

## **2020 AND THE LONG-AWAITED INESCAPABLE END OF ERITREA'S RULING CRIMINAL GANG: WHO CAN THWART THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE?**

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*“Even if you cover the whole world with darkness, you can never stop the sun from rising.” (Debasish Mridha: American physician, philosopher, and author)*

Although Eritreans have long developed an ambitious opposition plan, as the second phase of the Eritrean Revolution, to rid the country of Monster Isias and his gang, the sword hanging over the heads of the Eritrean people, and build a free, democratic, and prosperous Eritrea, where all Eritreans would live as equal citizens in rights and obligations, the inescapable end of the ruling criminal gang has lagged behind. The obstacles impeding the progress of the second phase of the Eritrean Revolution have been identified, analyzed from time to time, and the prospects of working together have been considered by many Eritrean writers and politicians. That remarkably led to the emergence of a comparatively more inclusive, better organized, and better coordinated movement (Yeakl Movement: almost two years since its inception) among Eritreans living in Diaspora, though a lot has to be done to raise its level of inclusiveness, organization, coordination and acceptability, with the aim of promoting its effectiveness.

As indicated above, during the last couple of years, the opposition struggle comparatively witnessed a rapidly growing organizational structure that embraces all willing justice seekers, and managed to collect momentum in the name of Yeakl, constituting a real threat to the gang. Consequently, the ruling gang started to see the impact of Yeakl (of course as enhanced by the age of social media) expressed in the form of a serious change of public attitude towards the ruling criminal gang; a matter which left the Atse and his gang shaking in their boots and resort to desperate and silly actions and tools to silence the movement (just

imagine how dough made out of flour and eggs could become a weapon). This public change has made the year 2019 a huge moment in Eritrean history.

Nonetheless, it should be noted here that the socio-economic and political realities of our people constitute the most important objective factor in raising the level of public discontent and bringing about the change of public attitude towards the oppressive regime from passive to active mode. Arguably, though the whole people have been experiencing catastrophic situations and circumstances in all aspects of life, the crisis in the rule of law, education, employment, health, office morality or ethics, and governance are most acutely felt by the youth, who are fleeing the country in mass. This youth action, by itself, is a protest against the regime, yet organizing confrontations and resistance would have been more productive, instead of fleeing the country. That would be the only way to remove the factors that force the youth to flee the country, and save those robbed of their lives or vanished in the journey to flee or in the attempts to reach the West as asylum seekers. ***Who is responsible for this disastrous and highly damaging great loss except the Atse?***

A part of the objective realities responsible for the radical growth of the political consciousness of our people is the rapprochement of relations between the head of the ruling criminal gang and the overambitious and scrupulous Ethiopian Prime minister, leading to what had been misnamed as “Peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia”, that exposed the treacherous nature of Eritrea’s Atse and his eagerness, not his willingness, to compromise the sovereignty of Eritrea (if he had not been planted by Ethiopia from the day he had joined the Eritrean Revolution, as many tend to believe), playing a dangerous game. It also exposed the unprincipled expansionist attitude of the young Ethiopian leader, who is obsessed of gaining the support of those living on the flashbacks of the old imperial memories, finally deciding in favour of taking the direction of reviving the “old Ethiopian glory” for which he has the support of the West, specially the US and Israel, and their errand boys in the Gulf; all forming the intimate partners of the conspiracy against the sovereignty of Eritrea. The laser-focused target here is the Red Sea.

It should be made clear here that, though what is going on between the two (Abiy Ahmed and his “Isu”) is totally hidden from the public eyes and ears, it only reflects half of the story. The full picture worryingly includes the roles of the West and that of the Gulf reactionary regimes, namely Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, as a reliable Ethiopian source reported that they are exerting a lot of pressure on Eritrea’s traitor (financial influence and the promise to convince the US and the West to protect the Atse’s throne and dynasty are expected to be among the elements of the pressure), on behalf of their American and Israeli masters to convince him to yield important concessions on the sovereignty of Eritrea so that Ethiopia becomes the most important power in our side of the Red Sea and serves as the protector of Western interests in the struggle between international powers to control the strategic routes in our region. In other words, the relations between the four partners (Atse Isias, Abiy Ahmed, Bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince, and Bin Zayd, the Crown Prince of the UAE) reveal the level of the danger hovering over Eritrea’s sovereignty, a serious concern that needs to be urgently addressed, leaving all our differences aside and mobilizing our people and the Eritrean Defence Forces to rise up and foil the conspiracy in the making. This danger should not be overlooked saying that Eritrea is a sovereign state and a member of the UN, and that nothing serious affecting its sovereignty could happen. However, the world realities show that any violation of any country’s national sovereignty is quite possible, and has no negative consequences whatsoever on the violator. We can think of too many examples but the key thing to remember is that this is an open secret. Accordingly, the golden rule is “Do not be vulnerable” or “Ayteqadam”.

To reach the inescapable conclusion that the Gulf reactionary regimes are playing a dangerous role in undermining Eritrea’s sovereignty, just think about the following questions and connect the dots to see the bigger picture:

- ***Why were the so called “Ethio-Eritrean peace agreements” between the two leaders signed in Jeddah and Dubai and not elsewhere?***
- ***Why did the Atse’s visit to Addis Ababa come as his second leg after visiting the two Gulf capitals? Could that be a mere coincidence?***

- *Why did these two Gulf countries that were formerly among those labeled by the previous Ethiopian governments as “our historical enemies” become so intimate friends with Abiy Ahmed and their multiple support and loyalty are so clearly placed in his favour?*
- *Could we consider all these good turns the results of an earnest wish to be pious or sacred rather than secular?*

If we do not connect all the dots and finally say, “We smell a rat”, we should be living in a naive hope that there is human intention in these relations; not a darker one in mind. Simply put, as the phrase “too good to be true” is applicable here, there is no other reasonable explanation.

Another contributing factor to the growing of the political consciousness of our people is the inspiration of the triumph of the revolution in the Sudan, whose most recent news reads: *Sudan: 29 officers sentenced to death for fatally torturing teacher* (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/sudan-sentences-29-agents-death-teachers-killing>, December 30, 2019). The Eritrean people are watching all details about the developments in the Sudan and are learning great lessons from them, while contemplating and renewing their resolve to be the next people to liberate themselves from the tenacious grip of the criminal gang, and put their country on the path of socio-economic and political justice, the most important pre-condition for joining the civilized world.

The cumulated result of all factors detailed above is that, Eritrea of 2019 became totally different from the Eritrea of the previous years, in the sense that our people are now in a better struggling mode and high spirit to end the nightmare, send the criminal gang to Adi Abito, Eritrea’s Kobar Prison (where they belong) and hold them accountable for all crimes committed against the people, the country, and humanity in general for decades. That is the reason why we are objectively optimistic that 2020 will be different from 2019, and we raised, as a part of the title of this piece the question: **WHO CAN THWART THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE?**

Experience has shown that there are two false constructions dictators use to delegitimize political opponents, silence opposition or shut down debate, when they find themselves cornered. These false constructions are “The will of the people” and “The people have spoken”. We hear these false constructions or other similar phrases repeated in a parrot-like style by the sole media of the regime, TV-Eri, affiliated media outlets, or members of “Nehna Nesu” Diaspora Group, in a desperate attempt to defend the so called “Peace Agreements with Ethiopia”. The key questions here are:

- ***How did the Eritrean people express their will and when about an agreement they know nothing about?***
- ***How did they speak?***

Before answering these questions, we need to see: ***What major tools are commonly used by the people to express their will?*** Here we can sum up the commonly used major tools in the following manner:

- People express their will through the elected members of parliament.
- Referendums on debatable issues are expressions of the will of the people.
- The constitution approved by a referendum and rectified by the parliament expresses the will of the people.
- People could also express their will through protests, demonstrations, resolutions of public meetings, petitions, and through the private media that represents their views.
- Writers, academics, research centres, and political activists could express the will of the people because they know what the people want.

As no margin of political freedom or environment that allows any of the above tools exists, even in its lowest form in current Eritrea, it is a futile spin and meaningless rhetoric for the gang and their loyalists to speak about “the will of the people”. True, there were times the Eritrean people expressed their will publicly. Nevertheless, that noble will was not only disrespected but shunned by

the ruling criminal gang, while in some cases the citizens involved were fired at and killed, or brutalized and thrown to jail without any charge and for decades. As these cases were few, they could be listed as follows to remind the reader:

- The 1993 referendum of Eritrean independence was the second major event (the first being the 30-year armed struggle which expressed the will of the people too) in the country's history in which the Eritrean people expressed their will. But the question remains: ***Could the Eritrean independence be considered complete after the Atse gave authority to Abiy Ahmed to guide and give him leadership?*** This was a major case in which the will of the people was disrespected and defied by the criminal gang.
- The public participation in the process of drafting and discussing the 1997 Constitution was another form of the expression of the will of the people. ***Where is the Constitution now?***
- Though we could call it national election in theory, the 140-member National Assembly of Eritrea (Hagarawi Baito) founded in 1992 from representatives of the six regions, of whom 60 members were appointed, was another form of the expression of the will of the people to some extent. This is also true about the regional assemblies formed at the time. Again, we ask: ***Did these assemblies function at all after the elections? Do they really exist?***
- Likewise, the eleven politicians (known as the Group of 15 or the G-15), including three cabinet ministers held without any charge or due process of law since October 21, 2001 (nobody knows who is alive and who is not), had to go through all that misery and pain because they wrote a petition to the Atse, demanding the implementation of the Constitution of 1997 and calling for democratic reform. Their petition was another form of expression of the will of the people defied and criminalized by the Atse.
- On two occasions, some sections of the Eritrean people protested to express their will, but they were fired at, with some killed, arrested, and

humiliated. The first was the protest of the wounded warriors of Mai Habar, who had demands related to their livelihood as wounded fighters, but were fired at and 12 of them killed by the order of the Atse in 1994 (recorded by Eritrean historians as the Massacre of Mai Habar). The second was Al Diaa Islamic School student-led protest of October 31, 2017, to which the reaction of the gang was very violent and brutal too. These two protests were expressions of the will of the people that had been criminalized.

This part shows, in concrete terms, that the criminal gang has no right to speak about “the will of the people”, a term they consider a sword piercing their hearts.

We cannot underestimate the will of our people to stop the insane scorch and ruin of the country so that their children would have a better life, and live in a safer and warm home they love, hoping to evolve into adulthood under the guidance of their parents and society. The whole world could easily see that the patience of our people is getting thinner with every passing day, due to all factors raised above, and no doubt that our people are daily getting more convinced that they have to cut off the cancerous limb: the ruling criminal gang. They know how low they and the country have sunk, and they want to wake up from that nightmare. Reaction to an aggravated oppression is one of the universal characters of human society since days immemorial. The universal truth is: the harsher the oppression gets, the more resistance it faces. When things reach that stage, and in the Eritrean case it did, we have a better chance of predicting that **the dawn is coming**. That is why many Eritreans have been shouting: “Don’t poke the tiger”.

When our people choose to resist, rebel or take up the revolutionary banner, they know that it is not a leap in darkness: they are aware that other peoples in different parts of the world have made the same choice under similar or worse conditions, and that they finally triumphed over the military might of their oppressors. It should be emphasized here that well-planned and executed public education, advocacy, and persuasion through the social media, in addition to helping the people get organized and gather all of their resources (material,

financial, human, skills, knowledge ...etc) to give a fatal blow to their enemy (the criminal gang) are practical steps for their empowerment in the struggle to end their pains and build the future of their children. The role the Sudanese Diaspora had played is a prime example that we have a serious work to do. In this connection, a couple of questions that could chase us throughout would be:

- ***Where do we stand from these tasks?***
- ***How do we turn 2020 into a year of triumph for our people?***

Though the struggle of the justice seekers, through the Yeakl Movement and to a lesser extent through the Baito (we hope both to work as hand and glove), has become a real thorn in the flesh for the criminal gang, changing the balance of power and the alignment of forces in favour of the national struggle for justice and democracy, in and outside the country, it is still far from achieving the eagerly-awaited results. The key question here is: ***What are the obstacles?***

Though we had discussed the constraints in some previous articles in different settings, we can briefly see them in two categories:

- The first set of constraints are political barriers that include trust deficit and negative mindset on which the criminal gang capitalizes to weaken the movement and make it rotate around a vicious circle. We can quickly say that as long as they do not arise from lack of political will and determination, they are surmountable, provided that there is foresight and visionary leadership. Here it needs to be emphasized that political will could be an enabler (a thing that makes something bad possible) or multiplier (something that increases the quantity of other things) to many barriers. It could also be a solution. In other words, political will is a two-edged dagger.
- The second set of constraints are capability barriers that mainly reflect the lack of necessary finance, human resources and skills sets necessary for managing the movement. This is also easily surmountable.

If these are the constraints affecting the progress of the justice seekers movement (the explanations above answer the first question): ***What should be done to make 2020 the year of triumph for our people?***

The most important task the movement of the justice seekers needs to focus on in 2020 is to raise the political will of the organization to the level necessary to remove all political barriers. That will create an enabling environment to address all other obstacles. This is not easy to achieve but quite possible. For instance, if there is a determined leadership that could make inclusiveness and tolerance a reality, deep mistrust and conflicts could be significantly reduced, if not eliminated. Above all, creating greater understanding and trust among partners basically needs a well-thought out strategy that includes lobbying, advocacy, popularization, and deliberations. There are other skills and tactics we need to apply to be successful in the year 2020. It is necessary to raise a couple of them, based on my personal observation in committee work.

Most of us are traditional thinkers who think there is one best way of doing anything. But the reality is that there are as many best ways as there are creative minds. In other words, this is one of our problems that we need to eliminate in our political work in 2020. ***Why?***

Traditional thinking freezes the mind and new ideas cannot sprout, which means it blocks progress. To fight traditional thinking, we need to be receptive to new ideas and destroy what we call “thought repellents” that are very common in our political interactions with one another, even within one party, and are among the main sources of conflict among justice seekers working in one committee. These include the sentences such as:

- “It will not work.”
- “It cannot be done.”
- “It is useless.”
- “It is stupid. “

In other words, each one of us should be the best sponge to soak up all the good ideas we can. The saying, “Man never stops to learn,” is a great reminder.

Another skill through which we fight traditional thinking is by being progressive, not regressive. A regressive thinker would say in his discussion: “That is the way we did before.” But the progressive thinker would say: “How can we do it better than we did before?”

The second problem is that many of us are bad listeners but good speakers. When we talk about listening, we have to understand that it is more than shutting our mouth. During the listening process, things penetrate our minds, we evaluate critically what we hear, test our views, and collect mind food.

Among the many things working together in 2020 for the triumph of the cause of our people demands, is that we should not make issues out of minor errors. We need to remember that it is always said, “It is better to lose a battle and win a war than to win a battle and lose a war.” Most of the fights we watch or read about in the social media between individuals are fights to win a battle but we forget that we are doing that at the expense of winning the war against the enemy.

As justice seekers, correcting our 2019 mistakes in communicating with one other is very crucial in determining whether we will start 2020 with sufficient unity that enables us to empower our people in their struggle to retake our state from the criminal gang, restore their dignity as citizens, and guarantee a motherland for their children. Here we ask: ***Which deserves our time, energy and attention more: the goals the Eritrean people are struggling for, as stated here, or the narrow concerns of ethnicity, religion or geography that are dividing us and creating a loophole for the ruling criminal gang to capitalize on?***

Before wrapping up my first contribution of the new year, I ask the readers to pray that God opens the hearts of those groups and individuals engaged in the inter-Eritrean physical and verbal fighting to the pains and tragedy of their people. Here we are referring to the fighting between justice seekers and supporters of the regime, and equally so to the fighting between the justice seekers among themselves, specially the nasty and counterproductive smear

campaign in the social media. The last word to say is that we are excited to see the victory we are struggling to win together. =====

# HAPPY NEW YEAR