



**Statement
On the Golden Jubilee
Organization of Africa Unity,
25 May 2013**

The Executive Office of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change, and on behalf of the Eritrean people in general, has the pleasure to express its sincere felicitation to this August Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African states who have gathered here in Addis Ababa for the commemoration of the momentous event of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Organization of African Unity, the precursor of the African Union.

It is, moreover, a special honor to the Executive Office to salute the delegations of member states attending this special session, and forward to them the Eritrean people's profound wishes for the success of their deliberations at this historic session in the interest of the fulfillment of the aspirations and hopes of the brotherly peoples of our Continent in their pursuit of peace, unity and cooperation, which, indeed, are the determinant imperatives for durable processes of development and prosperity on which the happiness and wellbeing of citizens of their nations hinge. It is only a matter of fact that, as members of the African community of nations, the people of Eritrea do also share the same dreams and hopes with their brethren on the Continent, who today are proudly represented at this eventful occasion.

By coincidence of events, our people also happened to celebrate their day of independence on 24 May. All the hopes and dreams of freedom and independence meant to herald and imply twenty years ago when we attained victory in 1991, and won recognition of our statehood, have disappointingly been dashed. Today, those aspirations and dreams are as remote to attain as they had ever been then. Apart from a very small circle of regime loyalists and beneficiaries, the majority of our ordinary citizens live in sorrow, backwardness and extreme poverty due to vainglorious wars, repressions and isolation brought upon them by the current ruthless dictatorship.

The man at the helm of the regime lost no time to make his despotic intention known very early on, even before the joy and euphoria of victory had time to run normal their courses. Soon after the liberation forces made triumphal entry to the Capital, Asmara, Isayas Afewerki had on 20 June 1991 openly banned any participation of political organizations and the public in the affairs of their newly liberated country. The first casualty of the regime's repressive conduct became the refugees whose right of repatriation was systematically blocked. After two decades since that time, they are still waiting to return to the country they had paid so much in blood and resources to liberate.

From that time onward, the country continues to be mismanaged under the full force of authoritarian decrees. These measures became groundwork for an oppressive dictatorship. With shrewd calculation to make way for a one-man rule, the regime imposed a series of decrees that suppressed any voice of dissent, basic liberties and freedoms of citizens to work and raise their children in peace and tranquility.

Some of the disastrous measures were usurpation of all land under the monopoly of the state, imposition of general militarization of the populace through regular nationwide conscription campaigns to round up the youth and able bodied citizens, total control of education under colonels and corporals with power to oversee even entrance examinations to colleges, which were made mere appendages to military training camps such as an infamous one in Sawa, in Western Eritrea.

After putting all the vital and productive sectors of society under strict control and thorough regimentation of society, the regime imposed an economic and social order that monopolized the resources of the nation in the hands of the regime in partnership with military-cum-civilian organs and spy networks. In that way, the regime secured the power and prerogative to freely waste the already meager capabilities of the nation by engaging in ruinous wars of aggression against all neighboring countries, and beyond as far as dubious involvement in the affairs of Somalia. The toll of those senseless adventures was enormous in terms of material and human life. To mention just one instance, 19,000 young Eritreans lost their lives in the border war with Ethiopia alone, which the regime ignited in 1998, and which the dictator himself was audacious enough to admit.

Today, after two full decades since the thirty-year war of independence came to a close our country is, listed sadly, among the poorest in the world's poverty index. Its youth and productive forces have been leaving their own country in scores in search of better future elsewhere. In a country in which investments of resources in prisons and detention centers exceed that which the regime spends on schools and health services facilities; one whose youth are forced to waste their years of education and work in military trenches; and one that knows no laws except the word of the despot, it would not surprise anyone to see it as one of the few countries that produce the largest number of refugee in the world relative to the size of its population.

Eritreans who are risking their lives to run away from endless military service and hellish conditions in their country have been making news headlines when they perished in harsh desert conditions, stormy waters on high seas or lost their vital body organs in the hands of criminal gangs of human traffickers in places such as the Senai Desert of Egypt. These tragic stories have shaken the conscience of human rights watch circles and governments. It is encouraging to note here that Amnesty International has lately made a move to investigate the flagrant human rights violation in our country and published a report on 9 May 2013, which estimated the number of political prisoners in the dungeons of the regime to be as high as 10,000. UN humanitarian organizations and other rights watch groups began also to engage, and draw attention to the thousands of refugees crowding reception centers and camps in the neighboring countries.

We Eritreans are very well aware the tragedy of our young nation would not end except when we put our acts together and empower ourselves to bring down the dictatorship and replace it by sane political order that should function under the supremacy of the law, and provides for restoration of freedom and human dignity to our citizens.

It is with this truism in mind that the diverse political and social forces opposed to the dictatorship having been striving since the 1999 to establish a broad national coalition. After many years of hard work and mobilization, political organizations, civilian groups, distinguished religious figures and academicians had convened a national congress in August 2011 at Hawassa, Ethiopia, at which the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change and an Executive Office under it were formed. This National Council is a broad umbrella mandated by its constituencies to lead and coordinate the work of the opposition. It is authorized to engage with governments, international and regional bodies as well as organizations that advocate the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights.

Hence, utilizing this important event of the Golden Jubilee of the founding of the OAU, the ENCDC's Executive Office would like to appeal to the delegations of member states of the African Union to draw their attention to the sad conditions tearing our young nation apart. Eritreans do have deep confidence in the force of the laws enshrined in the international legal and humanitarian charters whenever they are duly enforced. Moreover, as members of Africa's community of nations our people strongly believe that they also are entitled to protection by the rules and rights written in the African Charter on Human Rights (Banjul Charter adopted June 27,1981) entered into force Oct.21,1986 and subsequent conventions and protocols of the Union.

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