. That vision will answer the question whether post-independence Eritrea has truly been engaged in transition since 1991, while showing the outcome aspired for by our people (now we retrospectively find out our expectations from the gang were naïve and unrealistic) to emerge from the independence of the country.

As we saw it practically happen in China, former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and many third world countries, transition means the period in which the emerging state makes a set of structural transformations, changing a centrally

planned economy to a market based one. This is known as economic liberalization, which is opening up to the rest of the world in terms of trade, regulations, taxation, and other areas that generally affect business in the country. The West had already undergone through the process of liberalization, but the emerging countries, of which post-independence Eritrea is one, have been expected to make certain liberalization reforms, as a transition they have to go through. This will lead us to the question: ***What does liberalization mean economically?***

Liberalization is a process of taking measures that liberalize the economy and this begins with the removal of barriers to international investment so that foreign capital can easily flow in and out of the country. The process encompasses trade liberalization, financial liberalization, and privatization of state-owned enterprises (as needed and preferably when the enterprises operate at loss). Here it should be emphasized that the removal of barriers attracts foreign investment because the political risks for the investors will be reduced.

The liberalization process needs legal and institutional reforms that redefine the role of the state, establishing rule of law, securing property rights and transparent market entry regulations, and introducing competition policies. As a result of those legal and institutional reforms that redefine the role of the state, we find the following conditions fully in place:

- Strong legal foundation to settle disputes.
- Fair and enforceable contract laws.
- Property laws.
- Other conditions that allow business and investors to operate with full confidence.

As the above transformations have been what we hoped and aspired for, to show how far the PFDJ gang has failed the Eritrean people, we need to raise the question: ***What are the benefits of economic liberalization and the accompanying democratization process for the country?*** Experience has shown that the state intervention in the running of the economy makes it inefficient and

distorted because it cannot manage it well. For instance, remember the state sector, as was called then, in the economy and services during the Dergue era in Ethiopia, of which Eritrea was a part. The state sector that had to operate at loss included industries, state farms, domestic trade corporations, enterprises owned by the Hotels and Tourism Commission, and to a lesser extent, the Ethiopian Telecommunication, Ethiopia Road Transport Authority, and EELPA (Ethiopian Electric Power Authority). In fact, the Ethiopian Airlines was probably the only profitable state-owned company.

Another setback in any state sector is that the state moves the scarce resources to less productive activities. On the contrary, it is an uncontested truth that the owners of the private enterprises, in any country, maximize their economic benefits and overall economic welfare. Moreover, politicians and state bureaucrats engage in corruption, embezzlement, and bribe-seeking practices, using their power and authority. All of these practices in the state-controlled economy reduce the overall economic growth of the country and cannot lead to the reduction of poverty. These reasons justify economic liberalization or transition.

On the other hand, it is impossible to have transition or economic liberalization in the absence of political institutions established on basis of the constitution of a country. This shows the dialectical relationship between transition or liberalization process in all economic and service sectors, on the one hand, and democratization on the other. I am not sure how to describe the blatant and unashamed claim that Eritrea which does not have the necessary constitutional and institutional environment for economic liberalization has been engaged in transition since 1991. If I say, "That is false", I would not be saying enough. Just to leave it here, though stunned, we ask the following questions about post-independence Eritrea to engage PFDJ cadres and see if there are any who could prove us wrong (we are ready to learn):

- Does the political system in Eritrea guarantee compliance with basic human rights, political and economic freedoms, and private property? In other words: Is there a functional constitution that guarantees these rights?
- Are trade barriers removed, state-owned enterprises and resources re-structured, and financial sector created to facilitate macroeconomic stabilization (related to interest rates and national productivity) and the movement of private capital?
- Is the government transparent and accountable, with media and civil society scrutiny and political competition based on elections?
- Is there investment in human capital through the improvement of tertiary or post-secondary education?

One of the basic objectives of the Y-PFDJ conferences, if not the most important one, is creating idol worshipers. Here, by idol, we mean any idea, individual, or organization seen above criticism, scrutiny and accountability. The falsehoods with which they poison the minds of the youth target the conception of justice and state, and are aimed at disabling critical thinking. We are among the few countries that worship leaders and governments of failed states. The PFDJ cadres intentionally confuse government with state, though governments come and go and the state is there forever. Here they teach falsehoods and try to instill them into the minds of the youth so that they internalize them. Accordingly, though they may not say it explicitly always, they try to raise the youth in a way they grow to believe that:

- Isias means Eritrea.
- Anybody who criticizes him is insulting the country or is against it, finally to be labeled as a traitor. Just remember the case of G15.
- He is the inspiring leader, not a public servant.
- His prestige stems from the prestige of the state, though we believe that the prestige of the state stems from the rule of law. If he is above the law: How come he represents the prestige of the state?

As leaders make decisions that affect millions of people, their decisions could lead to a crisis or a catastrophe. Particularly, according to the falsehoods above, they cannot be held accountable. We compose songs for our leaders and dance for them, whereas in the West the leader could be criticized, and in extreme cases slapped with shoes and hit eggs (as freedom of expression). When a citizen criticizes the leader in the West, patriotic people say, "He loves his country". Here the questions that demand answers are:

- ***When are we going to think along patriotic lines so that we could see a leader as a public servant who can be criticized and held accountable, not as somebody above the law?***
- ***How do we insulate our young generation against these falsehoods so that they could think objectively and critically?***

Teaching Civics, which combines the history of the country and the constitution, to the young generation, is the only guarantee that raises good citizens. To make the new generation hold fast to the principles our martyrs had fallen for, we need to teach history of the revolution. Further, history of the country and the constitution are the only resource materials from which the young could take their inspirations. To put it candidly, Civics Education shapes the young generations in the way the society (not the government, which is only a part and not all of the society) wants them to be.

If any conference claimed to have been designed with the aim of the development of the young generations into informed, effective and responsible citizens or to prepare them for future national responsibilities, are not based on the contents of the constitution, then the government or the party organizing the conference should have an agenda which is not at all national. Here I am not using the auxiliary verb "may" or "could" that express possibility but "should" to express necessity. It is against this backdrop that the Y-PFDJ conferences should be evaluated. Precisely, the evaluation leads to the inevitable conclusion that the conferences have nothing to do with the creation of responsible, patriotic, and conscious citizens. This is to say, if conferences organized for the young

generations are not based on constitutional principles and core ideas (that are the basis of moral and civic virtues), they do not meet the requisite of good citizenship training. That is why we call the Y-PFDJ conferences, conferences aimed at creating idol worshipers, who are “yes” men or afraid to ask critical questions and challenge. It is from Civics Education that the spirit of “no longer afraid to ask critical questions and challenge” emerges, and eventually develops into the spirit of “no longer afraid of being shot at for the sake of my rights.” Our last observation is that we did not see any vision in the Y-PFDJ conferences, and Nelson Mandella teaches us, “A movement without a vision is a movement without moral foundation.”

It is harder for PFDJ elites to justify dictatorship today. The reason is that the whole globe is in the eye of the media. Accordingly, getting away with crimes is more difficult for dictators than it used to be. That is why we believe these Eritrean folks should stand for something bigger than being obedient servants of the boss and selling their souls to the devil. I hope they realize that Eritrea will live forever, whereas the PFDJ rule is not a permanent state. It is rather a moment in time, and it will pass. No dictator could get away with crimes committed on humanity, as we see it around the globe. No injustice and pains of the people will remain forever, and no will of the people could be thwarted indefinitely. This was candidly put and proved on the ground by Nelson Mandela who said:

“You may succeed in delaying, but never in preventing the transition of South Africa to democracy.”

The end of any dictator will come, and all dictators, their cronies, and supporters will repent when the right moment comes. But that would be too late. In this connection, let us remember what has happened to Omar Al Bashier of the Sudan, who said on his first day in Kobbar Prison:

”المظلوم دعوة اصابتنا”

“We were befallen by the prayers of the victims of injustice.”

(Translation is mine).

I would not be surprised, if the Sudanese people build a statue of Al Bashier at the Revolution Square in Khartoum so that families of the victims could slap him with shoes and spit at him. It is cynical to say that, but it is understandable because their wounds are deep and healing time will take long. But the lesson to be learned is that, this is the inevitable end and destiny of any dictator, whoever he is. The end cannot be different for any.

Coming back to our people, we can say that they can meet the challenge again, with perseverance and realism, inspired and aided by history. We are confident that, by establishing the foundations for liberalism, our people will go through the transition to democracy, ensuring civil and political rights, building stable political institutions and vibrant civil society, as well as securing socio-economic justice and progress, and creating the middle class. As Eritrea needs the head and heart of each of its sons and daughters for the coming period of reconstruction, following the fast-approaching and the inevitable fall of the regime, PFDJ elites need to realize that it is high time to break with the brutal regime, rally by the side of their people, scrutinize “government” actions and inactions, challenge their leaders, and demand answers for the grievances of their people. This is the safest historical path demanded by the cause of the people.

My word of advice to justice seekers is that, isolating PFDJ supporters, stopping social engagement with them, or in the worst case, entering into a battle with them, is counterproductive and does not serve the cause they are struggling for. The right thing to do is to bring as many Eritreans into a shared vision and on board. It is imperative to remember that any political view or stand is not incontrovertibly static. It could evolve, develop, and change with new information, learned lessons, persuasion, and dialogue. The possibility of getting together is always there; it is only a matter of creating the right environment for that. After all, we Eritreans, on all sides of the spectrum, are blessed with incredible love for our country. It is time to put that love above all differences and save the country. =====

HAPPY EASTER FOR OUR CHRISTIAN FOLKS!