

Questionable Straw of Info

A Response to Saleh "Gadi" Johar

By Hailemriam T. Tesfai

February 4, 2012

It is really unfortunate that Mr. Saleh "Gadi" Johar chose such an abrasive title for his article which he may have honestly intended to convey a meaningful and constructive criticism. His recent article written on February 1, 2012 titled as "an office full of mice" is full of misinformation and distortions. The truth and the facts will stand clear as I try to clarify unambiguously the series of developments that affected the venues of the National Congress. Though Gedab News was and is one of the formidable sources of information, this time his informants are completely out of mark and deadly wrong. Despite these facts, I applaud Saleh "Gadi" Johar for his attempts to bring the shortcoming and failures of the oppositions to the open. Informing the public about what is happening with any Eritrean organizational institutions especially with the much anticipated ENCDC is commendable.

As members of ENCDC and as one of the persons mentioned in his article, I would have been glad to provide Mr. Saleh with the facts that affect us all. We are in the initial process of introducing a new electoral system to our organizations, to the people and the nation. We have a lot to learn in the coming near future here in the diaspora and inside Eritrea. Having an independent media probing and inquiring about questionable events in a democratic institution is healthy in its self and must be encouraged at all times. The role of the independent media is necessary to pressure "the state and its institutions", thereby enabling us to correct any wrong doing and take actionable policy and resolutions, to help us grow institutionally and democratically as a society. On the other hand we should be watchful and avoid over politicization, and stretching the issue beyond its limits which in turn can hurt the institutions we collectively envisioned to evolve into a bigger being.

Provided the object of the criticism is with a genuine intent of correcting faults and not merely to target old political foes, I believe the clarification below will settle the issue of "Council seat distribution and appropriation".

The role of EDF:

To help the reader, I would like to clarify that all Elections were being conducted according the guidelines set by the election

committee that was handed to the Secretariat for execution. The Eritrean Democratic Front (EDF) was involved in two segments of the election process where help was dearly needed to settle a discrepancy with a missing Islamic Congress Party (ICP), and the Eritrean Global Solidarity (EGS) seats.

The election process was unique for the fact that each delegation team had shared seats in consensual and electoral arrangements. The Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) and Non-EDA political parties selected their representatives to send to the ENCDC Baito. The regional delegation along with civic societies elected their representatives in a secret ballot.

The Council Chairman, the two deputies and two secretaries of the National Council were also elected by secret ballot by members of the National Council. Additional information on the process that led to the formation of the National Council is as follows:

- Out of the 127 ENCDC seats, 66 were allocated to the political organizations, and the rest 61 to the civic, independents, and people's representatives.
- Out of the 66 seats EDA was given 38 seats, while the rest of Non-EDA political organizations took 28 seats.
- Out of the 28 Non EDA seats, 10 seats were given to EDF-a front consisting of 4 organizations.
- The other 18 seats were given to the rest 19 organizations (mind you, I am saying 19). No one noticed this numeration error until the next morning when the Council came in to session.
- When Congress came to session on the day one, two members of the Islamic Congress Party (ICP) suddenly started arguing for the missing seat in a noisy confrontation that stalled the session. ICP was claimed by two factional organizations after the National Conference of 2010, and were represented by two officially registered organizations to attend the National Congress.
- It took almost a day and half for the EDA and Non EDA representatives to come to an agreement of the numbers they can contribute to the Council. The rest of the Council was patiently waiting with clear indication of frustrations and exacerbations.
- The North America and European regions were allocated 15 seats each. One of each these 15 regional seats were given

to the Network of Eritrean Civil Societies in Europe (NECS), and the Eritrean Global Solidarity (EGS) of North America. NECS agreed to take it, while EGS decided to argue the case with the Secretariat of the congress asking to get at least two seats.

- Twice the congress encountered with a discrepancy in its allocations of seats, EDF helped to settle the discrepancy by giving away from its allocated seats. It is unfortunate that this effort of conciliatory process of taking away a seat from EDF to give it to the Islamic Congress party (ICP) **has neither been mentioned nor been made an issue** by Saleh "Gadi" Johar or anyone else as they did in the case of EGS.
- The cooperation and sacrifice made by the delegation from the Sudan and Ethiopia was exemplary, and was done to boost the diversity that North America contributes to the Council. A well thought wisdom, and as mentioned, the representation doesn't truly reflect the number of refugees we have in the two nations. It was a step, and an act intended to strengthen our national unity by portraying the true image of the Eritrean society.

My role in the EGS ISSUE:

In the National Congress for Democratic Change, the Secretariat headed by Mr. Saleh Omar was responsible for all congressional affairs until it handed over responsibilities to the Council. In that interim period, the issue was brought to the attention of the Secretariat by EGS. The Secretariat then decided to meet with North America region elected members to discuss the issue. As a North America Chairman/retired from the Commission at the time, I was contacted by the First Vice Chairman of the Secretariat- Dr. Afeworki Paulos to meet with the North America elected delegation and discuss the issue of a seat allocated to EGS. None of the North America elected delegates was willing to give up his/her seat, and Dr Afeworki, went back to the Secretariat with a "no" answer.

In my opinion, EGS should have accepted the one seat and then ask for a second one if they deserve to. EGS had contributed its share of struggle, and paid a registration fee quintuple of any political organization now holding 3-4 seats. In the North America delegation meeting, there was no one who asked me to give up my seat for Teklai, as described by Saleh J Gadi. We have a cordial working relationship with the NA delegation, and the communication was civil to say the least. No snappings! A representative of the

youth who had sympathy with EGS who suggested the return of the seat was asked if he wants to give up his own seat, and he jokingly declined saying "the youth want more seats!"

The Ethiopian "factor":

I firmly believe that we Eritreans as people are struggling against a brutal authoritarian regime. We need all sorts of help from the international community. No shame in seeking refuge in a neighboring country and we are grateful to the Ethiopian government and its people for helping our refugees and the Council-ENCDC. But when it comes to our national affairs and ENCDC, we are the sole owners of our council seats and we distributed them ourselves as we saw them fit.

In the meeting conducted by me at the request of the Secretariat, I did not mention any names of Ethiopian officials, and we did not call the meeting to deliver a message from them. No civic or political organization was asked to get a support letter or statement from any entity to hold a council seat – as described by Saleh "Gadi" Johar in the case of EGS. The information given by Saleh is wrong, and he has to deal with his sources who fed him with false information. As a matter of a journalistic courtesy, he could have verified his information with me before posting it in his website. Saleh "Gadi" Johar has my address, my email address, as well as my phone numbers. I was asked to help facilitate the work of the Secretariat, and I did it as part of my dedication to the region and as a Chairman of the North America Commission.

About the Mogogo:

This is a different mogogo; I want to tell Mr.Saleh Johar - a mogogo sitting on a metal base. Steel made special Mogogo called "Sajj". Unlike the clay made mogogo, this is built to withstand heavy strikes. If striking the mice, means written or verbal criticism within the realm of democratic culture to fix problems by expressing own opinion, go ahead and strike. Please, always set a higher press standard, and keep your facts straight by contacting both sources of the controversy in order to reach a non biased judgment.

The Speed rate of the Council:

On the speed issue, we could do better. As a new institution, we are engaging slowly, but surely we are making progress. With clear plans, reaching out to the communities as immediately as possible, opinion will change and, doubts raised and concerns expressed by the public or the media will fade.

The North America Administrative Choice:

Most political organizations had no separation of powers. The Executive body appoints Regional leaders and they literally become their own executives. We hope to have passed that stage and that era. We are now introducing a democratic system of governance with people's representatives including the people now sympathizing with the regime in Eritrea. The 7 regions in the diaspora are the elements of the foundations of the people's power.

The people's House we created is the "Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change", and change has to start from within. The Executive offices, the Legislative Baito, and the Regional Communities have separate responsibilities and tasks. It is not in its jurisdiction for the Executive office to come and appoint leaders for the regional administration. Today, we are a mixture of political organizations, civic societies and independent citizens organized to fight an authoritarian regime!

Tomorrow the diaspora Communities will be independent and must be empowered to tell the Council and later the government what is good for them. They have to be liberated starting from now! The North America commission being a good example of such governance style stood its grounds to prevent "mit'e't'taw eed" "ምትኣትታው ኢድ" and demonstrated it with proven results. We are now asking to follow the same path! And I don't know why Saleh "Gadi" Johar wants to see a reversed version of such a progressive design!

Last but not least, I would very much like haw Saleh to stand by the positive spirit of the messages portrayed in the last paragraph of his article. To quote one of his many good phrases:

"It (ENCDC) is our achievement and the best tool for the struggle, and we should protect it from within (inefficiency and foolishness) and from without (declared detractors under the moral guidance of the PFDJ)".

I like this spirit!

It is in conformity with this adage that we appeal to our compatriots and especially to the supporters of the ENCDC to avoid old grudges and not to concentrate on personal and trivial comments. Instead, we would like and invite all to discuss, argue and suggest openly and thoroughly on policies and principles that affect the organization. Indeed, that is the only way we could make positive contributions to the spirit of Hawassa and success of our Mission to help our people to get rid of the home grown tyrant and his gang.

Wodehankum!