

Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Forces

November 1971

OUR STRUGGLE AND ITS GOALS

We have for a long time been making an effort to publicize our revolutionary stand and our views on the political conditions of our country. We do realize, however, that our statements have not been reaching all appropriate audiences due to the shortage of funds and other means necessary for the task.

We are thus taking advantage of the favorable conditions and the convenient time at our disposal to present this historical exposition entitled "Our Struggle and Its Goals." Whereas what we have to say is most directly concerned with our country, Eritrea, and our Eritrean people, it is of utmost importance to our supporters in particular and the people of the world in general. We would like to firmly remind all concerned not to take this position paper lightly, since it goes beyond an exposition of our revolutionary struggle; we assure the genuinely interested that our country Eritrea, its people and their struggle can be explained clearly and adequately.

We, who are expressing our views through this exposition, are Eritrean liberation fighters who separated from the administration of the -"Kiada el Ama", "General Command", in March 1969. It is true that almost all of us or a majority of us are Christians by birth, cultural and historical background. Those who view our makeup superficially may regard our struggle as religiously motivated, an assessment that we do not desire to overlook even if it may be the result of a lack of insight into our objectives. Instead, we urge anyone who seeks to understand our position and ideology to read all our publications.

Further, we hereby state our readiness to meet with and openly clarify our stand to those who might entertain doubts as to what the nature of our struggle is.

Although we deeply understand the complexity of the reasons which caused us to take our stand, that is, to separate, we are fully cognizant of the fact that some of those who look at us with interest or concern ask themselves questions such as: "Why did the Christian elements separate? How did they separate? When did they separate? What is their goal? What do they seek? Are they religiously or nationally motivated?

Are they revolutionary fighters or Christian crusaders? Are they reactionary or progressive? etc...". We also know that they may not find satisfactory answers within themselves. On the contrary, they may get distorted information and blame or even oppose us.

Thus, it is not only questions that are asked about us, opinions are also voiced. Many have pretended to be on our side and have been known to applaud our supposed "separation from Moslems". Others may similarly applaud our separation on the ground that it "has been long overdue". Others still merely declare that we are "religiously" inclined, and so on. All such opinions are illusory. It seems that there are more opinions addressed to us for the purposes of

deception, praise, threat, defamation, criticism, bribery and the giving of different goals to our struggle than we can constructively use.

We fully recognize the fact that it is our duty and ours alone to give a satisfactory answer to those who seek to know, to discourage those who seek to deceive us, to thank those who praise us, to assure those that are bent on bribing us that we do not compromise our aims to accept comradely constructive criticism and to remind those who attempt to buy us that we are neither commodities nor animals. The nature of our struggle and its objectives are better known to us than anyone else, especially the news-shoppers and gossip-mongers. Based on this awareness and hoping that our position will be clearly stated, we have embarked upon this exposition.

A Brief Description of Our Country Eritrea and Its People

It is a matter of common knowledge that we Eritreans are the nationals of a country with distinct boundary economy, political evolution, history, culture and traditions. It is equally well known that, for the past several decades we have been subjugated by foreign conquerors and pro-imperialist African expansionists. These very oppressors have erased our boundary lines, confiscated our economic wealth, and arrested the high level of political awareness our society had reached, distorted our history, obscured our languages, replaced our culture and traditions by alien ones and totally robbed us of our human rights and dignity.

Our present struggle against Ethiopian oppressors is nothing more than an extension of our militant Eritrean struggle against foreign oppression. We are sacrificing our lives to free our people from the shackles of Haile Selassie and his masters, to attain independence for our country and to realize the self-reliant progress of the Eritrean people.

Oppression does not come from foreigners alone. Neither should it be associated with foreigners alone. There is also oppression and struggle within a society. The rich versus the poor, the master versus the slave, the powerful versus the weak, the chief versus the village, and the old versus the new ...etc., are types of political and economic oppression found within class societies. But in time, oppression is invariably met with resistance. The impoverished and the workers rise against the rich, as do the slaves against the masters. The village militates against the chief, the weak unite against the powerful and the new erupts over the old. This is a historical truth. It is evident that when contradictions in society reach a breaking point, the forces of the oppressed rise up to destroy the various forms of oppression. Thus, as long as freedom is not equally and universally extended to all members of society, i.e., as long as there is oppression, there is struggle.

The above holds true for Eritrea, in as much as we constitute a society, we have various contradictory characteristics. This is so, in spite of the fact that Eritreans as a whole share a common history, economy, political tradition, culture, and similar or related languages or folklore. One may erroneously see the religious differences as the major contradiction in Eritrean society.

For example, our separation may be understood as having been based on religious differences.

Similarly, one may be tempted to look at Eritrean society primarily in terms of division between Moslems and Christians. In any event, let us first carefully investigate and analyze the nature at the Eritrean society and its people.

A. Geographical Location

Eritrea is bordered by Ethiopia, the Sudan and the Red Sea. Geographically, it is generally divided into highland and lowland areas. Whereas the lowlands consist of the plains along the Red Sea coast and those along the Sudanese border on the west, the highlands consist of the plateaus bordering Ethiopia. Religious affiliation in Eritrea roughly corresponds with the geographic characteristics of the country. Thus, Eritreans who inhabit the lowlands (Metahit) are mostly or almost wholly of the Moslem faith.

Following the demarcation drawn by the Italian colonialists, Eritrea is divided into eight provinces. The highlands consist of Hamasien, Serae and Akele-Guzai.

The lowlands along the coastal plains are called Semhar, Sahel and Denkel, whereas those in the western plains are known as Senhit and Barka. The lowlands constitute about three fourths of the land surface of Eritrea, with the highlands making up the remaining one-fourth. It is well known that because of the strategic importance of its geographic location, Eritrea has been the focus of the greedy eyes of foreign colonialists.

B. Economic Conditions

Although Eritrea is rich in natural resources and has enough agricultural, mineral and animal resources to make it economically self-sufficient, its people are still in the early stages of development. They live as farmers and nomads. Since our country's wealth is stolen by foreigners and exported abroad, the Eritrean people are forced to live in poverty, deprived of their country's economic wealth. Those who live in the highlands lead a relatively better life due to their settled farming occupation, whereas those from the coastal plains and the lowland areas live the roaming life of nomads. The basis of all social oppression is economic. Thus, foreign oppressors motivated by the greedy desire to rob Eritrea of its wealth, have used and are using our people's religious, ethnic and regional diversity in order to divide and continue to exploit it. This is a historical fact.

C. Population

The people of Eritrea are about three million. Their distribution, however, does not correspond to the country's geographical divisions. Though the highlands constitute a smaller part of Eritrea's land surface, they contain more than half of the Eritrean population. The lowlands in the western areas are predominantly arid and, therefore, are sparsely populated. Although no recent census has been taken, a 1957 census gives the following provincial population distribution:

Hamasien	24.7%	Senhit	8.3%
Serae	15.7%	Sahel	7.9%
Akele Guzai	15.3%	Denkel	5.4%
Barka	17.5%	Semhar	5.2%

D. Political Development

A close look at our country's political development shows that foreign colonialists and their puppets have used religion as the weapon through which they achieved their goal of easy access to economic gain. From 1940 onwards and in response to foreign oppression, the centuries-old struggle of the people of Eritrea started to divide into two political groupings. Most Christians demanded "Union" with Ethiopia, while most Moslems wanted "Union" with the Sudan. It fell on the United Nations to make the final decision that has thrown the people of Eritrea into an ocean of suffering, another fact of the history of our political development.

E. Language

Although more than nine languages are spoken in Eritrea, the main languages are Tigrigna and Tigre. These are Semitic in origin and are the offerings of the Geez language. Other languages which do not descend from Geez are Bilen, Beja, Baza, Saho and Denkel. In general, highland Eritreans speak Tigrigna and those of the lowlands speak Tigré, but they are more specifically distributed on linguistic lines as follows:

Tigrigna: - Mostly spoken by the inhabitants of the highlands (Kebessa) of Eritrea, the majority of whom adhere to the Christian faith. But it is also spoken by some Eritreans of Moslem faith, such as the Jeberti. Tigrigna is not spoken only in Eritrea. It is also the language of the people of Ethiopia's northernmost province known as Tigrai.

Saho - The language of Eritreans living in eastern Akele Guzai and northern Semhar, most of whom profess the Moslem faith. But a few Christian Eritreans also speak Saho. Like the other languages, Saho is also spoken by some ethnic groups in the northern border areas of Ethiopia.

Tigre: - Spoken by Eritreans inhabiting the north-eastern plains and the western lowlands, the majority of whom have adopted the Moslem faith. But it is also the language of Christian Eritreans, such as the Mensa of eastern Senhit. Tigre is also spoken by many Sudanese in Eastern Sudan.

Afar: - Spoken by the people of eastern Eritrea, the province of Denkel. They practice Islam and share their language with those ethnic groups in Ethiopia and French Somaliland that border them.

Bilen: Spoken by Eritreans of the Bogos tribes in the province of Senhit. They are approximately equally divided between Moslems and Christians. This language originates from Agau and similar languages are spoken in Ethiopia by Agau peoples.

Beja: - Spoken by Eritreans in northern Sahel and the western lowlands. These are known as the Beja, are few in number and adhere to the Moslem faith. Beja is spoken by a large number of people in eastern Sudan.

Baza: - Spoken by the Bazen of the western lowlands, between the Gash and the Setit. Although a few Bazen practice the Moslem and Christian faiths, most of them do not belong to any religious denomination.

Barya: - Spoken by the Barya of the western lowlands, east of the Gash. Like the Bazen, a few Barya practice the Moslem and Christian faiths but are mostly without any religious affiliation.

Apart from the above linguistic divisions, there are a very small number of communities called the 'Rashaida' around the peripheries of Sahel, who speak Arabic and who have not mixed with any other ethnic communities. Despite the numerousness of the languages and the ethnic origins the Eritrean people are one people and, wherever they might be, they can use one or more languages to communicate with understand each other. Of the languages that we have listed, only Tigrigna and Tigre are written. Since these are the offsprings of the Geez language, they are written in the Geez script. Geez was the language in use centuries ago. After giving birth to Tigrigna and Tigre, today Geez finds itself only in Churches and holy books - it has become archaic. That is, Geez is used solely by the clergy and the Church and no one speaks or in any way uses it in daily parlance. However, it is of great importance both for religious and historical reasons. When the United Nations was attempting to solve the linguistic problem in Eritrea, it resorted to religious differences. Thus, in order to bind the Christians together through Tigrigna and the Moslems through Arabic, they resolved to make Tigrigna and Arabic the official languages of Eritrea.

F. Culture and traditions

In the area of culture and traditions, the Eritrean people may differ in accordance with their ethnic, provincial and linguistic origins. However, this apparent difference is obscured by our people's commonly shared economic conditions, political awareness, history, geographic location and religious affiliation. As a result highland Eritreans share, more or less, the same culture and traditions. Similarly, although lowland Eritreans may have radically different cultures and traditions, they are closely linked through a common religion.

Like other peoples, therefore, Eritreans are, as we have seen, made up of different groups.

Nevertheless, through ages of a common colonial experience, the Eritrean people's already related history, economy, political development, languages, culture and tradition have been so interfused, interbred and intertwined that today they stand on the same foundation. Therefore, Eritreans are a people that can neither be separated nor divided.

It is true that the people of the Eritrean highlands may be religiously related to the Christians of Ethiopia. Similarly, they may be linguistically (through Tigrigna) and by virtue of some common cultural and traditional characteristics be related to the people of neighboring Tigray. Moreover, the history of Eritrea, it is said, might have had some direct ties with that of the ancient kingdom of Aksum.

In the same way, Eritreans inhabiting the areas bordering on the Sudan may be religiously, linguistically and by virtue of some common cultural and traditional characteristics is related with some of the peoples of eastern Sudan.

Lastly, Eritreans who inhabit the coastal areas may, by virtue of their proximity to the sea, be susceptible to and influenced by the culture and traditions that come to them across the sea from the Arab world.

However, the internal relationships and unity within the country have a much broader and a stronger base. The surface similarities with neighboring peoples along the borders can never be a rationale for the slicing up of a nation. It is for this reason that Eritrea must remain a single nation. It is not a country that will acquiesce to its division between Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Besides, if the Eritrean people along the Sudanese border are viewed within the context of the people of Sudan as a whole, we find they are hardly related. In the same way, Eritreans along the Ethiopian border are very different if related to the people of Ethiopia as a whole.

What is more, just as there are geographic, economic, religious, linguistic and folklore differences in our country Eritrea, there are equal or even more pronounced differences amongst the peoples of Ethiopia and the Sudan. If we remember ancient history, we find it almost unrelated to what we have in this modern age. If we were to re-establish nations and determine borders based on ancient history, we would have to create a new world consisting of new nations.

In the case of Africa, we do not even need to go back to ancient history. For, if we were to attempt to create new nations based on the conditions that existed a few centuries ago, we would form a continent consisting of thousands of parts and division. In short, the differences amongst the Eritrean people are a phenomenon found in many other countries and, as such, our recognition of them is neither a source of shame nor a hindrance to a united Eritrea. What we are trying to clearly state is that religion by itself cannot be a basis for any struggle for national liberation. It is rather a tool of oppression and personal gain. Can we contend, for example, that all the religious and social differences we have already listed are merely religious?

The truth is that religion is one of over ten characteristics peculiar to the Eritrean make-up. As such, to say that it is the basis of all the differences, oppression and struggle within the

Eritrean society is nothing more than injustice. As we have seen, the Eritrean society could, very broadly speaking and if the various differences are overlooked, be divided into two major groups. Since each of these major groups has its own religion, (Islam or Christianity), it could conceivably appear as if the social differences in Eritrea are religious. Such an assessment appears more pointed whenever foreign oppressors and opportunistic Eritreans exaggerate it in order to promote their own selfish interests.

The main objective of the above exposition is to clearly state that it is wrong to divide the Eritrean people on the basis of religion and to stress the fact that Eritreans are a united people. Anyone who denies the truth of what we have said, be he an Eritrean or an outsider, either does not know what he is talking about, or is an opportunist or expansionist. Let us now return to our main topic. If the situation is as we have described it, why have we decided to separate? The reason and basis for our separation goes back to the formation of "Jebha", the movement for the liberation of Eritrea.

This goes back to 1961 and involves many events. We will, therefore, try to relate it as briefly as possible.

A/ The progressive forces in the world know that a revolution that is based on a struggle without a clearly defined political line cannot be crowned with victory. As has been made clear by the Eritrean experience, the mere fact of roaming around with arms and sporadic shootings, if unaccompanied by a clear political direction, is vain and futile.

That the armed struggle which started in 1961 had no political direction and did not take into account the objective conditions in the country has been commented upon by many Eritreans. The Eritreans who founded "Jebha" proclaimed the advent of the armed struggle without making sufficient study and analysis of the concrete conditions of our country and society. They simply proclaimed the "revolution" without a revolutionary line or organization, and with no delineated program of action, nor did they have a defined political objective or direction.

B/ Propagation of Islam

The point cannot be missed that the reason for the absence of clearly delineated political direction (guidelines) was the lack of sincere revolutionary leadership. Those who started the movement felt ashamed to give the cause its true nationalist essence; they believed that the most effective way of attaining the necessary power was by propagating Islam. They, thus, tied the movement within the bounds of Islam and programmed their actions accordingly both within and outside of Eritrea.

The bosses of "Jebha" assumed the responsibility to deal with foreign governments; supposedly in execution of this responsibility, they established links with those countries and organizations professing the faith of Islam. They tried to solicit the help of these countries and organizations against Haile Selassie, "that king of the Habasha who is oppressing the 80%

(eighty per cent) Moslem population of Eritrea".

They presented their case as that which seeks to resist the expansion of Christianity by Haile Selassie, and to that end they asked for the sympathy and help of their "Moslem brothers". Having wholeheartedly embraced whatever help was extended them; the bosses gave the movement a totally Islamic base.

Likewise, their armed followers in the field told the innocent people of the lowlands (Metahit) that they were engaged in a war of "Jihad"(holy war) against the "kafir" king Haile Selassie, who is the grandson of Yohannes, that king of the Habasha who had ventured to wipe out Islam and expand Christianity. In the course of fighting the holy war (Jihad Fi Sabil Allah), they conducted vicious anti-Christian propaganda, which was not in line with the interest of the national liberation struggle. The extent of the propaganda was such that the Christian Eritrean was ostracized as a "kafir" (infidel/traitor) and attacked as an enemy.

Lacking the capacity to correctly understand that the roots of its oppression were essentially of economic and political nature and not merely religious, the Moslem population of the country vehemently responded in favor of the "Jihad" operation designed by the leaders of "Jebha". However, those Eritreans who were not aware of the "Jihad" politics of the front, assessed the situation to be similar to that which was prevalent during the period preceding the federation; and conscious as they were of the maneuvers of foreign oppressors, their true nationalist sentiment drove them towards Idris Awate who led the armed struggle in 1961. The basis for the widespread Eritrean nationalist ferment and the resolute determination to engage in armed struggle lay in the politics of crude oppression that characterized the period 1950-61. This period was particularly rich with political events of national resistance. It must be stressed, however, that this national resistance was devoid of religious antagonism; it was a common struggle of Moslems and Christians, highlanders and lowlanders. This experience unified the people and raised the level of their political awareness.

Aroused by these developments, the Eritrean people resolved to join the struggle. Even though all Eritreans materially and morally supported the armed resistance headed by Idris Awate, almost all of those who joined him in the fields of Barka were Moslems. At that stage, the highland population did not participate in field operations the reason is solely that geographic conditions did not facilitate such participation.

The allegation that highlanders avoided the struggle with the knowledge and for the reason that it was initiated by Moslems is groundless. The movement flourished and continued operating till 1965; nevertheless, there was no halt to the propagation of Islam.

C/ Tribal Dissensions

If we were to ask ourselves whether the fighters who were mostly Moslem, were really united by the propagation of religion, we might be bewildered at the answer. We should always remember that in any society or grouping of people there are conflicts between the interests of the few and those of the majority. In the Eritrean struggle which then was not based on a correct political line the few opportunists increased their ranks in number and embarked upon

a struggle for personal power. They cultivated differences and discord and aggravated them increasingly.

They became increasingly preoccupied with the devising of schemes aimed at gratifying their lust for power; and they decided that they found an effective tool in the ethnic differences among the fighters in the field. Thus in an effort to capitalize on them, they magnified these minor contradictions and then used them to manipulate the liberation forces. This corrupt pursuit of personal aggrandizement eventually led to dissensions within the front.

The bosses who enjoyed a luxurious life outside of Eritrea had the capacity to conceal their true selfish interests. Nevertheless, they felt the need to make empty gestures to solve the problem. For that purpose they temporarily left their seats in the foreign countries and went to the fields where, around the end of 1965, they divided the forces into four groups. Their main purpose behind this measure was to quell down their agents in the field, who instigated the ethnic dissensions, and to further expand their followings and consolidate their forces. The professed reason for dividing the forces was that it would facilitate the setting up of more zones of operation and would enable more Eritreans to come into contact with the ideals of the movement and join it. But this kind of operational framework could be soundly devised only after a thorough study of the concrete conditions of Eritrean society, the accurate identification of the opportune timing and the careful consideration of all political and military strategies.

This was the kind of undertaking which required serious and thorough study and planning; it was thus meaningless to assign a division for Barka a division for Senhit, another division for Hamasien, Serae and Akele Guzai, and another for Semhar and Denkel. Such a division of an already small force, without making the requisite study, serves no nationalist or revolutionary purpose. It is, thus, clear that this measure was intended to promote the selfish interests of those few individuals.

D/ Even though there was a continuous flow of highlanders into the armed struggle, their number did not still equal that of the Moslems. Highlanders joined the various divisions of the front in the course of fulfilling their role as Eritreans; however, they came to sense the tint of ethnicism and regionalism in the set-up of "Jebha".

With the idea that an ethnic group can most effectively be dealt with by those who are its members, it was decided that the various divisions should be headed by individuals who are natives of their respective regions of assignment.

But the division for the Christian highlands of Hamasien, Serae, and Akele Guzai was led by a Moslem from the Saho. The Christian highlanders thought that this was not in accordance with the adopted policy: this awareness led to their discontent and complaints. The bosses of "Jebha", true to their tendency to put their selfish interests in the forefront, decided that the discontent that prevailed among the highlanders in the field would be quelled by setting up a division of Christian fighters under the leadership of a Christian. Thus in 1966 they organized the Fifth Division by extracting forces from the four divisions, chopping the Third Division in

Hamasien province, and installing a Christian lackey as its head. By compounding their mistakes, they only aggravated the problem they had caused a year earlier.

E/ Religious Convulsions

The setting up of the Fifth Division was a further extension of the policy based on ethnic differences; it certainly could not be a solution to the problem. As stated above, the measures taken by the bosses were not guided by true revolutionary principles; they were military strategies opposed to the people's interest and based on religious, ethnic, regional and reactionary considerations. Under their respective leaders, the five divisions of "Jebha" continued their operations in accordance with the outlined strategy.

The leaders of the divisions, who had neither the correct understanding of, nor the inclination to promote the national interest, competed against each other, exploited the efforts and looted the property of those whom they professed to liberate; within the country, they established five groups and delineated five areas of plunder.

They ventured to acquire all the requisite wealth and power and to commit acts of atrocity for the purpose of realizing their respective dictatorial aspirations. These leaders, who were eager to see their selfish interests fulfilled within a short period of time, did not curb their religious fanaticism. They stirred up some long dead grudges among some of the ethnic groups and started preaching that the Christians were their enemies, that the highlanders were their enemies, and that the Christians wanted unity with Ethiopia. Thus, they revealed their true sentiments and caused the eruption of religious convulsions within the front. Furthermore, they ordered their forces to plunder the Christian highlands of the country.

As a result it is estimated that about ten thousand heads of cattle were periodically looted from the lowlands of Serae and the eastern ridges of Hamasien by the First and Third division forces that were stationed there. The cattle were driven to the reserves of Kassela in the Sudan.

Further looting and the burning of settlement of innocent civilians were conducted; and those who, in the face of such cruel incidents, demanded the observance of their rights were brutally put to death. In a place called Senbere, the leaders of the divisions, who could not control their thirst for human blood, condemned innocent peasants as "kafir" (infidels/traitors) and massacred more than fifty of them. Such killings of innocent civilians continued at a greater rate and intensity.

As a result of the successive plunders, the agents of "Jebha" acquired huge capital which they invested in construction and transportation industries in the Sudan. With their new fortunes, the unmarried acquired wives, and those who had wives took additional ones. In short, they used the wealth which they brutally milked from the people for establishing themselves, for decadent indulgence and alcoholism in the Sudan and the Arab world.

Upon the intensification of these corrupt measures, the true picture of the leadership of "Jebha" became more and more revealed. The bosses and their agents in the field constituted an oppressive class in the Eritrean society; those fighters under their leadership became

simple mercenaries; and the Eritrean people, aware only of Haile Selassie's oppression. Unexpectedly fell into the oppression of "Jebha".

In view of this, the highlanders who, more than any other group, suffered from this oppression, resolved not only to renounce "Jebha", but to even resist and combat its forces. The oppressive government of Haile Sleazier saw an opportunity in the situation to escalate its propaganda regarding the religious motive of the movement. Furthermore, it supplied arms to the defenseless people and lined them up to combat the forces of "Jebha".

Using this situation as a pretext, the leaders of "Jebha" intensified the same policy of killing and plunder instead of seeking the correct revolutionary solution; and by that, they only aggravated the already prevalent feelings of alienation and dissension.

The feud and confusion did not revolve around the national interest of the country; they were essentially religious. This being the case, it was the fighters in the Fifth Division, the minority of which were Christians, who, more than any others, felt the grave nature of the problem. They became seriously concerned about the corruption that prevailed; not only did they denounce it while in the field, but finally went to the headquarters in Kessela in order to air their grievances. The officials of "Jebha" in Kessela taking advantage of the political tensions in the Sudan, ordered the fighters to their zone of operation.

The complainants resisted the order of the "Jebha" officials and continued to stay in the Sudan, where they were detained by government authorities of the country. All these incidents combined frustrated them to such an extent that some finally handed themselves to Haile Selassie's consulate in Kessela. The agents of "Jebha", using all kinds of false accusations, issued orders to the effect that the remaining Christian fighters in the field should be liquidated. Accordingly, more than one hundred innocent highland revolutionaries were hunted down and killed in the vales of the country.

The oppression of the people which ensued from this corrupt leadership was reflected in the armed resistance so clearly that religion-based dissensions became more and more grave. Following the submission of highlanders to the consulate in Kessela and the subsequent killing of valiant revolutionaries, very few Christian fighters remained in the field. The enemy echoed its propaganda with exaggerated reports on the situation. The whole phenomenon became disheartening to the people of the highlands, who then began to lose faith in and cast an auspicious eye on 'Jebha'. It may seem that all these events would take a whole generation to occur. Surprisingly, however, they all happened within One year, that is, 1966 - 1967. In the subsequent period the killing, plundering and the perpetration of acts of atrocity continued. The capitalists of 'Jebha' found it time-consuming to stay in Kessela making accounts of the revenues they obtained from the sale of cattle. They thus moved to the interior of the Sudan from where they started to direct their businesses. The role of their soldiers was limited to that of looting the people's cattle, driving them to Kessela and returning to the country for more plunder. They had no

qualms about their corrupt and exploitative engagements. The people lost faith in them even more and more. Eventually, there developed a marked popular opposition to "Jebha".

F/ Falling Back on Former Mistakes

Committed revolutionaries in the field never ceased seeking the means to solve the problem. They realized that it was the enemy which time after time stirred up the religious based differences. They took it as their revolutionary duty to combat the foundations upon which "Jebha" was based. It was concluded that the most effective approach was to combat the dictatorship of the five agents of "Jebha", and enlighten and bring under one banner all the fighters who were used to serve reactionary goals.

Sensing the determination to arrive at this solution, the bosses of "Jebha" and their agents realized that their interests were at stake, and made an all-out counter effort for a period of nine months. Consequently, the attempt to form a united front out of the five divisions was not completely successful.

Whereas the Third, Fourth and Fifth Divisions agreed to unify their supply and training units, the First and Second Divisions maintained their separate existence. Thus, from 1968 onwards, the three divisions continued successful political and military operations under one banner; it is to be recalled, however, that some running dogs of the bosses tried to sabotage them through the other two separate divisions. Furthermore, there were a number of false revolutionaries who infiltrated the three unified divisions.

The "Unity of the Three" rekindled the hope of the disheartened people of the country; the highlanders and particularly the Christians started joining the armed struggle in substantial numbers.

It was not only the capitalists of "Jebha" who were terrorized by the accelerated development of this united force. Haile Selassie's government, more alarmed than ever, intensified its military activities and espionage to combat this invincible force. However, the United Front, through chains of historic victories has marked ineffaceable scare of defeat on the enemy. The unity of the divisions certainly marked the beginning of the process of correction. But, since it was not built on the basis of revolutionary political principles, the disguised opportunists managed to sabotage it.

Taking advantage of the fear of espionage, those disguised opportunists declared that no more fighters would be admitted to the Front. This was framed to serve the regressive, religiously motivated policy of keeping the number of Christians in the field at a controllable level. This policy however, apparently of no big significance, injected venom into the administration of the United Front.

Those opportunists in the two separate divisions were waiting precisely for a confused situation which they could exploit. Realizing the problems in the administration of the United Front and hoping to exploit these problems, those opportunists declared their willingness to join it. All those who, from the outset, aspired the unity of all the forces, welcomed them believing they were sincere. Thus, the fighters met in a place called Adobha where they

agreed to unite all the divisions under the common leadership of "Kiada El Ama". It was then decided that a National Congress would be held within a year, that is, sometime before September 1970.

G/ The Second Phase of Oppression

It is said that "the offspring of a cat follows its mother's nature". These religious fanatics who did not previously find the chance to carry out a religious war now found opportune conditions with the leadership of the "Jebha" in their hands and they started to roll up their sleeves and sharpen their knives to murder the "Christian" fighters whom they always viewed from a religious standpoint. To accomplish their scheme, their first Step was to eliminate those within their ranks who were opposed to them.

Thus they placed six members of the "Kiada El Ama" in prison and subjected them to harsh treatment. Further, right in the heart of Kessela, they murdered the two revolutionary fighters, comrades Kidane Kiflu and Welday Gidey, who for many years had energetically worked to redirect the course of the struggle. They were under the impression that if they killed these valiant and insightful leaders, the rest could hardly accomplish anything. The dead bodies were placed in sacks and put on a taxi to be transported to a trash dump called Hafera. On the way however, as if to plead their case to the world-public, the corpses of the two martyrs fell out in the middle of the street.

After the death of those martyrs an order was passed, similar to that of 1967, to kill all the "Christians" who were in the field. Consequently, more than two hundred revolutionaries were slain throughout the field. In desperation, over two hundred others surrendered to the Haile Selassie government. Besides giving orders to kill Christian peasants, the leaders of "Kiada El Ama" also tried to further their criminal schemes by distributing arms under the cover name of 'Militia' to people who did not understand the concept, and then started to stir up long forgotten feuds that existed between some Christian and Moslem communities. Moreover, they committed and are still committing savage crimes in the highlands by throwing bombs, opening machine gun fire in public gatherings, looting and raping women. In general, almost all the Christian fighters in the ranks of the "Jebha" were either murdered or forced to surrender to the Haile Selassie government.

H/ What alternatives do exist?

Conditions being as such, should one opt to face butchery in the hands of "Jebha" simply because one was born Christian or should one surrender to the enemy, the Haile Selassie government? Which option is better? Dying at the hands of religious fanatics or giving one's hand to the enemy?

Both are abominable; both are poisonous pills to swallow; both mean death. Moreover to make neither choice is tantamount to sitting on the edge of a sharp blade. But rather than choose either of the two alternatives, it is better to sit on the edge of a sharp blade.

Now then we are the fighters who chose to sit on the edge of a sharp blade. We are the

fighters who made this choice rather than die in the hands of the religious fanatics of "Jebha" or flee to Ethiopia. It is said that he who does not participate in battle belittles its hardships. Those who did not face what we have faced, those who have never confronted the physical and moral hardships which we have experienced may spread rumors about us and even blame us. It is understandable.

We wish to make it clear that we separated from the fascist administration of "Jebha" and not from fellow freedom-fighters. It is a big shame that there should exist religious, ethnic and other divisions within the Eritrean liberation struggle.

As freedom fighters, our role should be to eradicate this and other ills of Eritrean society; and in no way should we create a situation where in such ills could be accentuated. What if one stood for the national cause, but the "Jebha" leaders misdirected the struggle? What if one was oppressed by these same leaders while one was fighting for national liberation? To liberation fighters, the answer is simple.

The nature of our separation might give the impression that we gathered on the basis of religion. But what alternative did we have? In fact, what saddens us is not the fact that we have gathered together and separated, but the harsh causes that forced us to do so, for we uphold the primacy of our country and our people over religion.

We are freedom fighters and not preachers of the gospel. What led us to take the stand we have taken is revolutionary conviction and not spiritual preaching. We consider what we have done to be induced by evolutionary courage, honesty and love of our country.

We are Freedom Fighters and not Prophets of Christianity

It is an incontestable fact that besides a few who do not espouse any religion, the Eritrean population is about equally divided between Christianity and Islam. Instead of promoting our national cause, the leaders of "Jebha" declare that the Eritrean population is 80% Muslim and the remaining 20% Christian. We also very well-know that they rally in the name of Islam rather than in the name of the Eritrean people.

Our conviction is that the Eritrean people were and are still oppressed in the same manner as with all other oppressed peoples of the world, and our objective is the liberation of our people and of all other oppressed peoples of the world. How many Christians or Muslims exist in Eritrea is of no importance or concern to us.

Let this be the worry of those whose interest is to spread the Bible or Koran. In Eritrea, when Eritrean Muslims are oppressed, it is the oppression of the Eritrean people: and when Eritrean Christians are oppressed, it is also the oppression of the Eritrean people.

We do not recognize that oppression discriminates on the basis of religion. Should there be any struggle in Eritrea whose aim is to liberate only those who are Muslims, we will oppose it. We are also opposed to any effort made by the "Jebha" to oppress or exploit Christians. We are unequivocally opposed to all forms of oppression. We will not close our eyes and remain silent when we see Christians being oppressed for fear that we might be labeled as the defenders-of Christians. We will actively oppose it. We oppose it not because we are

advocates of any religion but because it is oppression. We are freedom fighters who will not forget our revolutionary responsibility for fear of what might be said about us. What we wish to clarify here to those peoples or countries which give importance to religion is that the Eritrean population is equally divided between two religions.

We would also like to confirm to them that both Christians and Muslims have freedom of worship within their respective churches or mosques. We suggest that those who wish to understand the falsehood of the 80% Islam of "Jebha's" leaders to travel in Eritrea or to refer to the history of the country. A revolutionary struggle has to have a national basis. It can in no way be based on the concept of "Jihad" or "Christian crusade". We remind those who might think otherwise to correct themselves, and those who might engage in active operation under such an erroneous premise to top their actions.

Further, we wish to make it clear to those who give aid and support in the name of Christianity or Islam that such aid or support is of no use to us; we do not want it. We want to assure them that they will be only wasting their resources in vain. To those Eritreans who want to serve their personal interest using religion as an instrument, we wish to not only remind them that their opportunism is shameful but that they will also be remembered as criminals in the history of our people and in the eyes of the world.

To our revolutionary people and all other revolutionary peoples of the world, we reiterate that we are fighting against oppression and for the unity of our people, without any recourse to religion. We further urge them to condemn in solidarity with us those opportunists who exploit religion to advance their selfish interests.

We are Eritreans not Arabs.

Using "Arabism" as a trump card, the leaders of "Jebha" have claimed that with the exception of the alleged less than 20% "Habeshas", 80% of the Eritrean population are Arab descendants; that our country is an Arab country, and that our language is Arabic. Just as they used Islam as an instrument for their personal ends, they have also used and are still using "Arabism" for the same opportunistic purpose. Geographically, Eritrea is a nation located in north-east Africa, physically close to the Arab world. It is evident that, because of this geographical closeness, and because of the fact that the Eritrean National Liberation Struggle is an integral part of the world-wide anti-imperialist struggle, it is not only a strategic necessity but also a revolutionary imperative that it be part of the over-all Middle East anti-imperialist front.

Thus, when we line up in struggle together with our Arab comrades, it is only because of our revolutionary conviction and the dictates of our strategic relationship, and not because we are Arabs or Moslems.

No one can deny the fact that historically, the Eritrean people, be they Christians or Moslems, have some ethnic ties with the Arabs. We should recognize however, that the Eritrean people are first and foremost Eritreans and not Arabs. We do not develop revolutionary comradeship with people simply because they have religious or color ties with us. We are engaged in struggle because there is oppression in Eritrea and the world; and we will continue to struggle

as long as such oppression exists.

If there is any struggle which is based on race or color, we are opposed to it. If "Arabism" or the Arab struggle is based on color, race, or religion, let it be clear that we are Eritreans who do not distinguish among colors, races and religion.

Language is another instrument used by the overlords of "Jebha". They have consistently spread the lie that the language of the Eritrean people is Arabic. They only mention in passing that there exist other languages such as Tigrigna, Tigre, etc. These misrepresentations might have misled many people who do not know about the Eritrean languages. A concise explanation of those languages has been given in this exposition.

Arabic became one of the official languages in Eritrea only through the "Federal Decision" of 1952 in which the Eritrean people did not participate. Although they could not cover up this fact, the overlords of "Jebha" have triad and are still trying to destroy all the Eritrean languages and declare Arabic as the only language in Eritrea. It may not be known to people who are outside the struggle. But it is a fact that within "Jebha", Tigrigna and other Eritrean languages are totally suppressed. The fanatics of "Jebha" have an intense hatred of Tigrigna and some fools have gone as far as forgetting and rejecting their mother tongue in an attempt to pose as Arabs.

We would like to explain here, especially to the peoples and countries of the Arab world, that we entertain no hostility to Arabic and the Arabs. Not only do we acknowledge our strong historical ties with the Arabs, but we also recognize, and call for the strategic imperative of having closer relations with them. However, when we state this we do not in any way mean to imply that we are prepared to renounce our own languages in favor of Arabic in exchange for the help we need from the Arab peoples and governments, or in order to please their leaders. Nor do we want to deceive them by misrepresenting the Eritrean struggle as an Arab cause on the assumption that they do not know it. It is true that there are many opportunists who constantly strive to cover up the truth concerning the Eritrean situation. These misrepresentations by the bosses of "Jebha" have misled many Arab leaders and governments on various occasions by claiming that Arabic is the language of Eritrea and that Eritreans are Arabs. They have even presented Eritrea as a part of the Arab world in their maps.

Had we been Arabs or had our language been Arabic, we would not have been ashamed to say so. However, we are Eritreans who are neither able nor willing to betray our Eritrean identity or renounce our language. This is the truth and we do not hesitate to state it.

In our era, there are many international languages. When we venture into the field of international affairs, it becomes necessary for us to know many international or widely spoken languages. However, it is only through developing our languages and using them to educate and inform our people that we can acquaint our country and its people with the outside world. Otherwise, when we try to impose an alien language on our people on the pretext that this is a more widely spoken language or that it is a better one, we are not only reduced into the role of usurpers of language but we are also forced to regress a thousand steps backwards instead of advancing a step forward. Thus, it becomes absolutely necessary for us to refrain from this

regressive and dangerous trend.

Italian colonial rule attempted to destroy our languages and replace them with its own. The English also tried to spread their language. And in our own era of Ethiopian colonial oppression, Haile Selassie's regime has sought to kill our languages by burning our books and forcibly imposing Amharic on our people. The valiant Eritrean people have always been opposed and continue to actively resist such colonial expansionist policies. Many Eritreans have gone to various parts of the world, especially to Arab countries for educational purposes or for economic, political and social reasons. But to insist that our people learn study and speak an alien language borrowed from any of these countries undermines our national identity and negates the spirit of our liberation struggle. Therefore, we reject it totally. We would like to repeatedly remind those governments or peoples who support our struggle to avail us of their help because we are engaged in a just struggle for national liberation. If they offer assistance for any ulterior motives however, we do not need such support and will firmly reject it. To those governments and peoples who do not yet know the Eritrean people, languages, culture and history but who wish to help us, we extend them an open invitation to come and visit our country so they can learn firsthand.

Otherwise, we urge those governments which have been misled by the reports of opportunistic liars, to refrain from violating our national identity and dignity as Eritreans. If there be any governments which continue to violate our national identity in order to promote their selfish interests, let them know that we are prepared to defend our national rights, whatever the price.

We would like to make it clear to the Eritrean people that it is their responsibility to refute the various self-serving claims of being Moslems, Arabs, white or black, that are made of their behalf by the vicious opportunists and rogues. Furthermore, we would like to remind and warn false pleaders to stop deceiving the governments supporting our cause because we are convinced that whatever aid comes in exchange for our national rights is more injurious than beneficial to our struggle.

Our stand is Neither Ethnic nor Sectarian

Whether it be amongst our people or within our armed struggle, the opportunistic bosses of 'Jebha' have in the pursuit of their selfish interests, found it expedient to promote ethnic and sectarian antagonism and managed to create and sustain numerous divisive factions among the Eritrean people and fighters. Their continuing frantic efforts threaten to spread the plague of division into the surrounding communities and beyond. When "Jebha's" bosses divide the Eritrean people in this manner and scramble for the control of the resultant factions, it is always for their personal interest rather than that of the respective communities.

The only people who benefit from this are the opportunists. Our conscience does not allow us to tolerate such a state of affairs which subjugates the masses for the benefit of a privileged few. The objective of our struggle is not to foster communal strife but to promote harmony and to win national liberation. We therefore resolutely oppose the opportunistic and divisive

elements that work against our national unity and thus, undermine the struggle for national liberation. Since we are witnessing within our struggle the development of personal power contests through claims and counter claims of the allegiance of one group or another, we unequivocally state that we are opposed to ethnic parochialism. We wish to remind these tribalists who have tried and are still trying to maneuver us, that their attempts are futile and that they are only exposing themselves.

We are freedom fighters who are dedicated to the unity of all progressive combatants without regard to their ethnic or regional backgrounds.

Our Objectives

First we will share and discuss with our Eritrean comrades the program of action we have designed to reach our final objective. Nonetheless, till we present our full program in our second exposition, we present here a short summary of our goals:

To create a society where no economic exploitation or political oppression of man by man exists.; to build a prosperous nation with educational, agricultural and industrial developments; to establish a National United Front with no distinction as to religion, ethnic affiliation or sex. To establish close solidarity with all progressive peoples in the world, especially those in Africa, Asia and Latin America; to combat world imperialism led by the United States; to smash Israel Zionism.

Firstly, we have to wage armed struggle to gain national liberation from Ethiopian oppression as an immediate goal.

Victory to the Eritrean people!

Victory to the fighting peoples of the world!

Long live the Eritrean liberation fighters! Destruction to the Ethiopian oppression!

Down with Imperialists, Zionists and all reactionaries!

GEBREMEDHIN ZERIZGHI:

An Eyewitness Account

[ELF version]

Posted on [March 7, 2012](#)

By [Awate Team](#)

<http://awate.com/gebremedhin-zerizghi-an-eyewitness-account/>

***Editor's Note:** This eye-witness account by Gebremedhin Zerezghi, veteran combatant with the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), was originally written in Tigrinya and published by the ELF-RC' of which Gebremedhin was a member. About seven years ago, Gebremedhin kindly sent us the Tigrinya copy for publication. Unfortunately, for lack of time and resources, we didn't have it converted to an electronic file. However, we did translate it into English and shelved it with other pending files. Today we are glad to present it to our readers hoping they benefit from it as a source of information.*

The detailed testimonies contained in Gebremedhin's report serve as a background to the article ([He And His Objectives](#)) that we published on February 13, 2012, and to the upcoming article entitled 'Srryet Addis: Blatant Lie?' We believe that all three documents will shed more light on the most crucial grey part in the history of the Eritrean struggle of the late sixties.

Whenever possible, the translation of Gebremedhin's eyewitness account was verbatim so that the tone and spirit of the original Tigrinya content is not altered. While we have remained true to the content, we have occasionally and slightly reconstructed the Tigrinya sentences and the writers writing style in order to make it comprehensible to the English reader: (If a reader does not have a cultural understanding of Tigrinya, some sentences may certainly sound strange.) We have translated proper nouns of people and places phonetically.

AN EYE WITNESS

In The History of the Eritrean Revolution

By: Gebremedhin Zerizghi

Member of ELF-RC

May 1997

Introduction

I am an individual who has been, and still is, struggling [as a member] of the ELF organization in different aspects, since 1969. This written material is a true history [and] based on experiences that I was part of and I have witnessed. This book, though it should have been issued earlier, due to different reasons, is being issued belatedly. But its issuance at this moment is positively identified.

Since I became blinded when I was [in combat] in the Eritrean field, I recorded this note on [an audio] cassette; and it was [made] possible to write and distribute it with the cooperation of my struggle-colleagues; and I feel proud. In the Eritrean field, I was a common combatant and not someone who was a cadre. The history that I have presented in this book is not what I heard of or [what I] read in magazines, radios of television: they are truths that I have accumulated on my daily movements in the Eritrean field. I don't have the conviction that all Eritreans would believe or accept the history that I am presenting; but, since there is no lack of [those] who replace truth with lies, and who speak and write lies presented as truth, I have no doubt that this will help the people to compare in trying to find the truth [on their own] about their true history.

I pass my heartfelt appreciation to my comrade Tesfay Tekle who whole-heartedly accepted my request to have this [notes] published in a book format.

Your brother, Gebremedhin Zerizghi

Foreword

What compelled me to write my experiences as well as the situation of the Eritrean revolution is not an intention to pick on past wounds of the Eritrean revolution—and this, I would like to bring to the attention of the reader. Moreover, it is also not because I forgot the current objective of our people to unseat the dictatorial system and to replace it with a democratic system endowed with harmony. I believe in the truth and that revisiting our past history and investigating it would soften the grounds [to achieve] our current objectives.

It is known that, regardless of their reasons or the targets they want to hit, there are individuals and groups who say, “the history of the Eritrean people’s liberation struggle should not be mentioned negatively or positively.” When we observe closely, [we find out] that some innocently believe that there is no benefit in talking about history; but it should be remembered that some do that purposely to protect and cover up their individual and group interests.

The history of the Eritrean liberation struggle, in whatever manner, can never be changed or beautified or [its] black [spots] to be changed to white and its white [spots] to be changed to black. Who knows, even if it was contemplated that by removing the black [spots] and painting it white would [actually] make it white; but painting white over the black [spots], [will result only] in shades of grey. It is impossible to forget history and create a future history that can be identified as positive. In other words, it is only based on the past and present that one can build the history of the future.

Regarding the view that [divulging] “history that doesn’t consider timing would not deliver its [intended] message”; from the organizational perspective, I fully agree with that. But, when irresponsible individuals and groups trash and twist our past, to keep silent by claiming that, “it is not the right time yet”, be it directly or indirectly, I say, it has no meaning other than protecting the tyrannical government of PFDJ which is sitting on the saddle of authority, and is dreaming and struggling to erase our history. Because, saying “let [the PFDJ] write [what they want], but since you are [more] responsible [than them] don’t respond”, on top of it being outright opportunistic, reminds one of the sayings of our ancestors: “*Asha temesilka drarom wed’alom.*” (*Pretend to be foolish and take advantage of them*).

I don’t believe there is an Eritrean who doesn’t follow how those criminals (specially and primarily Isaias Afwerki’s group), in order to cover up the wrongdoings they committed against our people and our organization (ELF), are spreading and writing, a mocking and twisted history of our organization. As the saying goes, “*Adkha kzmet do Atynkha Y’emet*”, hearing and watching quietly while history is being disfigured before it is told, is nothing but escaping from bearing responsibility and turning your back to the struggle—my conscience forces me to expose and uncover their lies with the history of which I am an eyewitness. It is also of great necessity that our people know this truth. It’s driven by this [conviction] that I was pushed to write about

the past and the real experience of the Eritrean revolution that either I participated in person or witnessed. Since I believe very well that the experiences and history of the 30 year armed struggle for the liberation of Eritrea cannot be written in one book or in a few hours; I wouldn't like to pass without mentioning to my readers that I will focus on the important issues... questions and historical events that took place in the period in which I was present.

The Origin Of My National Consciousness

It is undeniable that our environment has a huge impact and influence on our lives. And since the source of the national consciousness of every citizen, in different times, ages and situations, etc, is dynamic and is different, it doesn't mean that everybody has a similar point of departure.

As for me, I was 14 years old in the beginning of the sixties and I lived in the towns of Mai Habar, Nefasit and Ghindae. Chat was being cultivated in the farms of these towns and I was moving around trading in Chat. Conversely, since there was a large Tor Serawit [Ethiopian Army] military camp in Mai Habar, I was frequently going there to sell Chat. The Army in that town enjoyed better living conditions than their colleagues [in other towns]. This is because, on the one hand, since they had fought victoriously in an African country named Congo, Emperor Haile Sellasie had given them a 1000 Birr bonus; and on the other hand, they had uncountable property which they looted and stole from the Congolese people; they were swarming around me like bees to buy Chat. And because [I frequented the camp] I used to see many wives of the Tor Serawit dressed in black crying and mourning. And I was hearing some people say that "[the soldiers] died while fighting Wedi Awate [Hamid Idris Awate] who is a Shifta [bandit] in the lowlands". One time, I accidentally witnessed in the camp the Tezkar [wake] of Colonel Kebede, the commander of the camp who was killed in battle. The wake was extravagant and big. Though I was about 14 years old, I was aware of the fact that Hamid Idris Awate was struggling for the liberation of Eritrea in the Lowlands, and that there was an organization known as Jebha [Front].

With the passing of time, when I went to the area around the mountains of Bizen for farming, Jebha had started to penetrate the Eastern Lowlands [of Eritrea coming] from the Western Lowlands. Because of this, I was able to witness what I used to hear about. Around 1966, the Tor Serawit from the [camps] of the towns of Ghindae and Embatkala were killing and slaughtering people; burning houses and farms, and plundering properties and cattle. Flourishing villages like Ailet and Gemhot, and villages located on the foot of the Bizen Mountain had their inhabitants slaughtered or scattered by Tor Serawit. Even the inhabitants of those villages who were able to escape were not able to carry anything except their canes and the cloth on their backs; they were exposed to disease and hunger and lack of shelter. This suffering of the people and the brutal deeds of the Tor Serawit that I witnessed firsthand was imprinted in my mind and it played a big role in increasing my national consciousness. When the situation became worse, even though we were lucky and escaped death, we understood that one day [death] is going to befall us; therefore, I and a few others decided to go to Ghindae.

In Ghindae, there was difficulty in finding a job. But after sometime, I was employed as an assistant in a truck that transported firewood. And by coincidence, since the truck was moving in different areas, I always had the opportunity of meeting Jebha [combatants]. To mention a few examples, by going to the direction and surroundings of Shebbah, Gedged, Selemuna, Zager, Ad Shuma (Semhar Metaat) and on the other direction, to the surroundings of Feter, Tego, Een, meeting combatants became my daily affairs. I was also recruited by the ELF and started to fulfill my obligations [*Ed: This usually means financial contribution, information gathering and running errands secretly for the combatants*]. It had been a long time since I thought of enlisting in the ELF to fulfill my obligation. But after postponing my plans for sometime due to different reasons, I joined the Eritrean Liberation Forces in May (Gnbot) 1969.

Thus, based on what I saw and heard when I was young, and driven by my national consciousness (positive and negative influences that were created by my surroundings) I joined the Eritrean field.

My participation In The Eritrean Field; The Prevailing Situations; And The Tripartite Unity Of May 1969.

In May 1969, when I fully decided to join the ELF, I headed towards the mountains, ravines and valleys where I grew up and which I knew. When I reached Debre Bizen, I found the ELF group that was led by Martyr Weldemariam Solomon and I told him that I came to join: he accepted me. Including me, we were eight youth who came to join in that place. But the mother of Weldekidan, the eighth person, came and pleaded, “without him we don’t have anyone to take care of our cattle and farm; give me back my son.” He was returned.

The remaining new recruits, seven of us, were first taken to Deeot Mountain and later to Zager Valley (Eastern Eritrea). There, we found out that the integration of Tripartite Unity (Wehda Sulasiya) forces was being carried out. We were amazed by the big number of the forces. The next day, they took us to a place to meet Abraha Tewelde, the commander of the fifth zone and member of the transitional leadership of the Tripartite Unity.

Abraha Tewelde asked us “how are you brothers?” and received us, but then he yelled at Solomon Weldemariam with strong reprimanding words and said to him, “why do you accept new recruits?” Solomon responded, “I cannot tell such strong youth to return to their homes, and you do whatever you want with them.” Abraha Tewelde tried to convince us to return to our homes. We refused and he transferred us to martyr Mohammed Ibrahim, the secretary of the transitional leadership of the Tripartite Unity. Mohamed Ibrahim registered our names and took us to a small training camp. After forty days of training we were assigned to the forces. I and another person were [further] assigned to a clinic that was located in Gergera.

Though we accepted it later on, we were not happy for being assigned to a clinic. We had a thought in our minds: carrying arms and fighting the foreign forces of Ethiopia; we didn't consider working at a clinic a real struggle. The people who were at the clinic convinced us that the struggle [can be carried out] in any place. At the clinic we tended to the sick, helped, served food, water and tea to the sick and since we were given limited training on giving shots, we contributed with our humble skills.

A. The Situation Of Spies (Jewasis) In Jebha

There was no stone unturned and no tactic not tried by the occupational Ethiopian system in order to at least hinder, and if it can, to abort the Eritrean revolution with the help of spies. In what follows I will explain enemy attempts of spying during the period that I was present. I would like to note here that though I will explain regarding "Srreyet Addis" in detail [later], and why the leadership of the Tripartite Unity had decided to stop accepting new recruits; the subject [spies] that we have raised has some connections with it.

In 1969, the Government of Haile Sellasie organized an Expo in Asmara for the first time. All Eritrean ethnic groups were given instructions to prepare a cultural exhibit. Based on that, twenty youth from Ghindae aged between 20 and 25 were selected to play [in the Expo] representing the Tigre group. Mainly popular youth from Ghindae, like Wedi Kerai, Wedi Hajji, had participated at the Expo. The Government of Ethiopia, through its collaborators like Asrate Kassa and Tesfayohannes Berhe, had tried many plans to abort the Eritrean revolution. After secretly recruiting the youth, they deployed them to [secretly] join Jebha in places around Ghindae in order to spy. They lured them by promises of cash and employment positions when they return if they cause the failure of Jebha or if they brought along important secrets. Deceived by these promises, the youth traveled from Asmara to Ghindae and from Ghindae to the Tripartite Unity [forces]. Among the youth was a certain Messoud who had previously joined Jebha but later surrendered to the enemy. When Messoud surrendered to the enemy, he had exposed and caused many [clandestine] Jebha members to be shot. Messoud also abused the people and Jebha was trying hard to kill him. There were two attempts on his life. In the first attempt by Jebha Fedayeen in Ghindae, he escaped with minor injuries; but on the second attempt, the attack that targeting him resulted in collateral casualty on some bar workers, and he escaped [unharmed]. The reason I am mentioning the history of this individual [Messoud] is because he thought he was still unexposed and came to join the Jebha again. I want to make it clear here that, he was already sentenced without any doubt [and there was no need for another] judgment. Jebha had the identities of those youth from its clandestine cells and from Abdu Cavelieri Omer, the administrator (District Officer) of Ghindae. And Abdu Cavelieri Omer had other information that he got from Asrate Kassa. Therefore, after finding the detailed list of the names of those who were deployed in the Eritrean field, they were picked from their units and taken to the interrogation department. After they admitted committing the crimes [of spying], the Tripartite Unity leadership imposed on them a death penalty.

The reason why the leadership of the Tripartite Unity had stopped recruiting new people was because many such activities of spying were being discovered. And this was the reason why Abraha Tewelde angrily yelled at Solomon Weldemariam for recruiting us as I mentioned above.

On a different side, there was a spying incident of a new recruit who was on training: someone who claimed to be an Egyptian and who asked to be recruited by promising, "I am ready to pay to the Eritrean Revolution even with my life". The leadership of the Tripartite Unity considered him a genuine person who came to help and accepted him. On May 1969, after observing Jebha for some months and discovering that he was not able to do anything, he left Gerger heading towards Massawa [to surrender]. But daylight caught him on the way before he could make it to Massawa. When the leadership of the Tripartite Unity heard of his escape, it deployed combatants and civilians to search and apprehend him. At 4 PM, when he went out from his hiding due to thirst and descended to the river to drink, he was caught by civilians and was delivered to the leadership of the Tripartite Unity. After interrogation, he admitted that he was a spy. In addition, a watch on which he recorded secrets was found with him. Information that was found later confirmed that he was not an Egyptian but an Israeli. This individual was a dangerous individual who worked in the Congo as a spy. Later on, we heard that Jebha delivered him to the Syrian government in case Syria and Israel exchanged prisoners: Syria could have use of him.

B. Internal Political Situation

Generally speaking, the internal situations of the Eritrean revolution in the field were clouded with conflicting wishes; efforts to splinter and trends of uniting. It can be said with confidence that it was divided between a camp that supported the unity of the five regions and a camp that opposed it. In time, it became clearer as these divisions led to the [formation] of forces along trends that either supported or opposed the convening of the Adobha military congress.

At the clinic where I was assigned, I observed that the leaders of the department were all from Hergigo and Massawa. To mention [a few], Alamin Mohammed Said, (currently in the PFDJ leadership) Abdulkadir, Idris Lobinet, Ahmed Hayoti, Ahmed Mantay [who were from Massawa] were on one side, and on the other side, at the clinic that was located around Gedem, its leaders were from Hergigo. During that time, we were witnessing many small cliquish meetings [held] behind the boulders and trees. Especially when it started to get dark, the holding of continuous meetings became a customary schedule. The goals of these meetings were never explained to us, be it in positive [light] or negatively. Though we had the understanding that since we were new, we were not supposed to be privy of all that went on, we didn't miss [the fact] that the excessive whispering was the seed of splintering. Later in 1970, these whispers were followed by the splintering and the formation of the Eritrean Popular Liberation Forces at Seduho Ella [Dankalia].

As for the second trend, the positive trend of uniting and integrating [the forces] of the waves of democracy, it pushed forward and directed its focus only towards the [convening of the] Adobha Congress. The following can prove that:

- 1- The need for the contact delegation that was formed on 25/11/69 by the Tripartite Unity to communicate with the first and second regions was found to be important and it was accepted by all regions.
- 2- The decision [taken] on 2/4/69 by the First Zone in its congress to form a committee to contact the Second Zone and the Tripartite Unity, and the beginning of implementing the decision.
- 3- The decision of the Second Zone's congress on 13/4/69, to form a committee to contact the First Zone and the Tripartite Unity, and the beginning of implementing the decision.

Because of these efforts, the Adobha Congress was convened between 10-25 August, 1969. Some of the decision of the Adobha Congress is as follows:

- 1- It elected a leadership composed of 38 members to lead the liberation forces.
- 2- It decided to suspend the [authority of the] Supreme Council until the convening of the first congress. It also [decided] to strip the authority of regional commanders and their deputies.
- 3- It decided to hold a general national congress after a period of one year; a preparatory committee was formed for this purpose.
- 4- It elected an 18-member committee to investigate wrongdoings committed against the people.
- 5- It clarified that no one and no group has the right to issue official statements on behalf of the organization without the permission and authorization of the General Command.
- 6- It formed a committee to collect the properties of the organization.

Therefore, without going into deep political analysis regarding the decisions of the Adobha Congress, for the forces of change—those who were interested in the people, the revolution, unity and democratic process—it was a good herald that the struggle has achieved its goals. But to the reactionaries, tribalism, sectarians and the power hungry, it made them eat their heart out and go into the muddy path of splintering and seclusion.

After the Adobha Congress was adjourned successfully on 25/8/1969, the General Command (AlQiada AlAama) summoned the liberation forces from all parts and started to integrate them.

And after the integration process was carried out in Tahra and Orota, we and others were summoned and we left to convene in Saber where all members of the General Command were present in the Saber Valley. We were [in Saber] because the family of martyr Jaafer Jabir was having a memorial for their son in the surrounding of Halhal and they had invited all the members of the General Command—Isaias Afwerki was also present there. The hosts slaughtered five or six oxen because of the many guests: members of the General Command and their escorts as well as many other invited guests. We stayed in that place for two days.

After moving from [Saber] to a place called Beyan in Jengeren, the General Command held a meeting that lasted for 24 hours to draw different plans and later, many of the leaders headed towards Halhal.

C- The Seed Of Selfi Natsnet (and Srryet Addis)

As I stated earlier, there was a disagreement between Martyr Abraha Tewelde and Solomon Weldemariam regarding our recruitment and that of other new recruits. This issue should not to be considered as a disagreement between two persons only; I feel that it should be seen from a legal context and as a matter of principle. In other words, this issue was related to the splintering that followed later on.

After delivering us to the Tripartite Unity (meaning to Abraha Tewelde), Solomon Weldemariam continued to move around Ala, May Habar and Nefasit and accepting new recruits. He was specially accepting those who came from Addis Ababa and who later were to be known as Srryet Addis, and was assembling them in Seled. Solomon was doing this with the collaboration of a SATEO bus driver who was then working on the Addis Ababa [route] and who currently lives in Sweden.

Solomon was a steadfast, dedicated, genuine and resolute combatant. That is why when he was in the Third Zone, Jebha sent him to Addis Ababa to educate and organize the people; he found a special opportunity of organizing Eritrean students in the [Addis Ababa] university. But as much as he was known as a resolute combatant, Solomon was also known [to be] sly. In short, he was among those who were considered overwhelmed by a cunning [behavior]. In regards to his relations with Isaias, he was an outright puppy. This was because they had plans to split and they were considering the force [gathered in Seled] as their force and [were] trying to introduce it to a sectarian leaning.

Excessively deceitful, Solomon Weldemariam went to the extent of betraying his colleagues to the enemy; my conscience forces me to expose some of his ugly deeds. Solomon Weldemariam was in charge of collecting financial contributions through the Fedayeen squad that was around Asmara and its surroundings; and Martyr Arefaine who was in charge of military operations was jointly working with him. While Solomon was collecting money from wealthy Eritreans by

dispatching combatants, Arefaine was taking steps of killing Ethiopian spy elements. Since in that time there was a disagreement between Solomon and Arefaine regarding the split, he caused Arefaine and eight of his colleagues to be killed by the enemy. When he was in the area around Derfo, a Commandis force approached their location, Solomon saw them first and he fled towards Gul'ee to save his life without informing his colleagues or opening fire [to warn them]. [Arefaine's group were cordoned by the Commandis and ordered to surrender. But the combatants bravely fought, but they were all martyred after hitting some [of the Commandis]. Later on, Solomon was asked to explain the [circumstances] of how [his colleagues] were martyred. Shamelessly he reported that, "While Arefaine was trying to [hide] and avoid the Commandis, a Beles Picker [fruit vendor] saw them and snitched on them; shooting started and all were martyred there."

After the Adobha Congress was adjourned and all combatants were integrated, news about the new combatants who were assembled at Seled reached the General Command who sent three successive letters to Solomon Weldemarian. The content of the letters was based on the resolution of Adobha Congress and General Command's call for the integration of the remaining forces. Regardless, Solomon chose silence and didn't reply. After that, the General Command sent combatants and brought [Solomon] as a prisoner. As for Srreyet Addis [those who were assembled in Seled], it made temporary plans and dispatched them to the surroundings of Keren, Halhal, Asmat and Marya Tselam. It assigned Sereqe Bahta as the leader of the force and also assigned to them experienced military trainers. Sereqe Bahta was a trustworthy nationalist who is still struggling under his organization until now. After completing their military training, similar to all other forces who were integrated, the General Command called [Srreyet Addis] to be integrated [with other forces] in a place called Mai Shewa, in the surroundings of Hagaz and Aderde.

At 8 o'clock, all members of the General Command arrived at Mai Shewa where Srreyet Addis displayed its training. After the show, the General Command said, "we witnessed a good training result that is truly very successful. Today the reason we have come here is to inform you of your assignment and that is, [every] six combatants will be assigned to a brigade and [every] two combatants to a platoon". But the trainees considered this [a plan] to disperse them and totally rejected [the decision]. [The members of Srreyet Addis] insistently refused and said, "we had a good training, give us arms and assign us as [one] force wherever you want". The discussion about this issue continued from 8 am until 6pm. It was clear that all the excuses and smartness was not initiated by the [new] combatants; they were not its source. Isaias Afwerki was in Mai Shewa; and all the meetings were known to the members of the General Command. In addition to that, Tewelde Eyob, Maasho Kibrom, Asmerom Gerezgher and Zemichael were sitting and watching as if [they were] innocent. Some of the Srreyet Addis [members] would say they were going out to relieve themselves and would return after meeting with these people. All day whispering was at its highest. At last, the General Command became suspicious. Later on, after

Srreyet Addis and their instigators assessed that the General Command had become suspicious, they decided, “All right, we will be assigned” and they were assigned to all parts of Eritrea.

Within one-month, the Eritrean field was flooded with crisscrossing letters. Members of Srreyet Addis started to communicate and correspond through letters. When there was an attempt to read letters that were intercepted, it was impossible [to read them]. Some were in secret codes, some were in numbers, and some were [written] in alphabets that seemed like Russian. But after a long follow up, some [letters] containing messages [were intercepted]. Written in Tigrigna, they just read, “Hold on [Ajokhum], be brave, let’s do as we talked.”

When the General Command intercepted these letters, it recalled the spying network that was exposed [earlier] in the Tripartite Unity. Emanating from that thought and to prevent the revolution from entering into risk and pitch darkness, it passed a decision to gather all members of Srreyet Addis from wherever they were. In the beginning, the task of collecting about 17 members of Srreyet Addis who were around Barka was accomplished. Until their remaining colleagues were collected from the different places to which they were assigned, they were accompanied by a guard squad of 12 people and ascended Debir Sala. Since they had agitating thoughts in their minds, they outlined a plan to take steps against the squad that was guarding them. Their plan was to forcibly take the arms from their guards, kill whomever needed to be killed and by night head to the town of Agordat and surrender to the enemy. They agreed that one of them would go closer to a guard with the excuse of telling him he was going to go to relieve himself and then snatch his gun; and a second one was [supposed] to kill the leader of the squad while he was sleeping by crushing his head [with a stone]; and another two were to attack the two guys who handled the machine gun (Bren gun). The squad leader was then crushed [with a stone] and was martyred. One of the machine gunners was sleeping while securely rolled around his gun, and the member of Srreyet Addis who was supposed to snatch it from him was not successful. He was killed there. The remaining 15 fled and entered Agordat. When this [incident] happened, the news of the betrayal of Srreyet Addis spread all over the field. While the majority of the remaining members of Srreyet Addis who were assigned in other places fled and surrendered to the enemy, the rest joined Selfi Natsnet [Isaias’ splinter group].

I would like to point out that after the Adobha Congress, and after the integration of the forces was concluded, with the pretext, and under the cover of organizational tasks, Isaias was moving around Re’si Adi, Ad Shuma and the Red Sea Coast accompanied by some of his colleagues

Therefore, whatever is said, whatever defamation is spread, whatever is exaggerated, the truth is what I had witnessed with my own eyes, which is what I have mentioned above: the plans to split resulted in the conspiracies, whispering and betrayal. Since it is very troublesome for some individuals and groups to swallow the truth, the fact that they have always diligently tried to twist and bend the history of the Eritrean revolution, is a fact that the experience of the Eritrean revolution bears witness to. Criminals like Solomon Weldemariam and Isaias Afwerki try to

cover up the crimes they committed or to direct [the accusation] to others, and they blubber saying, “Jebha [is] reactionary, sectarian, slaughterer, etc.” Whose eyes do they want to blind!

Therefore, the party that bears responsibility on the issue of Srreyet Addis is neither Jebha nor the members of Srreyet Addis; it is the conspiring leaders of the then Selfi Natsnet, and present PFDJ who purposely pushed them in order to serve their splintering designs. The cause [for the problem] was the EPLF leaders who couched the innocent members of Srreyet Addis by telling them, ‘if they say such and such tell them such and such,’ etc. They pushed them over to risks and caused their dispersing. This is a truth to which history bears testimony.

A General Picture On the Eve After the 1970 Splintering Period

A- The Adobha Congress passed two resolutions: the stepping down of the regional commanders from their positions until the first national congress and the stripping of their deputies of their authority. These were two incidents of historical importance and they aimed at the future developments. While Mohammed Ali Omaro, the commander of the fourth zone, rejected the decision and started to gloat, “there is no individual or entity that can make me step down from my position”, the commander of the fifth zone, Martyr Abraha Tewelde, supported the resolution of the Adobha Congress and said, “since this is honest and protects the well being and safety of the people and the organization, there is no reason why I shouldn’t step down, therefore I accept it.” Each [commander] clarified his stand. The substance that we can extract from this truth is as follows:

1- Mohammed Ali Omaro was either determined to splinter sometime in the future or he was [thinking to], or, he advanced his personal interest to the unity of the people and the organization. The fact that Mohammed Ali Omaro was establishing special relations with Osman Saleh Sabbe, and others who hail from Semhar, is a truth known to all.

2- Martyr Abraha not only didn’t wish to splinter, [his stand] explains that he was against what was to happen later: the splintering ideas and deeds of Isaias, Solomon Weldemariam, and their colleagues. In addition, this shows that Abraha Tewelde had a wish for unity, and that he was a combatant who doesn’t put his [personal interest and love of] authority above the interest of the people.

After the Adobha Congress, Omaro started to meet with Sabbe and began to prepare to split and to form a new organization. Abraha Tewelde requested a vacation and, accompanied by a combatant named Tekhle, went to Aala—the environs where he was born. In no time, he was killed by the Isaias and Solomon group. The reason [for killing him] was [fear] that is he is alive, their splintering designs would not be successful; they knew he was accepted by the people and the combatants.

B- Since on the eve of the conclusion of the Adobha Congress some members of the General Command started splitting movements on top of internal and international meetings, the General Command arrested six of its members who were carrying out such movements (they were all from Semhar, Red Sea). Later on, in 1971, they were freed by the leaders of the Obelyeen.

C- Osman Saleh Sabbe and some remnants of the Supreme Council, some members of what was known as the Revolutionary Leadership that was leading out of Kassala, and some ex-members of Mahber Shewate held a meeting in Amman, Jordan and formed a leadership called “AlAmana AlAma” which issued statements condemning the resolutions of the Adobha Congress.

D- They were running actively to weaken the combatants who were entering the Sudan for vocation for medication or other organizational missions by [offering] them money (assistance to them or their families), and by spreading lies claiming that the General Command went astray from the resolutions of the Adobha Congress. And in order to appear as defenders of the congress that was supported by the forces, they started defaming the General Command for acts it didn’t commit. In short, all became a feathered rooster and campaigned to defame the General Command.

E- Some individuals started to weaken the rank and file of the combatants by sending them to the Sudan, and from there taking them across to Yemen and [from there again by sea to] Dankalia.

F- Weldai Gide and Kidane Kiflu, who were collaborators of the revolutionary leadership in Kassala, establishing connections with Osman Saleh Sabbe and were working actively as part of the conspirators to splinter and form a new organization as mentioned above. They were killed in Kassala. The splinters exploited this [incident] and repeated words: “Jebha [is] slaughterer and liquidator,” something that became their catch phrase.

G- The [splinters] convened a congress in June, 1970, in a place called Seduho Ella, Dankalia, and formed a leadership owned by Osman Saleh Sabbe. Omaro, Mesfin Hagos, Alamin Mohammed Saed, etc...were members and they called themselves, the “Popular Liberation Forces (PLF)”.

H- In June, 1970, four members of the General Command who were from the Beni Amer tribe (Adem Saleh, Mohammed Ahmed Idris, Osman Ajeeb, Ahmed Omer) and some of their followers held a meeting in Obel Valley, Barka where they took a stand supportive of the Popular Forces for the Liberation of Eritrea and freed the six prisoners of the General Command as a gesture to Sabbe. They called themselves the “Eritrean Liberation Forces”.

I- And Isaias Afwerki, after staying in the surroundings of Ad Shuma, Merara, under the pretext and deceit of carrying out Jebha mission without openly declaring his splinter, he started connections with the PLF when they reached Seduho Eela on the Red Sea and began to acquire help in [the form of] combatants, arms and logistics from them. Later on, he exposed his splinter through his Christian oriented “Nehnan Elamanan” manifesto.

The Salvation Struggle: 1971-1972

As I have mentioned above, the general picture indicated that the Eritrean revolution had reached a turbulent situation. The reason is the splinter of three groups, ‘tribes of the PLF’, on one hand and the inability of the General Command to lead the Eritrean Revolution, on the other. In such a risky situation, defending the resolutions of the Adobha Congress and its legitimacy, and [the task of] strengthening the role of the democratic forces and elements, and integrating them to carry out a resilient struggle, was necessary. Without going to great length, the only choices were: either to emulate the stands taken by the three ‘faces of the Shaabya’—to take sectarian, tribal and religious stand, and to go the ravines, forests, plains, bars, churches, and mosques in one’s birthplace and be secluded [there] or, to struggle for the salvation of the revolution.

At any rate, in the periods mentioned above, the role of the General Command as a leadership was becoming weak and its capabilities were decreasing. Understanding this played a big role in ensuring the success of the Awate Conference and the support for the first national congress. First, there was an attempt to hold the Awate Conference at Kur, but since the Ethiopian government knew of the place through its spies and airplanes swarmed the place and disturbed the area, shifting it to the Awate camp became a must.

Even now, the leaders of the “Eritrean Liberation Forces” or, Obelites, devised a secret military plan to kill whoever they can and to arrest the majority of the Awate Congress delegates in order to have full control of Jebha. To further clarify this point, with the exception of Isaias Afwerki and Memher Abera Mekonnen, all the other members of the General Command, battalion, platoon, regional commanders, and all their deputies, battalion medics, as well as individuals who came from abroad (for instance Herui Tella, Ibrahim Idris Mohammed Adem), were present. However, in spite of the fact that carrying out the conspiracy was underway, one of the combatants who were assigned to attack the congress told Osman Abu Sheneb: “I like you and I don’t want you to die, I am telling you that tomorrow morning, this congress will be attacked by the Obelites.” As we all know, the straightforward and honest Osman Abu Sheneb, he was a patriotic combatant who would not betray Jebha. He couldn’t sleep that night, and in the morning he came to the place of the congress in his customary humorous manner. Mixing seriousness and jokes, he told (Abdella Degoul, chairman, Ibrahim Idris Toteel, Arabic secretary, and Memher Ogbamichel Mesmer, Tigrinya secretary) the three persons in charge of the congress: “today is not our day, the congress will be attacked.” After that, Saleh Jemjam, a member of the General Command and in charge of the security of the congress, held a loudspeaker and announced to the

delegates: “today there will not be a meeting.” The Obelite mercenary combatants who were assigned to attack the congress, were seen coming down from their locations; but other Beni Amer like Sharoukh, Hariray, etc, who thought, “[they] can be successful,” escaped and disappeared after discovering that they were exposed. Thus the planned military attack was aborted, thanks to Osman Abu Sheneb.

At that time, information was relayed to the delegates that, at Ad Shuma, Isaias and his colleagues liquidated a six-member ELF fedayeen squad that was moving around Ghindae—some the liquidated [members of the squad whom I remember were], Ahmed Gasha, Omereddin Mahmoud, and Osman Ibrahim. But on the contrary, the criminals harp and repeat that, “the ELF started the civil war in the first place; ELF is slaughterer and liquidator.” Isn’t it amazing to those who know the true history of the Eritrean revolution! *Baalom Tehanti, Baalom Ka’a lenqeTti*.

Upon evaluation—considering its spirit, its patience and the cool headedness that prevailed, the responsible stands it took, and the practical resolutions it passed—the Awate Congress (though it came as a result of the resolution of the Adobha Congress), it is not less [important] than the Adobha Congress.

The 600 delegates of the Awate Military Congress deliberated from February 26, 1971 to March 13, 1971 and passed the following main resolutions:

- 1- Called for a national congress after four months.
- 2- Based on the resolution of the Awate Military Congress, it increased the members of the preparatory committee by five to reach 30 members.
- 3- Since the success of the national congress would depend on the success of the tasks of the preparatory committee, it was given full responsibility in managing [its] finances. In addition, it was given the responsibility of carrying out studies, present documents at the congress, conduct democratic election of delegates to the congress from all departments of the organization, and decide the number of delegates to the congress.
- 4- [It decided to] let the General Command continues to maintain its authority until the national congress is convened.
- 5- It formed a contact committee to dialogue with the splinter groups.

As the provocative activities by the three splinter groups against the ELF had reached its highest level, the ELF took a responsible position and refrained from any provocative counter reaction and spread its hands for peace and dispatched a nine-member contact committee that exerted weeks worth of efforts roaming around the Red Sea and trying to meet with the [splinters]. But on the side of the counter revolutionaries, they considered not showing up for appointments and

rejecting the sacred goal, as their task. The [claim] of “we are in a narrow place between two blades...etc.”, wrapped under Christian cover, the “Selfi Natsnet” decided to keep silent and not to respond while liquidating Jebha Fedayeen and postponing the appointments of the contact committee. On one hand the Obelites did whatever they can [by creating] hindrances to stop the convention of the national congress; on the other, they issued an official statement condemning “the congress that is being planned is sectarian.” After much fruitless roaming, the contact committee returned to its station and presented its report to the General Command. But with all of that, it is worth remembering that the preparatory committee of the national congress had sent invitations to all of them to participate in the congress.

Though the issue of splinters was one that needed resolution and clarification, it doesn't mean there were no other problems in the ELF that needed solutions; and to solve those problems, the ELF directed its attention to the convening and the success of the congress. The following are some of the problems that needed solutions:

- 1- Identifying our international, zonal and regional enemies and allies.
- 2- Setting up public organizations to increase the consciousness of the people in order to strengthen the relations [between them and the organization], and to identify the rights and obligation of the people.
- 3- Finding a solution to the issue of Eritreans who were collaborating with the enemy and to find ways for them to cooperate with their revolution. This concerned the Police, Commandis, and Nech Lebash forces and others.
- 4- Clarifying the ideology that would be followed to lead to the future Eritrea and the type of society and system that would be built, etc.

In short, there was a need for drafting a national democratic program that the Eritrean Revolution would follow.

The first national congress was attended by about 820 democratically elected representatives of the people and the forces; it was convened at Arr between October 14, 1971 and November 12, 1971 and concluded successfully. The national congress was the highest authority of the ELF; a 32-member leadership (12-member revolutionary council and 19-member executive committee) that would lead the organization was democratically elected from among the people and the forces. With that, one chapter was closed and a new chapter was opened. With that, the general chaotic period of the Eritrean revolution and particularly of ELF was crossed; and by holding an image and content that [firmly] rooted our struggle, we started to advance foreword. Since the splinter forces understood that the democratic trend will be established, and that it will

overwhelm them with its influences, as if dialogue and unity doesn't concern them, they hastened to consolidate their forces to confront the Jebha.

At any rate, though the first national congress was convinced of the dangerous deeds of the wing led by the Obelites within the Popular Forces, it resolved approach to them through a contact committee to ask them to return to their organization [ELF]; and if they refused, [it decided] to take steps against them.

Regarding the Popular Forces of Seduho Ella, which was led by Osman Saleh Sabbe, the ELF opened the door of contacts and dialogue [with them]; and if they reject that, the congress mandated the leadership to study their case and take necessary steps.

After a lengthy and responsible deliberations regarding Isaias and his colleagues, the congress considered the propaganda that they were spreading [which claimed] "Kebessa [combatants] do not have rights in the ELF" on one hand, and on the other the propaganda that was being spread by the Ethiopian government which was not any different from that of the Selfi Natsnet. [Therefore] it concluded that "necessary contacts would be made with Selfi Natsnet."

This clarifies to what extent the resolution was timely and responsible; to what extent the ELF was minutely following the situation of the Eritrean society; and its interest in solving it. But regarding the fact that the congress didn't specify what happens if [Isaias and Colleagues] rejects [the calls], it is clear that the congress had a big shortcoming.

1972, The Period of Taking Steps

After the first national congress of the ELF was successfully concluded, all the resources of the organization was spread nationally and intentionally to implement the program and resolution of the congress. And for a period of six months, all the wings of the Popular Forces were [approached] through letters and contact committees that tried to meet with them. However, true to their habit, they turned a deaf ear to all the efforts. Finally, starting from their spirit and stand, they were showing [signs] of mobilization claiming "Amma [ELF] will take action therefore let's be ahead of it before it [does]"; and Jebha was ahead of them in starting to take steps. But this step [attack] was taken against the Popular Forces of Seduho Ella and Obelites and not against Selfi Natsnet.

In the [darkness of] the night, the ELF circled the forces of the Obelites including four of its leaders in the surrounding of Tekreret in Sheglet. Adem Saleh ordered his forces to open fire, but he was faced with the objection [from his forces who said] "we will not open fire". And because later, Ahmed Adem ordered, "do not open fire", no fire was opened. All of them surrendered to the ELF. However, there were other platoons that were not in the area but in Obel. An attack on which I personally participated was carried out [on them] around Herkok and Mensura. Their

leader was AbSelab. Because when Jebha surrounded them we hit some of their prominent fighters, the rest fled and escaped. The third attack was carried out on Barka Laal on the platoons led by Ibrahim Gulay, Dubshik, Ibrahim Kukuy (from Ad Kukuy), but without returning fire, they fled to the mountains. After two weeks of suffering from thirst and hunger, they sent a letter: “we are coming to surrender our arms.” They came and surrendered their arms. Jebha, didn’t charge them with anything but told them, “you are free and you can continue your struggle with Jebha.” And since they said they were tired and needed vacation, they were allowed to go. After a few days, they retrieved arms they had hid in caves, they surrendered to the enemy at Agordat. Later, they committed a lot of attacks on Jebha by leading Ethiopian Forces [to where Jebha was]. But the platoons led by Al-Hassen Abubeker that was around Maria Tselam recognized that there was no benefit in a civil war and surrendered to Jebha without bloodshed.

An extensive dialogue was carried out through different committees and delegates of the forces with the section of Popular Forces that was led by Osman Saleh Sabbe; but they neglected that and continued on actions that pushed towards battle.

And a nine-member dialogue committee led by Ibrahim Mohammed Ali and martyr Fitsum Gebreselasse, members of the leadership, was sent to the section that was led by Isaias Afwerki. The dialogue committee included Tesfai Tekhlezi, martyr Tesfai Bahlebi, Gebru Hagos, Martyr Melake Tekhle, Osman Abdulkadir, Gebru and Amanuel. They handed them a letter informing them that the dialogue committee was there to dialogue with them based on the resolution of the national congress. The Dialogue Committee waited for their answer for many weeks in Mrara and Filfil. Then it sent them another letter asking for another appointment. After delaying for many weeks without giving a reply, they replied, “we will decide a date of appointment on our own and we will let you know.” After staying around Geleb (Mensa’e) for some weeks, and after understanding that all its efforts to dialogue with Selfi Natsnet had failed, the dialogue committee went to Barka and presented its report to the leadership of the organization. At the end, what we finally deduce from this is that [the committee] had full conviction that Selfis Natsnet was not ready for dialogue; but looking at it from the legal perspective, the dialogue committee waited for the reply from Selfi Natsnet to respect and implement the resolution of the national congress.

The battle against Sabbe’s PLF started in Semhar and moved to Sahel towards Sheib, Hayet, Tombobit and Gerger. But the group of Selfi Natsnet under Isaias, which had said it will inform [the ELF] of an appointment for the dialogue, and which the congress decided it should not be attacked, descended from the surroundings of Re’esi Adi, Merara and Ad Shuma on its own will and decision, and sided with the PLF and was found fighting against the ELF.

In this manner, the civil war and bloodshed spread and exploded in all parts of Eritrea. It continued non-stop for two years.

This is the true Eritrean history that led to the splintering and to civil war. The responsibility for the [lives] of the patriots that were martyred in all corners of Eritrea, lies primarily on the shoulders of the leaders of the counter revolutionaries.

Conclusion

Those who bear responsibility for the splintering and civil war are Isaias Afwerki, Solomon Weldemariam, Osman Saleh Sabbe, Mohammed Ali Omero, Adem Saleh, Mohammed Ahmed Idris, Osman Ajeeb, Ahmed Omer and their puppies. In brief, since they are the individuals who took the Eritrean revolution into sectarian, tribal and regional differences and immersed it into bloodshed, they have an unforgettable history that left a negative bruise. It is because of the civil war that they ignited that our revolution was elongated for thirty years.

Since I witnessed many combatants and followers of the [EPLF], including some who claim to be researchers of history, wishfully twisting, exploiting, and partitioning the history of the liberation struggle of the Eritrean people; and since as the saying goes, “*Zewaale yngerka*,” [better to listen from an eyewitness] I understand that it is my national and public obligation to tell of what I know to [anyone] with ears that is willing to hear the true history. [That is why] I chose to present this true history. Those entities that are mentioned [above] and their leaders are writing and saying [unsubstantiated lies], based on the hallow spirit and belief that they have eliminated the ELF in the eighties and that there is no one to question them. But now, the ELF, with a new spirit and new approach, has managed to safeguard its sacrifices and its history by consolidating its members inside and outside [Eritrea]. Therefore, as the saying goes, “*May keymetse megedi may tsreg*”, [build canals before rainfall] they have to think and work for harmony, reconciliation and unity, because twisting history cannot save them.

All splinter groups, specially the EPLF, who splintered from the ELF in 1970, were explaining the causes [for their splintering] by saying that Jebha doesn't protect the rights of Kebessa people; Jebha is slaughterer and killer; Jebha is sectarian, etc. So many faint-hearted were deceived and followed them. But that the truth of their splintering was not to protect the rights of the Kebessa people, and that they are not interested in anything but their positions, the people and their forces have now understood and identified them. As for us, since we know them from the time they started to sprout, we knew that their sickness was only [selfish yearning] for power.

Leaving everything aside, let's see how the rights of the Kebessa people were at that time. The number of leaders who hail from Kebessa is not few. As an eyewitness I can just mention: Abraha Tewelde, Solomon Weldemariam, Isaias Afwerki, Asmerom Gerezgher, Bashay Gerezgher, Gebrehiwet Himberti, Kidane Jenubi, Kidane Gobeze, etc. As for those who were on other parts and regions, they were uncountable. Continuing on the topic at hand: is the fact that emanating from the thought of developing themselves to develop their revolution forgotten? Is the fact that the ELF in the sixties sent Isaias Afwerki, Issak Jebha, etc. to China for education

forgotten? Or is it that the [ELF] didn't know they were from Kebessa and sent them to China by mistake? Therefore, the accusation of Isaias is considered like a pirate's accusation and is *'temeliska zbelaaaku tsahli msbar e'yu'* [thankless].

As for their accusation of “killers, slaughterers”, in which cave do they want to hide the fact that they exposed martyr Arefaine and his eight colleagues, martyr Abraha Tewelde, and the members of Srreyet Addis whom they pushed into dangers and liquidations for the sake of power? And after their splintering, in the outset, didn't they liquidate those who asked for their rights peacefully, and by branding them “Menka'e, Chega'e”? Didn't they liquidate combatants in the hundreds? Or those who were liquidated were not Christians?

After the liberation of Eritrea, the cause of the death of the liquidated disabled war veterans, the disappeared combatants was explained as suicide [in an attempt to up the real cause, and] ordinary citizens and combatants are kept in prison without justice, etc. But since you are watching it on your own, you [the reader] don't need explanation from me.

As for the accusation that was thrown at the ELF, that it was sectarian and tribalist, it was not the ELF that gave instruction for [some] to go to the ravines and villages of their birthplace and unearth backward sentiments and to exploit it all day. They all jumped: those who hail from Semhar, went to the Gedem mountain; those who hail from Kebessa went to Mrrara and Aala; and the Beni Amer went to Obel. And weren't those who tried to agitate the people, each [by touching] its raw nerves? The negative and dirty history that those criminal teachers of deceit and ugliness left behind will never be forgotten.

At any rate, the main reason that pushed them to splinter was to create an organization that they will direct, and in order to live sitting in the saddle of power, [it was] not to protect rights and to defend the wronged—it was not to realize the unity of the people. It was not so then; and it is not so now. And now this is realized by our people, Christians and Muslims alike. I conclude by calling on the people and the army to put their hands together and to struggle strongly with consciousness and steadfastness in order to uproot and expose the ugly system and its history that is soaked in lies.

Source: <http://awate.com/gebremedhin-zerizghi-an-eyewitness-account/>

HE AND HIS OBJECTIVES

February 13, 2012

Awate Team

The first decade of the Eritrean struggle for independence that started on Sep 1, 1961 was a time of growing pains. But in the late sixties, the military setbacks and draining of all regional support from the Arab region after the Six-day war, combined with the extensive and effective Ethiopian propaganda, resulted in serious internal crisis. Many combatants were determined to reform the organization and they formed Harakat Al-Islah (the Reform Movement.) Unfortunately the problems were deeper than what the Islah Movement could reform. By 1969, the crisis had deteriorated and resulted in sectarian rivalry.

In 1971, there appeared *Nehnan Elamanan (We And Our Objectives)*, a document that Isaias Afwerki and his friends authored to justify their sectarian split from the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which they considered a “Jihadist” organization. They embarked on establishing an organization to mobilize Eritrean Christian Highlanders. Today, many believe that *Nehnan Elamanan* is the cause for all the fragmentation and polarization that Eritreans still suffer from.

Nehnan Elamanan came with allegations of grisly murders committed by what it called the “Jihadist” ELF against Christians; and after more than forty years, the allegations still circulate as truth among Isaias’ supporters. With time, the unsubstantiated allegation became urban legend, elevated to a myth, and further deepened the mistrust among Eritreans and to this day continues to divide Eritreans. In fact, it is difficult to understand the cultural disharmony, the sectarian mistrust, and the regional frustration that Eritrea suffers from without scrutinizing *Nehnan Elamanan*. Unfortunately, save for some loner pens here and there, not many have challenged the allegations made in the document. On the contrary, a number of so-called Eritrean scholars have been repeating the contents of the manifesto as divine truth. But those who read the polished English translation cannot be blamed for the translators themselves are certainly influenced by the message. It suffices to show that the title of the manifesto, *Nehnan Elamanan*, was translated as ‘Our Struggle and Its Goals’ whereas the correct translation is We And Our Objectives. The manifesto is all about “WE”—its authors identify themselves “most if not all of us are Christian highlanders”—which carried so many subliminal messages directed to a focused audience: Christian Highlanders. It was not (as the translated version tried to make it appear) about the STRUGGLE which, in the Eritrean psyche, means something of a national nature, with an all encompassing Eritrean scope, not a sectarian clarion call.

The manifesto still cries to be researched and analyzed; and we encourage qualified scholars to do just that. On our part, this article is our modest attempt to shed some light on it. We will challenge and explain the evolution of the manifesto because we believe that knowing the details of Isaias’ destructive designs in the past will help us better understand him and be better equipped to fight his tyranny.

Nehnan Elamanan is widely believed to be a creation of Isaias, his master plan. Therefore, we think a more fitting title for it would be ‘He And His Objectives.’ The manifesto is the seed of Isaias’ tyranny of today, and it is the reason why we have him at the helm of power in Eritrea.

In this article, we will first present an introduction to *Nehnan Elamanan* followed by an insight into how it came into existence and how it hastened Isaias’ sectarian split before he joined two other splinter groups with whom he formed EPLF, which he soon controlled, and which, after the liberation of Eritrea, became today’s PFDJ. Finally, we will explain how Isaias and his clique exploited the killing of Kidane Kiflu and Welday Ghidey, the **only** two names of casualties that appeared in *Nehnan Elamanan* and which it treated sensationally.

Nehnan Elamanan: The Eritrean Mein Kempf

Nehnan Elamanan was an attempt by Isaias to rewrite history to fit his grand plans for Eritrea. From the outset, he identified his constituency and focused on mobilizing the Christian population of the Eritrean Highlands, by addressing their baser instincts, cleverly using their fears and suspicions, spreading out any feeling of collective guilt (over Eritreans dealing with the Haile Selassie regime) and calling on them to rally behind him against what he portrayed as the dangerous other.

The dangerous other is “*Qiada Al’Amma*” (the General Command—the leadership of the Eritrean Liberation Front of the time—derisively, thereafter, referred to as “Amma.”). The General Command is described as a people who had no clear political principles, no military strategy (*tebenja hizka m’kkublal...zttakhosu zneberu*: roaming around and firing off guns haphazardly); who opted to use religion instead of nationalism as an organizing principle and therefore defined Haile Selasse as “Kaffir” and the Eritrean struggle as “*jihad fi sebilli Allah*” [struggling in the path of God]; whose favorite activity was looting Christian properties. It accused them of looting 10,000 cows belonging to Christian highlanders and, with the spoils, it explained, the General Command bought houses in Sudan, they got drunk, “the single among them got married and the married among them got remarried.” When they were not looting the properties of Christians, getting drunk and marrying and re-marrying, they were slaughtering Christians by the hundreds (“*karatatom ksiHlu...nkrstyan kHardu*” sharpening their knives to butcher Christians.)

With the “other” clearly defined as corrupt, bigoted, thieving and murderous thugs who used religion as an organizing principle, the document went on flattering the “we”—always defined as Christian highlanders. It told them that if they are suffering any guilt for the role of their forefathers in the 1940s, they shouldn’t because “The Eritrean people—after 1940—were divided into two political fortresses. When the majority of Christians were calling for union with Ethiopia, the majority of Muslims were calling for union with Sudan.” (never mind that this is not what the UN Commission reported at the time.) It told them that they should feel empowered because the last census which was done in 1957 showed the “we” are 55.7% of the population and “*aslam hzbna*” are 44.3%. It told them that the Christian highlander was just as nationalist, just as willing to fight for Eritrean independence in 1961—had it not been for the restrictions of geography.

It also claimed that the consensus which was reached in the 1950s to have dual official languages was forced by the UN because the UN saw everything through a religious prism. The idea of the ELF to divide Eritrea into 4 operational sectors [copied from Algerians in their fight against colonialist France] was based on the ethnic differences of the ELF leadership and it was right for the Christian highlanders to ask, “why is a Muslim/Saho leading us?” And even when he was replaced by a Christian highlander, it was not good enough because he was “*Hade se’Abi’om zkhone kristanay Halega*” [a Christian chieftain who was one of them.] And there was nothing wrong for the Christian highlander to make these demands because “*natka yeHmmeke*” [what is yours is what concerns you], it argued. All attempts for reforming the ELF failed because “*wedi dmu ney gedfnay e’mu* [bad habits die hard--but the expression describes "bad habits as hereditary] explained the document. And so, since the only two choices are to (a) surrender to the enemy [Ethiopia] or (b) be butchered by the ELF leadership, we don’t have the luxury of sitting on a razor blade and that’s why we are splitting.

The document played up every stereotype of the Muslim Eritrean: disorganized, barbaric, murderous, sectarian. It was 28 pages of “*Aslamay entenegese yHarrd e’mber neyferrd*” (put a Muslim in a position of authority and he is severe.) And it did its job: to this day, 40 years later, Eritreans who know nothing about Eritrean history know one thing: the ELF ["Amma"] was led by sectarian butchers. Not just Eritreans: even foreign “revolutionaries” internalized its message and called the ELF a “Muslim organization”. How did this document come about?

The Birth Of The Mysterious Document

For a long time before *Nehnan Elamanan* was openly distributed, Isaias and his group were clandestinely circulating parts of it, and messages with similar content to it. Apparently the originals of the messages were kept in Kassala [Eastern Sudan] and many of those who were part of the planning, writing or disseminating the propaganda of *Nehnan Elamanan* have repeatedly, and vaguely, mentioned them just as “documents”. They all stated that Kidane and Welday were in possession of some “important documents” in Kassala, Sudan.

An interview conducted by Isaias Tesfamarian [an Eritrean librarian who resides in California and works at Stanford University (?)] with several EPLF (the precursor of the PFDJ) party officials is very revealing. They state that at one time after Kidane and Welday were killed, Ghirmay Mehari (now Brig. General in Eritrea) and Wolderufael Sebhatu (martyred in Nackfa) were sent to retrieve the documents from Kassala. [\[i\]](#)

Brig. General Ghirmay states: “*they were very important documents.... Wolderufael knew the whereabouts and the importance of the documents because he used to work with them [Kidane and Welday] ...Once we got to Kassala we got some of the documents but not all.*” [\[ii\]](#)

Woldenkiel Gebremariam, a current minister of the PFDJ says: “*the documents were very important. Kidane Kiflu was in Kassala and Kassala was the coordinating point with the field. He used to follow up the situations in the field and record them. They were very important historical documents. Some of the documents (letters) were sent to the field. With the situation that we went through in the field, it is hard to say where they are. Some documents were taken by Tekue Yhidego and etc. to Aden from Kassala. We used to have them with our Hafash Wudubat*

(Mass Organizations). After we went to the field we did not know the situation of the documents.”[\[iii\]](#)

And Naizghi Kiflu, an ex-Minister of the PFDJ and its one time security director, who had been critically ill for some years, and died on Feb. 6, 2012 in the UK said: “*The documents were very important. They used to describe the situations in the field. Who did what? Who got killed by whom ...etc. are the sort of things that were in the documents. We left some of the documents with our Hafash Wudubat (Mass Organizations) in Aden, Yemen. Later, we heard that the documents were stolen.*”

Mesfin Hagos, in a recent interview (we translated the relevant part of it to English) also mentions some documents: “*...At the end of 1969... I was told that I was appointed to the engineering department, but shortly after...I went to the Sudan. There were some books in Sudan that I brought along with me from China, and that would help us in my appointed position [military engineering]...* [\[iv\]](#)

In a testimonial booklet, Gebremedhin Zerezghi, a veteran combatant who lived the events says: “*Members of Srryet Addis*[\[v\]](#) *started to communicate and correspond through letters. When there was an attempt to read letters that were intercepted, it was impossible [to read them]. Some were in secret codes, some were in numbers, and some were [written] in alphabets that seemed like Russian.*”[\[vi\]](#)

We believe that those messages, and the repeatedly mentioned documents [referred to as “books from China” in Mesfin Hagos’ case], or some of them, are in the possession of the PFDJ, and once released they would surely clear a lot of grey information. But until such a time, the available information is enough to deduce what the documents were about: perhaps the seeds of *Nehnan Elamanan*.

At a time when there was rampant political conflict within the Eritrean liberation forces, and obviously Isaias and his group were weaving conspiracies, and the heavy-handed manner with which the ELF leadership tried to resolve the problems, one side would naturally want to defeat the other, at least in the propaganda war—that partially explains the motive behind *Nehnan Elamanan*. Also, in many instances, the ELF leadership proved to be seriously inept in solving some problems and resorted to extreme solutions. It is difficult to understand, let alone justify, some of its damaging actions—for instance, its decision to jail six-members of the General Command, all hailing from the Semhar region. This cannot be explained except in terms of regional bias even if they had committed subversion, a not-convincing explanation given by the General Command. It was amid this political turmoil, mass surrender and spying cases, and internal maladministration that Kidane and Welday were killed. They could have been innocent; but even then one doesn’t expect the revolutionaries of the day to set up courts for them and deliberate meticulously before passing a sentence—within the ELF, a serious attempt to establish a proper court system only started in 1975. And though *Nehnan Elamanan* alleges that hundreds of Christians were killed within the ELF, it didn’t mention any names save two: Welday Ghide and Kidane Kiflu.

In that environment of wild “revolutionary justice,” many innocent people—not just Christian highlanders—were killed, and many who fought against a more powerful entity were defeated. But it doesn’t follow that the defeated are always innocent who should be treated as helpless victims; had they been the victors in the power struggle, it is almost certain the role would have been reversed. In short, the price of revolutions is high, and liberation struggle is not peaceful either, nor is it a slow evolution. And everywhere and anytime, revolutionaries are led by zealots and it is the nature of revolutions to divide people into enemies and allies, nothing in between. It is because of such complexities that it is important for Eritreans to know the nature and content of the documents that were kept in Kassala. And why they were so important that Isaias and his group badly wanted to retrieve them from Kidane and Welday’s house.

It is not far-fetched to consider the “books from China” that Mesfin Hagos mentioned in his interview is a reference to the same documents that Ghirmay Mehari (now Brig. General) and Wolderufael Sebhatu (martyred in Nackfa), were trying to retrieve from Kassala. It is very possible that they are the same documents that Naizghi Kiflu and Weldenkiel Haile mentioned. And it is very possible that the clandestine letters, that Gebremedhin Zerezghi mentioned in his testimony, were circulating among the combatants were the cause for the killing of Kidane and Welday, whose names automatically appeared on *Nehnan Elamanan*.

A serious question has been asked for decades regarding the allegation of *Nehnan Elamanan*: If the ELF was into the “slaughtering” business as alleged, why were “Christians combatants” like Mesfin Hagos, Isaias and many, many, others spared?

Theories: Why Kidane And Welday Were Killed

The ELF never formally denied or admitted killing Welday and Kidane though many who lived the era confirm privately that it did. They explain the killing differently, and in general terms. As *Nehnan Elamaman*, and many senior members of the EPLF testify, in the days when the two were killed, the ELF witnessed mass surrender by combatants from the highlands to Ethiopian garrisons and the Ethiopian consulate in Sudan. Given the politically polarized society, perhaps the events of the time threw a shadow of suspicion and mistrust on the Christian combatants. The polarization was definitely sharpened by the political situations that prevailed at the time, for example:

1. A relentless and heavy Ethiopian propaganda that labeled the Eritrean revolution as a Muslim project and encouraged Christians to surrender by taking advantage of the blanket amnesty offered by the Ethiopian king. Many did.
2. The onslaught on the Muslim population, wiping their villages, mass arrests, robbing of cattle and other properties carried out by the Ethiopian forces, particularly the commandos forces, which were composed of predominantly Christian highlanders.
3. The general treatment of Muslims as second-class citizens as Ethiopia declared Orthodox Christianity as the official religion of the state.
4. The military setback of the ELF after the Halhal debacle where the ELF was weakened and appeared un-salvageable.

5. The Israel-Arab war that drained supply lines from the Arab countries and weakened the ELF.
6. The emergence of ideological (Marxists influence from Yemen and Sudan) philosophies in the ranks of the ELF and the struggle that ensued between urban (who were more accepting of Marxist ideas) and rural (conservative) members of the organization.

The above could have been some of the reasons that made the doubtful combatants surrender in droves. But for other patriotic Christian combatants who remained behind and were totally against the surrender, it must have been painful to be categorized with those who surrendered when they chose to fight on. Such frustration would understandably trigger in them the urge to develop a counter narrative to vindicate themselves or at least ward off the suspicion. For Isaias, this must have been a grand opportunity to exploit and revive his old bigotry and prejudice as some of his schoolmates attest. The cause of the “hundreds” killed and of “Srryat Addis wiped out,” could only be a natural human reaction, a defensive mechanism by the injured to fight against the labeling and to defend themselves from being stereotypically perceived in a negative light. For Isaias, though, it meant a golden chance, an energy that would propel his sectarian split, a successful attempt to turn the tables on those he perceived as the other. And he cleverly used the incidents to mobilize Christians from the Highlands whom he considered his constituency.

Nehnan Elamanan: The Mother Of The PFDJ

In 1970, according to a number of veteran combatants, handwritten copies of some of the documents somehow ended in the hands of ELF security officers of the time. They contained allegations and language similar to what come out later on *Nehnan Elamanan*. The sectarian allegations were spreading wildly, and the security officers of the ELF began a surveillance task to check who was behind it. Kidane and Welday were implicated in the propaganda war (documents) as the statements of the above-mentioned veteran combatants indicate. Around the same time, a Sudanese officer tipped the ELF security personnel that Kidane, Welday and others were communicating with the Ethiopian consulate in Kassala—the consulate was aggressively luring the doubtful to surrender and it facilitated the surrender of scores of ELF combatants. It was in such circumstances that Welday and Kidane were killed and their bodies found around a place called Hafera, near the town of Kassala in Sudan.

No one claimed responsibility for the killing but fingers began to point towards some zealous officers of the ELF. Veterans of the revolutionary justice environment of the Eritrean Struggle are very secretive and do not allow themselves to be quoted publicly, but many of them recall versions of rumors that spread at the time: Kidane and Welday were accused of subversion against the ELF and treason for causing the surrender of combatants. The zealous security officers might have thought the killing would serve as a warning for others; or they might have been trying to contain and hide the damaging sectarian allegations that exposed the struggle to grave risks.

Others claim that after the leadership of the ELF became aware of the killing and wanted to punish them, the killers leaked some of the documents to gain sympathy from the public who would not condone but be angry at the combatants who were surrendering to the Ethiopians. But

the leak and the wide spread of the documents had another unintended result: it hastened the split of Isaias. If not for the embarrassing situation the leadership found itself in after Welday and Kidane were killed, and if it didn't panic and properly contained the damage, it would have certainly continued the surveillance calmly and reached a conclusive result. But the exposure of the documents and the panicky move of the leadership placed Isaias, the mastermind of the whole propaganda onslaught, in a precarious situation. He in turn panicked and began to devise an escape strategy.

At about the same time, the General Command assigned Isaias Afwerki and Saleh Fekak (both members of the General Command) to organize the people of the Highlands. They left the ELF bases accompanied by nine-combatants and they carried along typewriters, duplicators and other resources that would help them set up a local information unit. Once the group reached a place around the village of Fgret, Isaias excused himself for a few hours to visit his relatives in the area—he selected the three Christian combatants in the group to accompany him. Hours went by and Isaias didn't return. Saleh Fekak and the six-combatants waited for another day and he didn't show up. On the third day, Saleh Fekak sent three combatants to look for Isaias and his three companions; they failed in tracing his path in any of the villages in the area. Saleh Fekak abandoned the mission and returned to the ELF bases and reported that Isaias has disappeared with three combatants. Weeks later, Isaias met other scout forces in the Merrara area and told them that he could not work with *Qiyadda Alamma* (General Command) and that is why he abandoned his colleagues in Fgret—that was the beginning of his split. It was then that Isaias edited *Nehnan Elamanan* and publicly disseminated it after adding the names of Kidane Kiflu and Welday Gidey to it.

In 1991, members of what was known as United Organization (UO), a conglomerate of parts of many struggle era groups, entered Asmara. They had hoped to be recognized as a political party to compete in Eritrean politics; but Isaias' PFDJ had another idea. The UO members were told that they were just individuals and should stop dreaming of continuing as a political party. A small number of them, the helpless, were absorbed in the public sector, the rest either went into exile anew or were left to wander in Asmara in confusion. Shortly thereafter, many were silently snatched by the PFDJ's security apparatus and disappeared. One of those who disappeared a few years later from his hotel room in Asmara was Mohammed Osman Dayer, a veteran who was the security chief of the ELF when Kidane and Welday were killed. In a short time, the PFDJ successfully blocked any future testimony or impartial investigation into the case that propelled the tip of Isaias propaganda spear.

The ambition of Isaias to have his own organization goes back to 1969 when weeks before the convening of the Adobha conference, he approached the late Mohammed Ahmed Abdu to agree with him *“to establish and lead a military division composed purely of Christians from the Eritrean highlands.”* [viii] Woldeyesus Ammar laments, *“History has attested that Isayas Afeworki, a born loner, was not able to heed to that important advice from his senior commander, Mohammed Ahmed Abdu. Isayas carries on that absolutely negative trait to this day.”* [viii]

To achieve his goal, Isaias has perpetuated the mistrust among Eritreans for over forty years and to this day continues to do so. From the outset, his attitude and views foretold what he was

planning: destroying the Eritrean Liberation Front from within, a goal he made clear on his first day he arrived to Kassala via Tessenei in Western Eritrea. He said, “***The first day I arrived in Kassala**, I was frustrated, people telling me about the ugly nature of the ELF. It was a nightmare. For some reason that no one explained, we were ostracized.*” [ix]

Isaias’ statement comes regardless of the fact that he had just joined, and he couldn’t have observed anything about the ELF on his first day of joining. Why then such a serious allegation on his first day? As many who know him testify, his statement exposes his bias and prejudice that he carried along with him from his past. Today, Eritrea is under the mercy of Isaias because he was not challenged since a long time ago when he was paving a path for his current tyrannical rule. He consistently perpetuated a strategy of victim mentality until he achieved the goal of creating an organization molded in his shape: the PFDJ.

Conclusions

The November 1971 document entitled “*Nehnan Elamanan*” [literally translated to “We And Our Objectives” (but in its English translation “Our Struggle And Its Goals”)] most likely started out as a document written by reformers but was eventually changed into a Clarion Call of us (Christian highlanders) vs. them (Muslims) by Isaias Afwerki. It appeals to the baser instincts of Christian highlanders and it flat out lies and exaggerates and, when necessary, omits the motives and magnitude of the persecution of Eritreans by the ELF leadership. However, because it was interlaced with revolutionary rhetoric, it was presented as a respectable document to a selectively targeted group of influential Eritreans and fellow-travelers in the socialist camp.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as in now, the Eritrean people could not forgive two infractions: (a) surrendering to the enemy and (b) splitting and weakening their liberation organization. In trying to justify the former, and trying to prepare the Eritrean people to accept the latter, the author of the final version of *Nehnan Elamanan* (Isaias Afwerki) wildly exaggerates the number of Christian highlanders that were killed by the ELF leadership (the document claims that 300 Christian highlanders were killed over a two year period but gives the name of only two) and it uses specific language to suggest how they were killed: knives slit with throats. However, despite all the inflammatory language, in the mid 1970s, when Christian highlanders were given the opportunity to join the field, a large percentage of them still joined the ELF—either because they didn’t believe the accusations or because they hadn’t heard them yet. The EPLF (precursor to the PFDJ) intensified its campaign of painting the ELF as a “Muslim organization bent on slaughtering Christians” (“*Amma Haradit*”) non-stop, until the organization collapsed in 1981 eaten within, and assaulted without by the combined efforts of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF.)

Note: next, in an article entitled: “Srryet Addis: Blatant Lie?”, we will shed some light on the allegation of what came to be known as Srryet Addis, the most sensational allegation of Nehnan Elamanan. Subsequently, we will publish Gebremedhin Zerezghi’s testimonial, available in Tigrinya booklet, which we translated to English. In due time, we will also present to you the English translation of Nehnan Elamanan after we thoroughly check its accuracy compared to the original Tigrinya version.

Recommended Reading:

1. An Eyewitness In The History of The Eritrean Revolution, Gebremedhin Zereghzi, May 1997. (Will be published soon and this will be replaced by a link to it)
2. Woldeyesus Ammar, "From The Mysteries Of "Siriyet Addis." April 25, 2004, (This article first appeared on awate.com, on a column called Spotlight. Weldeyesus Ammara was a high school classmate and a university colleague of Isaias Afwerki in the 1960s.

[i] Isaias Tesfamariam (California) interview <http://www.ehrea.org/kidank.php> (accessed Feb 6, 2012)

[ii] ibid <http://www.ehrea.org/kidank.php>

[iii] ibid <http://www.ehrea.org/kidank.php>

[iv] Mesfin Hagos in an interview with Radio Erina Dec. 1, 2011

[v] A group of Christian Highlander recruits from Addis Ababa who were allegedly killed by the ELF according to Nehnan Elamanan

[vi] Gebremedhin Zerzghi, An Eyewitness In The History Of The Eritrean Revolution (originally a Tigrinya booklet translated to English by the Awate Team)

[vii] Woldeyesus Ammar, a high school and university colleague of Isaias Afwerki:
<http://web.archive.org/web/20070505031415/http://www.awate.com/portal/content/view/3076/8/>

[viii] More on this by Woldeyesus Ammar: "...Isayas opined that the 5th division to which he belonged would be more effective if it is let to be "a pure Christian and Kebessan force". Mohammed Ahmed Abdu did not agree, and literally begged Isayas not to pursue that idea. Mohammed Ahmed Abdu reminded Isayas that even the ill-conceived division of ELA into regional commands required at least one third of fighters to be from outside each regional command."

Source:

<http://web.archive.org/web/20070505031415/http://www.awate.com/portal/content/view/3076/8/>

SRRYET ADDIS: BLATANT LIE?

March 24, 2012

Awate Team

This is the last of a three-part series. On February 13, 2012 we presented the first part ([He And His Objectives](#)) and on March 7, 2012, we presented the second part, detailed testimonies contained in [Gebremedhin Zegegeris' eye witness report](#) which are, to our knowledge, the first detailed first-hand testimony of the subject we are exploring. Today, we present to you our third and last article of the series entitled 'Srryet Addis: Blatant Lie?' We believe that all three documents will shed more light on the most crucial grey part in the history of the Eritrean struggle of the late sixties and early 1970s. In this article, we present a challenge to what has become almost a myth in modern Eritrean history: the alleged killings of Srryet Addis.

Since its inception awate.com has proclaimed its slogan: “inform, inspire, embolden, reconcile.” Throughout the years, we have heard questions of “who reconciles with whom? We are not fighting, so why are we reconciling?” And we have attempted to answer such questions with words to this effect: the history of Eritrea, like the history of any people, is a history of winners and losers; of vanquishers and vanquished; of accusers and accused; and, throughout our history, those who feel they have been wronged have never had an opportunity to tell their side of the story. And the wound is an open sore which never healed...and the only way out of the vicious cycle is for people to be open to listening to others' grievances.”

In other words, information—blunt information, when necessary—and the ability, the willingness to listen to a different point of view, is a pre-requisite to reconciliation. It is one of the reasons we published the martyr's album, the names of those killed in action in the “Badme War,” in 2004. When people were speculating that there were 50,000 dead, 60,000 dead, we listed the names and ages of the nearly 20,000 Eritreans who perished in that senseless war so we can at least know the SIZE of the pain, before we discuss the CAUSE and the RESOLUTION to the pain. Those who thought it would be politically advantageous to exaggerate the number were not happy with us; and those who knew that the next question would be “why”—the regime supporters—were full of hatred and rage towards us. But we persisted and we shared the information with you.

Without specific information—what, when, where, how, who, why—it is difficult to have reconciliation and closure. This is why police states like the one in Eritrea monopolize information: they have calculated that if we don't have the precise detail of those it has incarcerated, killed and made to disappear, then our demands for accountability will be dismissed as “exaggeration” or “fabrication.” But even without having the answers to those questions, we should have a conversation.

How many Eritreans were massacred in Ona and what are their names? How many Eritreans were massacred in Sh'Eb and what are their names, gender, and age? How many Eritreans, the so-called MekaE and Yameen were killed by the EPLF? How many Eritreans were killed in the

so-called Falul chaos within the ELF? How many were the victims who were branded Yameen in Denkalia and were killed by the ELF? How many Eritreans, and what are the specifics of these Eritreans, who were summarily executed by PFDJ officials? How many Eritreans have been exiled, arrested, tortured, and made to disappear? What are the names of the Eritreans who have been dispossessed and whose properties were taken? What are the precise grievances of the Eritrean Kunama and Eritrean Afar, and others?

There are many more questions.

And one of the questions that has not been answered to-date is the case of Srryet Addis: the claim that the Eritrean Liberation Front killed hundreds of Christian Highlanders.

The Allegation

In November 1971, the Eritrean field saw the emergence of a political manifesto known as *Nehnan Elamanan*. As was the custom of the era, the manifesto had no byline other than to a collective “we”—the “we” later identified in the manifesto as “we who are predominantly if not totally Christian highlanders.” It is a testimony to the polarized Eritrean polity that to this day many Eritreans (and many foreign political scientists, particularly leftist intellectuals) consider the document a brilliant treatise whereas many others saw it as a poisonous seed with its repeated references to the Muslim combatants of the Eritrean Liberation Front as butchers (always with a knife), reactionaries, tribalists, womanizers, bigots, shiftless bandits “shooting their guns aimlessly” and lacking any sense of nationalism, but pledging allegiance to Jihad and Arabism.

The most sensational claim of *Nehnan Elamanan* was that, during a two-year period, the Eritrean Liberation Front had killed over 300 Christian highlanders. Some of those killed, it claimed, were a group that had arrived from Addis Abeba to enlist in the field. And since then, those alleged victims were collectively referred to as Srryet Addis (Addis Battalion). Here is how *Nehnan Elamanan* describes the incident:

“...The [ELF leaders] ordered those who were in Sudan to air their complaints, to return to the field. The complainers, instead of following the orders, because during their stay in Sudan they were imprisoned and angered by the Sudanese authorities, they surrendered to the Haile Sellasie [Ethiopian] consulate in Sudan. Using this as a pretext, the viceroys of Jebha [ELF] passed orders to the field to kill all Christians, without any crime, they unjustly brought over one-hundred combatants from the Highlands and killed them in ravines. After the combatants from the Highlands surrendered [to Ethiopia, and others] were killed, there remained in the ranks of Jebha only a few that can be counted with the fingers of a hand.”

“Later, believing that if they killed the wise the others have nothing to do, they killed Kidane Kiflu and Welday Ghidey” It continues further and states, *“After the death of those martyrs [Kidane and Welday], similar to 1967, [the leaders of ELF] passed orders to [combatants in] the field to gather all Christians and to slaughter them. Over 200 innocent combatants were slaughtered and thrown away. And over 200 escaped and surrendered to the enemy [Ethiopia]... Due to this and worse deeds of injustice, those Christian combatants who were in the ELF were lost to surrendering and killing...”* [\[i\]](#)

Todate, there is an important question that has not been answered ever since *Nehnan Elamanan* saw the light of day. One would expect those who consider the document flawless to have come with more names in addition to Kidane Kiflu and Welday Ghide. Why not? It shouldn't be difficult if there are over one-hundred and fifty "Christian university students... massacred by the ELF"!

So far, the only account closely related to the **Srryet Addis** incident that was later to become a catchphrase, is the eyewitness testimony of Gebremedhin Zerezghi.

"...members of Srryet Addis were being recruited by Solomon Weldemarian (an ally of Isaias) in the Highlands against the order of the ELF leadership that had passed orders to stop recruiting. Solomon kept recruiting specifically select people in violation of the orders. At a later stage, the new recruits were sent to the surroundings of Debr Sala where they attacked other ELF combatants and "the squad leader was then crushed [with a stone] and was martyred. One of the machine gunners was sleeping while securely rolled around his gun, and a member of Srryet Addis who was supposed to snatch it from him was not successful. He was killed himself there. The remaining 15 fled and entered Agordat. When this [incident] happened, the news of the betrayal of Srryet Addis spread all over the field. While the majority of the remaining members of Srryet Addis who were assigned in other places fled and surrendered to the enemy, the rest joined Selfi Natsnet [Isaias' splinter group]." [\[ii\]](#)

The student population of Haile Sellasie university in the late sixties is open for research; and the possibility that at the university there were several hundred Eritrean Christian students who would all decide to join the ELF en masse in a short period of time, and who would all be killed in the same incident, begs for a serious explanation. In short, the perpetrators of the allegations, Isaias and his colleagues, and their satellites, haven't produced anything for over forty-years. Unfortunately, humble challenges by some Eritreans were not enough to expose the allegations as utter lies; and sadly, there are many who still believe the lies and act upon it.

Alleged Victims: 300; Names Produced: 2

There are many victims of the Eritrean struggle for independence, all liquidated, jailed and abused based on the norms of "revolutionary justice." Some of the victims of the political crisis are well known, others are not. For example: the combatants that the ELF labeled as Yemeen and liquidated in Dankalia [\[iii\]](#); the names of those whom the EPLF labeled Menka'a [\[iv\]](#) as well as those it labeled Yemeen and liquidated [\[v\]](#); others victims who were killed by the EPLF whose names pop up here and there; [\[vi\]](#) and the victims of the Haraka [\[vii\]](#) that the ELF liquidated at Ela Tsaaeda in 1965 [\[viii\]](#) are well known. But the casualties of 1977 who perished after the ELF attacked "Fallo!" a rebellion by a mish-mash of small groups which included the rebellious reform-minded youth; the insubordinate troublemakers; the anarchists; and those who were misguided and misdirected by their political idols whom they wanted to bring to power, are less known. Most of them had either surrendered to the EPLF or to the Ethiopian garrisons. Those who joined the EPLF were allegedly decimated in the battle of Massawa in 1977. Their oral stories are told in many versions, each looking at it from a different perspective, but the victims are relatively better known though no serious research has been conducted to explain the events properly.

In the entire *Nehnan Elamanan* manifesto, it is alleged that 300 Eritreans (Christian highlanders) were killed but only two names are ever, and repeatedly, produced: Kidane Kiflu and Welday Ghidey.

Four decades later, no other names have been produced:

(a) Alamin Mohammed Saeed, the semi-retired PFDJ Secretary, says:

“The Eritrean Liberation Front executed 250 individuals based on religion and regional affiliation. Kidane Kiflu and Weldai Ghidey were two of them.”

(b) Brig General Ghirmay Mehari confirms:

“the previous word of mouth account of how the two (Kidane Kiflu and Woldai Ghidey) were murdered in cold blood in Kassala.” [\[ix\]](#)

(c) Naizghi Kiflu [ex-Internal Security chief who died in London on the 6th of February, 2012] confirms:

“The split from the ELF had already started before the martyrdom of Kidane. Basically, Kidane was in Kassala with the understanding reached between him and Isaias Afwerki and Abraham Tewolde. Isaias and Abraham had already split with their respective comrades. Kidane Kiflu was in Kassala to coordinate the activities outside of the field. From Kassala, he used to correspond with me [Niazghi], Aboi Woldeab Woldemariam, Hiruy Tedla and others about the conditions and situations of the field.”

(d) Mesfin Hagos, in a recent interview (translated here to English) also mentions the two names:

“...at the Adobha Congress...a transitional leadership, what known as Qyada ALama, was established. There, two committees were formed 1) a preparatory committee for a congress and 2) a committee that would investigate [the cases] of those who say they were wronged by the ELF and the mistakes that were claimed to have been committed by [the ELF], a committee to investigate and scrutinize was formed. I worked as a member of the investigative committee. After the congress I went straight to Sudan—it was supposed to [investigate] if there were [people] who claim to have been wronged by the ELF. It didn't work out as wished. Those who were in the field and even their section that entered into the Sudan, maybe some who remained in the field might have worked, but those of us who came to the Sudan couldn't do anything. That is because the leadership of the time didn't want us to work, it didn't want us to meet with the people, it didn't want us to ask the people, and they didn't want the people to give us their views or tell us the wrongdoing that befell on them. Therefore, we were immediately pulled back and entered the field. This happened at the end of the seventies; similarly, when we entered the field at the end of 1969, we were scattered everywhere, I was told that I was appointed to the engineering department, but shortly...I went to the Sudan. There were some books in Sudan that I brought along with me from China, and that would help us in my appointed position {engineeringwhen I entered [Sudan] there was disharmony among the leadership, when

chaos ensued and we entered Sudan, those who were in Sudan, especially those who were closely cooperating with us, Welday Ghidey and Kidane Kiflu were killed by the ELF, and since there were [in Sudan] many who came from the field—those who came from Eritrean towns, also those who came from Sudan, there was no one to organize them, it was those two [Welday Ghidey and Kidane Kiflu] who were organizing them. There was also imprisonment and there was, and there were many escapee combatants [in Sudan]. [x]

A pre-condition to reconciliation is truth-telling. There are only two possibilities here: The ELF killed 300 Christian highlanders and nobody knows the name of the 298 Eritreans killed. This seems an untenable argument but could be possible: absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. There is another possibility and, indeed, a higher probability: the claim that 300 Eritrean Christian highlanders were killed was a fabrication, an invention to mobilize people by appealing to their baser instincts as well as a means to justify what was then considered an extreme measure: splitting.

In the Eritrea of 1971, which had a recent and bitter memory of how its internal division in the 1940 had led to its eventual federation with, and annexation by, Ethiopia, there were two taboos: (a) splitting the Eritrean resistance; (b) surrendering to the Ethiopian army. *Nehnan Elamanan* argued that in 1971 Eritrean combatants from the highlands had only two choices: to surrender to Ethiopia or to be butchered by the ELF. Therefore, it argued, since neither were its choice, it had to split and found a separate organization.

The only way that its justification to split the organization could be politically palatable was to argue that the ELF hadn't killed just a few or a dozen: it had to argue that the ELF had killed hundreds of Eritreans, and that all these hundreds of Eritreans who were killed were Christian highlanders. And this is precisely what the document strongly alleged.

We hope the detailed testimonies contained in Gebremedhin's report will serve as a background to the topic that we have addressed so far. Together with other sources, it sheds more light on what we believe is the most destructive document ever authored by an Eritrean. Using several sources, we have modestly challenged the '*Nehnan Elamanan*' lies that have been crippling our society for over forty years. In short, the divisive document authored by Isaias and his colleagues can probably be compared to Hitler's *Mein Kempf*. Both messages served as tool of agitation to rally the people for sinister motives and both messages succeeded in creating a megalomaniac.

[i] Nehnan Elamana

[ii] Gebremedhin Zegergis, *An Eye Witness In The History Of The Eritrean Revolution*

[iii] Yemeen combatants killed by ELF in Ibibi, Dankalia on 22 May 1978: 1) Saed Hussien 2) Omer M. Suba, 3) Ahmed Ibrahim 4) Omer M. Omer 5) Haji Saleh 6) Ibrahim Mahder 7) M. Mansur 8) M. Shedeli Ismail 9) Abdu Idris A., and 10) Adem Ibrahim Al Haj <http://www.ehrea.org/ExecutedDankalia.htm>, and an Arabic booklet called *Shuhada'a Al Teshis* (Martyrs of Reform)

[iv] Menkae killed named by Meharena Hadgu (from his video narration):

- 1) Mussie Tesfankiel (Tsina'a Degle)
- 2) Yohannes Sebhatu (Gura'e)
- 3) Russom pharmacist (?)
- 4) Afeworki Teklu (Atekelezan, Anseba)
- 5) Tareke Yehedego (Himbirti)
- 6) Habteselassie Gebremedhin (?)
- 7) Aberash (?)
- 8) Dehab Tesfatsion (Gura'e)
- 9) Tewelde Eyob, a member of the leadership (?)
- 10) Berhe Mesih (Possibly from Mendefera)
- 11) Gebreamlak Isak (Mai Cha'eda)
- 12) Michael wedi haketay (Himbirti)
- 13) Goitom Berhe, SerE (Akeleguzay)
- 14) Alem Abraha, (Akeleguzai)
- 15) Habte (?)
- 16) Aba Samuel (?)
- 17) Teklemariam Rashaida (Wedi Keshi Gebremeskel) (?)
- 18) Petros Kahsay, student from North America
- 19) Girmay Bahri, Asmara university student, (?)
- 20) Amare Tekumurach (Digsu)
- 21) Araya Semere, (?)
- 22) Abraha Seyoum, (Tsina'a Degle)
- 23) Haile Ameso, wedi ameso (Aala)
- 24) Estifanos (?)
- 25) Debessai Gebremichael, Mendefera

source for the above: (www.eritrios.com, the site has other related materials.)

[v] in 1976 Isaias Afwerki authored a booklet titled, "Destructive Movement" to prepare the ground for the purging of the "Yemeen" who were executed at Arrag in 1980:

- 1) Dr Eyob Ghebre-leul, educated in the USSR
- 2) Mehari Ghirma-Tsion
- 3) Ghebre-Michael Meharizghi, Addis Abeba university graduate
- 4) Hibret Tesfa-Ghaber
- 5) Kidane Abeito
- 6) Fissehaye Kidane (Germen)
- 7) Haile Jebha, former EPLF interrogation section chief
- 8) Araya Semere,
- 9) Ammanuel Filansa
- 10) Solomon Woldemariam.

(<http://www.ehrea.org/purgeeplf.php>)

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 - 7) Haile Jebha, former EPLF interrogation section chief
 - 8) Araya Semere,
 - 9) Ammanuel Filansa
 - 10) Solomon Woldemariam.
- (<http://www.ehrea.org/purgeplf.php>)

[vii] Eritrean Liberation Movement

[viii] Mohammed Saeed Naud, AlHaqiqa Weltarikh, self-published Arabic book. ELM combatants attacked and killed by the ELF at Ela Tsaada in 1965: 1) Mohammed Saleh 2) Mahya-El Din Ali 3) Ahmed Salih Ali 4) Idris Mahmoudi 5) Ali Mahmo

[ix] October 1, 2003, the PFDJ newspaper Haddas Eritrea had an interview with Brig. General Ghirmay Mehari, who confirms this.

[x] Mesfin Hagos in an interview with Radio Erina Dec. 1, 2011

Source: <http://awate.com/srryet-addis-blatant-lie/>

FROM THE MYSTERIES OF 'SIRIYET ADDIS'

By: **Woldeyesus Ammar**

The Eritrean armed struggle has its share of mysterious occurrences that to this day remain little told and little known to many of us. One of such perceived occurrences that continue to adversely affect mutual trust and reconciliation among many forces and segments in the society is the alleged killing by the ELF in the late 1960s of up to 150 Eritrean youth from Kebessa. The incident under review is commonly known as the case of '*Siriyet Addis*'. The key source of the allegation was *Nhnan Elamanan*. Subsequent publications by the same author(s) continually hammered to make a point and make many believe that such a grisly killing actually happened. Yet, no concrete proof has been presented to show that the allegedly horrendous criminal act indeed took place and for the reasons presented in *Nhnan Elamanan*.

I am one of those who know very little about this incident, and no wonder that I am motivated to write this piece after reading Ogbamichael Tesfatsion's informative article of 21 April 2004 on the subject of '*Siriyet Addis*' (see Meskerem and Nharnet webs of that date). Ogbamichael's article quotes the entire section about '*Siriyet Addis*' from a book by Ghebremedhin Zerizghi (published in 1997 under the title of '*An Eyewitness Account*') and posed important questions. I consider the quotation from the book about '*Siriyet Addis*' very important and I am translating it for those who may have difficulties in reading the Geez alphabet. But before doing that, I will give a brief explanation of some terms and events for the sake of those young compatriots who have no adequate background on this matter.

'*Siriya*' in Arabic meant a military unit of about 150 fighters in the Eritrean Liberation Army (ELA). It was known as *Haili* in Tigrinia and company in English.

Siriyet Addis did not officially exist in the ELA as a unit under that name. The name was coined in later years to refer to a group of Eritreans who were reportedly recruited (mainly consisting of youth coming from Addis and other parts of Ethiopia) and secretly kept with Solomon Woldemariam in Seled, the Tsena-Degle area of Akele-Guzai province in the late 1960s. When it became aware of the presence of a group of newly recruited fighters kept in Akele-Guzai, the General Command (*Kiyada-al-Ama*) that was elected at the ELA conference of August 1969 at Adobaha, started to inquire about the issue and wanted to regularize the deployment of the new recruits.

Below is my translation of the section from Ghebremedhin's book that Ogbamichael Tesfatsion quoted in his recent website article that appeared under the heading of "*Query to Ato*

Habtemariam Abraha". Ato Habtemariam, a veteran member of the liberation struggle who reportedly was a close friend of Solomon Woldemariam, alleged in his recent interview about the killing of "150 members of 'Siriyet Addis'. He and others who may know more about the incident are being asked to help uncover the mysteries, if any, of 'Siriyet Addis', and others because **knowing the whole truth is definitely part of the required package of tools in building mutual trust and initiating reconciliation among mistrustful forces and population sectors**. Ogbamichael Tesfatsion is asking pointed questions, and many Eritreans could agree with him. He is doubting the figure of "150" members in 'Siriyet Addis'. He is also questioning if the number of persons alleged to have been killed by Jebha because of their ethnic and confessional identity (Kebessan Christians). The manuscript of *Nhnan Elamanan* dated November 1971, claims as follows: 1) 'over 100 Christian fighters were killed by Jebha between 1966 and 1967'. 2) over 200 Christian fighters were killed between 1969 and 1970'. The document alleged that the aim was keep the Christian within Jebha as a minority. Similarly, the Tigrinia publication of 1975 entitled, "*Hafeshawi poletikawi tmhrti ntegadelti*" (p.47-48) alleged that soon after coming to power in August 1969, the General Command killed over 250 Christian tegadelti ('Siriyet Addis'?) by gathering them at military training camps. It also disarmed and sent to the Sudan 400 selected fighters. Now the translation...

TRANSLATION of a section about 'Siriyet Addis' from Ghebremedhin Zerizghi's book of 1997, 'An Eyewitness Account'.

"Soon after the Adobha conference was conducted [in August 1969]and redeployment (mitHinifats) of most of the fighters of the liberation army completed, the General Command (GC) [of the Eritrean Liberation Army] received news about the presence of new recruits that were kept at the area of Seled [Akele-Guzai province] and sent three consecutive messages to Solomon Woldemariam [who was with the group]. The letters called that the new recruits kept at Seled [without the knowledge of GC] be redeployed as per the resolution of the Adobaha conference and a decision of the GC. However, Solomon kept silent. After sometime, the GC sent fighters who arrested and brought Solomon [from Seled]. The new recruits were also brought and deployed on temporary basis in the environs of Keren, Halhal, Asmat, and parts of Maria Tselam. Sereke Bahta was appointed as leader of the new recruits/trainees; other fighters with military background were also assigned to train them. Sereke Bahta is still a devoted member of the organization [ELF-RC]. After completing their military training, members of 'Siriyet Addis' were asked by the GC to gather at Mai-Chewa in the region of Hagaz and Aderde in order to undergo redeployment (mitHinifats). All GC members arrived at Mai-Chewa at appointed time and observed the military drills staged by 'Siriyet Addis'. The military drills were highly appreciated by the GC who also told the new recruits as follows: 'We are here today to inform you about your future assignments within the army. Each existing ELA company(i.e. siriya/Haili) will receive six new fighters [of 'Siriyet Addis'], and that will mean each ELA

platoon receiving two fighters'. However, the new recruits of 'Siriyet Addis' perceived that this plan was a trick designed to disperse them, and they refused to obey saying: 'We have been trained well; now give us weapons and **deploy us as one company** to any region'. The next day, a meeting between GC and the trainees continued [for ten hours] between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. It was becoming clear that the new recruits were not the source of the circuitous arguments. Issayas Afeworki was present at Mai-Chewa, and what was going on was an open secret. Also present as 'innocent' by-standers were Tewolde Eyob, Maasho Kibrom, Asmerom Gherezghiher and Zemichael. Members of 'Siriyet Addis' were constantly interrupting the meeting with excuses of passing water ('nshinti'/going for toilet) and were consulting with those persons. Whispers and undercover consultations were rampant at Mai-Chewa. In the end, the GC started to be suspicious. At the same time, the new recruits of 'Siriyet Addis' and their mentors discovered that the GC was apprehensive and aware of what was going on. Therefore members of the group ('Siriyet Addis') were advised [by their mentors] to accept the planned GC redeployment plan and go to all corners of Eritrea. Within a month, the Eritrean field experienced waves of letters exchanged between members of 'Siriyet Addis'. It was difficult to decipher the messages they were exchanging. Some were written in codes that included numbers and others in an alphabet having the appearance of Russian characters. However, a few messages written in Tigrinia were apprehended thus exposing hidden intentions; the letter-writers in general encouraged each other to 'carry on the plan as agreed'.

"When these messages were discovered, the GC had started to restudy the significance of an intelligence network uncovered earlier within the Tripartite Union. With the aim of finding a better solution in order to avert a serious danger to the revolution, the GC decided to bring all members of the so-called 'Siriyet Addis' to one location. The first to be brought were 17 members of the group who were deployed in the Barka region. Until the arrival of their colleagues, the 17 new recruits were taken to Debir Sala (Mount Sala) and guarded by a 12-person security unit. The overall plan [of 'Siriyet Addis'] was revealed when they started to implement it – that is, by attempting to seize weapons from their guards, kill whoever can be killed and then escape to Agordat [to take refuge with the enemy].

"[The 17 'Siriyet Addis' members taken to Debir Sala] planned as follows: one of their members was to ask for permission to pass water and then seize a weapon. Another member was assigned to crush with heavy rock and kill on his sleep the leader of the security unit. Two of the group was to attack and overpower the two guards with automatic Bren-guns. At the start of their operation, the [plotters] crushed to death the head of the guards. One of the guards had his Bren gun tightly tied around his body, and he managed to kill his attacker. In this way, only one of the 'Siriyet Addis' attackers was killed. The remaining 16 fled to safety and entered Agordat. Following this incident, news of the disloyalty was talked all over the field.[Following that

incident], many members of 'Siriyet Addis' deployed in several other places either escaped and gave up themselves to the enemy or joined Selfi Natsinet." End of translation.

P.S.

While reading the Tigrinia version of this quotation in Ogbamichael Tesfatsion's article of 21 April 2004, I remembered Mohammed Ahmed Abdu. Also at the same time, I could not resist imagining of Isayas and group at Mai-Chewa talking to members of 'Siriyet Addis' with the aim of promoting a wrong line - that of "ethnic purity". The note below may shed some light on why this so called 'Siriyet Addis' was wanted to stay as a separate group.

Mohammed Ahmed Abdu was prominent leader in the liberation struggle who died in Khartoum only a year ago on 14 April 2003. Between 1965 and 1969, the ELA was organized into divisions (kiflitat/manatiQ) that were created with the aim of mobilizing the population to join the liberation army through appeals to primordial affinities and regional ties. However, the regional commands were in principle expected to obtain at least one third of their fighters from outside their respective regions. (By the way, This phenomenon of regional commands or divisions (kiflitat/manatiQ), which was known for its less positive legacies in the armed struggle is, ironically, being revisited nowadays by certain elements and sections in the Eritrean opposition.)

Martyr Mohammed Ahmed Abdu headed the Tripartite Union (wuHda Sulasiya) that was formed before Adobaha. That short-lived partial union consisted of the 3rd, 4th and 5th military commands (manatiQ/kiflitat) of the ELA. Martyr M. A. Abdu was later elected as the Secretary General of the 38-member General Command (Kiyada-al-Ama) that emerged from the military conference of Adobaha of August 1969.

While the one-year war (1980-81) between the ELF and the EPLF/TPLF alliance was raging in Eritrea, I had a chat with Mohammed Ahmed Abdu in Beirut with the intention of writing in The Eritrean Newsletter an article about the adventurous past politics of Isayas Afeworki. The article was published although it omitted one important point on the request of the interviewee. It will say it now, though with regrets because the heroic fighter-leader, who is my source, is no more around to confirm it. The point was this:

Only a few weeks before the convening of the military conference at Adobha, Isayas Afeworki approached and seriously asked Mohammed Ahmed Abdu to agree with him and allow him to establish and lead a military division composed purely of Christians from the Eritrean highlands. Isayas opined that the 5th division to which he belonged would be more effective if it is let to be "a pure Christian and Kebessan force". Mohammed Ahmed Abdu did not agree, and literally begged Isayas not to pursue that idea. Mohammed Ahmed Abdu reminded Isayas that even the ill-conceived division of ELA into regional commands required at least one third of fighters to be from outside each regional command.

History has attested that Isayas Afeworki, a born loner, was not able to heed to that important advice from his senior commander, Mohammed Ahmed Abdu. Isayas carries on that absolutely negative trait to this day.

Regards

W. Ammar

Source: <http://www.ehrea.org/syria.htm>

NHMAN ELAMANAN WAS INDEED AN INFLUENTIAL MESSAGE

By: **Woldeyesus Ammar**

Feb 2, 2004, 10:32 PST

A few writers in recent months have come up to tell Website readers that '*Nhnan Elamanan*', a document authored in the early 1970s purportedly by one person, Isayas Afeworki, was not that influential. I disagree.

Aklilu Zere, is one of the promising new crops of writers that will hopefully continue enlightening readers on more important past events that occurred around the current Eritrean dictator. [Aklilu's Awate.com article of 23 December 2003 - 'The Birth of Despotism'](#) - was quite informative. His 25 January 2004 article, 'The Poison Manifesto...', also contained two interesting observations: the first about *Nhnan Elamanan* and the second about a big loss that Eritrea suffered due to the defeat of the ELF in the struggle. I agree on the latter observation but have problems with his assertions about *Nhnan Elamanan*. I will attempt to make short comments on his views about the document and then attach a material on the same subject written three years ago.

Aklilu states that it was wrong to consider *Nhnan Elamanan* as a poisonous manifesto in the sense that many people have come to understand it. He writes:

"The document was not distributed widely as the intention was. Thus its existence was a matter of passing through word-of-mouth, which greatly affected its influence and result expected by the author...the majority of Eritreans never read it or were never influenced by it... For me, Nhnan Elamanan was a document that fathoms the psychological mindset [...] of the author. Nothing more. Nothing less".

I insist this is not correct. In the outset, it must be clear that we are not talking about "the majority of Eritreans" or the majority of Eritrean highlanders, whom the document wanted to address and appeal to. We are talking about a segment of our people who came across the message and then got infected by it. For sure, the channels of communication and dissemination of information was not as good as we have it today. But the hand-written and typed versions of *Nhnan Elamanan* were copied and recopied in many forms and in many places in the neighboring countries, in Europe and the USA. I and many others read it in Addis Ababa probably a few months after it was put to circulation, and I remember the good old friends I lost because of it. I still possess a copy of that document put under covers and produced in Italy in November 1971 by Eritreans in Europe. Therefore, there cannot be much argument about the fact that the document was made to reach as many Eritreans as possible in the early and mid-1970s.

Secondly, one did not need to read the whole text to get the venomous message the author intended to convey. As Aklilu also noted, it was very easy to pass the contents of *Nhnan Elamanan* "through word-of-mouth". Nor can one say in absolute terms that a message conveyed through word-of-mouth is less effective than one passed in the form of a written document.

Thirdly, the key message contained in *Nhnan Elamanan* was being disseminated by its author long before the text appeared in a written form. This was done through personal letters addressed to selected friends. One such letter was sent to some of my ELF cell members two years before *Nhnan Elamanan* was written down. I was not supposed to see that letter but a friend [now in GoE's foreign ministry] volunteered to read it for me. Again, the main contents of that letter matched what had later appeared in *Nhnan Elamanan*. The author of both was the same person.

I find myself compelled to write these paragraphs because of the conviction that the message Isayas Afeworki conveyed through *Nhnan Elamanan* and other means has been of negative effect in modern Eritrean politics. The point of raising the issue is, for sure, not to stoke up fire by revisiting old wounds but to accept our past and present mistakes as they were/are and to try to correct them with full knowledge and understanding of what has gone wrong and how. In other words, no Eritrean should have interest in revising or distorting our history. We should not do that. *Nhnan Elamanan* must be understood as negative influence that it was.

While at it, I wish to mention in passing Nebarai Keshi's long article of 11 October 2003 in Eri24.com, which I read only recently. In it, the writer (no great fan of DIA) questions my earlier description of Isayas Afeworki as "top polarizer" in Eritrean politics, and advises readers not to continue to "wrongly view [Nhnan Elamanan] as a leading vision upon which Hizbawi Hailitat was established as a splinter group". It is true that there were different reasons for the formation of the three splinter groups that later made up the PLF (Hizbawi Hailitat). However, the outlook expressed in *Nhnan Elamanan* remained to be the guideline and vision upon which Isayas Afeworki relied in creating an organization in that image, and then continue attempting to impose that vision on the new state born out of our people's 50-year struggle and sacrifices.

On the other hand, I read a number of laughable writings during the past few months referring to ELF-RC cadres, including myself, and calling us follow-goers of *Nhnan Elamanan*. This is another version of factual and historical distortion which serves no purpose. But one should not complain much because there were others who fully understood the truth. One of these was an anonymous observer in Shimagle.com who wrote the following kind words about me. (At the risk of looking less modest, I quote the following writing as a way of expressing my appreciation for the writer's kind words about me and his correct and strong reprimand to willful twisters. The nameless Shimagle.com observer wrote: "*The most reconciliatory documents in the cyberspace were written by Brother Menhot Woldemariam (Woldeyesus Ammar). His analysis of the most dangerous and divisive "Nihnan Eilamanan" document was the most important piece of documents written in Eritrean cyberspace and it was an eye opener to Eritrean people in general*

and to many decent Eritrean Christians in particular... Had those documents [been] written by any Eritrean Muslim, they would have created endless accusations and counter accusations between Eritrean Christians and Eritrean Muslims and would have pushed us further away from [reconciliation](#); fortunately they came from a very courageous Eritrean Christian who learned [...] how to say "Ageb/Nawri" to his brothers and sisters, and it takes a courageous and civilised man to do that. I would like to thank him from the bottom of my heart for that. I am very disappointed to read [...] that some Eritrean Muslims who disagreed with him and his friends have started to throw him into the dirty basket with the real bigots in the DIA camp i.e. call him "[Christian Sectarian / Chauvinist](#)". ... it is very sad and it accomplishes nothing but gives new life to the real bigots in the DIA camp. Again, why burn the bridge all the way to the ground? Calling the bigots what they are has its merit, but lumping decent and respectful Eritrean Christians like Brother Woldeyesus Ammar or the whole ethnic/religion group of those who display bigotry as bigots is outrageously indefensible act." Thanks Brother Writer of this corrective advice.

As promised in the introductory parts of this article, here below are two articles I wrote on the subject *Nhnan Elamanan* in November 2000. They are being reproduced for the sake of interested readers who should know what the message of Isayas and his *Nhnan Elamanan* has been throughout the past.

Reconciliation and National Unity

Vital Terms In Eritrean Politics

Part V

November 19, 2000

From the Satanic Utterances of Isayas

Part five and six of this writings are not going to be about a positive development in reconciliation and national unity. It is about a reverse process that had undone all what was, gradually but surely, building up from the days of Shiekh Ibrahim and Aboy Woldeab till early 1970s.

An average Eritrean nationalist fully appreciates the fact that, in spite of the presence of frightening factors for possible conflict, thanks to a 'reserve' wisdom of the people, Eritrea had not in its entire known history experienced religious or ethnic wars of any magnitude that could disrupt social relations in the variegated society. *Tocca ferro*, never.

And let me first address the older generation - that dwindling minority of 40+ years, which, I am told, is now less than 20% of the total population of Eritrea. Old Generation: have you ever witnessed religious or tribal war-fares in Eritrea? Do you believe there ever occurred genocide or ethnic cleansing in Eritrea? Did we have our share of mass massacres similar to those witnessed in recent years in Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Liberia? I expect many Eritreans, without sinister political motives, to respond in the negative because we did not have religious wars and massacres in our life-time.

It is true that geographical differences, two major religions, and languages can be considered as factors exploitable by political actors. These same elements were in fact exploited in the past (positively and negatively relative to the Eritrean cause). In the old days, Eritrean politicians who believed in and advocated for unity with Ethiopia used religion without themselves becoming religious "fanatics". Also by his own admission, Ibrahim Sultan had to name his party after Islam ("Al RabiTa al Islamia"), not because of his religious belief but because he and his group of militants found it the only easy and feasible way of rallying the majority of the Eritrean Moslems for independence. Al RabiTa al Islamia was not a party of religious fanatics, as detractors at times insinuated. To my knowledge, Eritrean Moslems had never been fanatics, and in general, never deserved that epithet. One should be mistaken to think that it was the "long hand of the

EPLF", the "invincibility" of its army/security apparatus that repressed the growth of an opposition army in Eritrea, Jihadist or otherwise, at least since 1991. It was the restraint, the care for national interest shown by the people and their political organizations that has so far averted internal catastrophe. In recent years, when political Islam mobilized masses for fundamentalist wars elsewhere, Eritrean Moslems continued to give deaf ears to any call for Jihad, a stillborn movement in our country, whose nominal existence was aided and abetted by the actions and omissions of the regime in Asmara. To stress, we never came near to religious strife save the infinitesimal incidents of 1949-50, which were the making of foreign powers, Ethiopia included.

Yet, there have been satanic writings and teachings by Eritreans repeatedly used to make believe that we had ugly mass murders, genocides and ethnic cleansing of worst degrees in contemporary history. Keep reading.

"If I were not aware of our own situation, I would have described the grisly mass murders in Somalia, Rwanda, former Yugoslavia and Liberia as barbaric crimes perpetrated by backward peoples. I would have said 'we are different, we are not like them'. But what we had gone through in Eritrea was not different from what is going on in other countries. We in Eritrea suffered mass murders, one ethnic and geographic group cleansing the other in a cowardly and inordinate manner. We have now come a long way from that past, and the present and future generations [in Eritrea] who had not seen what we did would be surprised of what is going on in Somalia, Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Liberia. The surprise comes because they did not know what had happened in our country. Seen from this angle, it would appear that the present and future generations would benefit from knowing about it. But unless done in a constructive way, making the new generation aware of a black spot in its history is a bit difficult".

If you had forgotten or if you are not aware of who said this and when, you better be reminded. The words were uttered by the Eritrean president, Isayas Afeworki, 'proudly' speaking to issue volume 1, number 1 of *Reporter*, an Amharic language magazine in Addis Ababa published in September 1997. The message was very clear - as clear as a similar poisonous message he passed three decades earlier. The addressee this time round was the new generation of Eritreans. Isayas has said all what he wanted to say in the interview, and it is not true that he had reluctance in telling this old tale to the new generation. Z'aKlen TiHinen ba'Elemariam yibla.

If I were born in the 1970s and had never known the Eritrean reality of that period to its full depth; if I had never known Isayas, with his worrisome mind-set reflected from early days; his impulsive character capped up by deceptive shyness; and his derogatory language full of religious slurs, I would have fallen a helpless victim to his charisma and confidently stated assertions, accepted by many as the truth, notwithstanding their being absolute distortions of the reality. I would have stood as one of his staunch supporters, right or wrong. I would have refused to accept any criticism to his sincerity in building a 'healthy' Eritrea for all Eritreans. I would have described as 'disgruntled garbage' to whoever failed to join me in praising this man, who, I

would have believed, liberated Eritrea single-handedly. I would have sworn that there wouldn't have been an independent Eritrea if Isayas were not born. I would have believed that there is no nation as 'united as Eritrea is' - *Hade lbi, Hade hzbi*'. I would have believed that.....etc

But no, I was not born after 1970. No, I was not in any way infected by his line of thinking, his virus of "we". No, I knew more. I also assume many members of the age-group of 40+ year-olds do know that we had no religious wars. No genocidal campaigns of one ethnic or tribal group against another. No grisly massacres by "religious fanatics" with the aim of cleansing other ethnic and tribal groups. Yet, the Eritrean president affirmed as recently as three years ago that we had the type of internal conflicts he repeated in the Reporter as a cover-up of his shameful writings of 30 years ago and related utterances which were used in duping a good segment of our society. But, Eritrea could have fared much better without that type of wrong orientation and indoctrination to a good segment of the population, which is naturally endowed, and accepted, to play weighty role in helping decide the fate of the whole.

Nhnan Elamanan

Nhnan Elamanan ('We and Our Objectives') was authored sometime in 1970 by Isayas Afeworki and a small group of followers, usually reported to had been less than 13 persons (you are amused?). The document was addressed to Eritrean highlanders, precisely to Christians. The message obtained wider circulation when reprinted in November 1971 by Eritreans residing in Europe. What did the hand-written 24-page document say? It opened by stating as follows:

"We standing in front of you to speak [the truth] are the Eritrean fighters who split from the administration of 'Kiyad al Ama' (General Command of the ELF) in March 1969. It is true that all of us or most of us are Christians by birth, by culture and by history. Those who hear about our separate existence from afar may say that we are religious [elements]".

Before engaging on rationalizing the schism, the document presented a lengthy background on the people and their country, with some errors and early attempts on revising Eritrean history, like: "the majority of Christians opted 'Andnet' with Ethiopia while the majority of the Moslems stood for 'Andnet' with the Sudan".

In narrating the weaknesses of the Eritrean revolution during its first 10 years, the document repeated what was being said by the rank and file in the front at that time. Like the language of the underground Fighters' Committee of the ELA and the Reform Movement, among whose key members included Ibrahim Mohammed Ali (the current ELF-RC chairman) and Ibrahim Toteel, *Nhnan Elamanan* rightly criticized the lack of well-studied program for the launching of the armed struggle. The fighters' movement inside Eritrea and the sister reformist group in the Sudan were harassed by the leadership which did not identify its enemies to be "Christians" only. But the message of *Nhnan Elamanan* denied the reality, betrayed the democratic soldiers' movement

and the civilian reform movement of the day and failed to stand with them to change a generally bad situation.

At that time, the group led by Isayas saw a potential fanatic in every non-Christian Eritrean. On page 10 of the "European" manuscript, *Nhnan Elamanan* says: "Those leaders who started this [revolution] were ashamed to call themselves nationalists and instead chose Islamic propaganda as their weapon, both inside and outside the country". The document concluded that almost all the Jebha fighters were Moslems because Christians could not join the struggle for geographical reasons, and that what was going on in Eritrea was a "Jihad fi sabil Allah".

The charges and wild exaggerations in *Nhnan Elamanan*, which were re-echoed and promoted to the level of genocides, mass murders and ethnic cleansing campaigns in Isayas Afeworki's interview of September 1997, include the one's listed here. (As ugly as it is, the message divided Eritrea to two: The Moslem Eritrea and the Christian Eritrea. By doing so, it sent a message worse than the actions and 'crimes' it wanted to portray.) Look at the following presentation in *Nhnan Elamanan*:

Those who founded Jebha (i.e.ELF) and still leading it are religious fanatics working for Jihad, and determined to harm the Christian population. They identify themselves as Arabs.

Jebha misinformed the Arabs, claiming that the Eritrean Moslems, constituting 80% of the population, are oppressed by the Christian regime of Haile Selassie and preached that the Christians in Eritrea were enemies of the Moslem Eritreans.

Jebha intends to impose Arabic as the sole official language in Eritrea. Tigrigna and other languages are suppressed by Jebha. "The fanatics of Jebha suffer headaches when they hear someone speaking Tigrigna".

Four army units were formed to strengthen the tribal dictatorship in Jebha. The fifth army unit established for Christians was led by traitors serving the interests of the Jebha leaders.

The Jebha 'Rases/Princes' mobilized the army units to steal property and livestock of the Christian people. Well over 10,000 head of cattle from Christian peasants were pilfered and sold in the Sudan. Jebha fighters became robbers, moving livestock from Eritrea to the Sudan.

Villages of civilian Christians were put to fire by Jebha.

Every Christian is described as "Kafir". Jebha killed in a brutal manner over 50 innocent Christian farmers at Sember in the western lowlands.

The Jebha "Rases/Princes" became rich merchants, bought villas and vehicles in Sudanese cities, and married and remarried up to two and three wives.

The Christians in Jebha showed concern about what was going on in the front, not the others.

The leadership of Jebha issued the order that " all Christians in the field be killed". Over 100 Christian fighters were killed in 1967.

Kidane (alias Kebede) Kiflu and Woldai Ghidey were murdered in a brutal manner in Kassala, and following this incident, over 200 Christians were slaughtered inside the field.

On top of a standing order to "kill Christian farmers", Jebha created armed militias to bomb and burn Christian villages and loot their property, including women's jewelry.

The narration tried to justify the group's conclusion that Christians in Jebha (or rather, Christian highlanders) had no way of continuing the struggle within the same front, and therefore decided to form a separate organization.

It is true that every point in the above litany of alleged crimes has its own history, its own explanations/manipulations and it may take volumes to tell each story in its correct perspective to be fair to the reality that took place. However, what is important is that this type of 'politicking', which continued to post-independence Eritrea, has been very dangerous to the much-wanted harmonious co-existence of the various linguistic and religious groups in Eritrea. The above noted language was put into mobilization use by the front that Isayas created through the years. As a result, the society has been polarized.

We all know that the Eritrean struggle was not at its best in the late 1960s. The field was divided into military commands based on the Algerian model of organization (and unfortunately for Eritrea, there were no other world liberation movements worth emulation until the early 1970s). The system in general was put to scrutiny by democratic forces, starting from the ranks of the fighters. It is not true that there was an all out murder of Christians in the field. But the blown up tales told in Nhnan Elamanan sent a bad message everywhere. Nhnan Elamanan thus reversed the reconciliation and unity process that was gradually healing the scars left from the Andnet/RabiTa battles of the old days. Deepening the rift continued when the organization that grew out of this dangerous orientation took it as its mission to impose itself on the body politic of Eritrea at the highest price to the unity of the very people who are supposed to live together and build a viable state.

Therefore, whatever attributes you give to your charismatic leader, Isayas Afeworki, please also calculate the price we had to pay, are paying, and may still continue paying as a people.

Part six of this series will try to explain the fact and fiction in the list of "Jihadist crimes" recorded in Nhnan Elamanan, the efforts exerted at that time to mend cracks on the edifice of unity of the Eritrean people, and indicate a possible way-out from the ongoing division and polarization in the Eritrean society.

Part VI

November 27, 2000

More on Nhnan Elamanan

This is a follow up of the essay started under part five. It will make a sweeping review of the situation in the field preceding the publication of Nhnan Elamanan; try to cast some light on the overstated and allegedly 'planned crimes' listed in the document, and, more importantly, highlight a few of the genuine efforts exerted to stop separatism in a fragile society. Also as a concluding remark or two, it will be appropriate to state how a successful rebuilding of reconciliation and national unity can be started in order to ensure our survival as one entity. I will have two points to make, and I will not keep you waiting till the last paragraph to know one of them, which is: Isayas, Go!!

But before delving into the complex historical issues, let us have a quick look at post-independence Eritrea with its provisional government declared on 29 May 1991.

- Eritreans are the living witnesses of the all-round awkward and painful commencement, which has not yet ended.
- In spite of the esteem, awe and respect proffered to the new rulers, the people were denied respect in reciprocity, and an existing bad civil administration had plummeted to nil.
- One can cite the economic fiasco requiring every Eritrean to "develop" his own ancestral locality.
- Crisis management (read: mismanagement) led to shocking decrees and measures like the massacre at Mai Habar against harmless handicapped veterans of the liberation war.

- What was stated at the football stadium on 20 June 1991 by the head of the new state, rendering all political forces 'illegal', was an outrageous declaration of war on the people's aspiration for reconciliation, national unity, democracy and prosperity.

- Peace was among the first victims. War was declared against 'internal enemies' and in no time extended to the entire neighborhood.

- No need to mention the word diplomacy, which did not exist. (The list is endless and the reader will confirm that by attempting to make his/her own complete list).

Some members of the GoE and its apologists have started conceding those mistakes, although they plead fairness in judgement arguing about the regime's newness to the business of statecraft.

Now think about those young student leaders of 40 years ago who plunged into the untested waters of liberation struggle, with little backing and virtual dearth of funding from any quarter. They had no support or feedback from an intellectual reserve, like the one that can be availed today. They were among the first generation of 'intellectuals' themselves, and pioneers in everything. With all fairness, therefore, one cannot expect a smooth growth of an 'exemplary' liberation movement in the hands of those young men and a small army in the field, mostly composed of illiterate peasants and semi-literate former soldiers of peasant/pastoral origin. That was what we had. The unfairness was calling that genuine start for national liberation by other names.

Allegations in Nhnan Elamanan

One cannot provide full answers to all questions raised regarding the events mentioned in the interview of the Eritrean president in 1997 and in Nhnan Elamanan, the source of his power and inspiration of his politics. Full answers must eventually come from the entire people concerned through a suitable process. But the urgency for action to salvage our severely affected cohesion as a nation would deem it necessary to review now parts of the story told and retold by Isayas Afeworki, the Eritrean head of state.

I will categorize the allegations into four and try to provide a general picture of the major incidents raised in the interview and the old document, namely: 1) the ELF leaders were propagating Islamic holy war (Jihad) and pulling Eritrea into an Arab identify (NB: ELF was mentioned in its Arabic rendition, 'Jebha', for a purpose, as was the case for 'Kiyada al Ama');

2) Division of the army into five zones was contrived to satisfy the interests of the "tribal" leaders of Jebha; 3) The leaders of Jebha were inimical to Christians and passed an "order" to kill them all; 4) The non-Christians did not care of what was going on; thus, the Christians had no choice other than forming "their own" organization.

Jihad/Arabism

There should not be any disagreement on the fact that those who founded the struggle always dreamt of unifying and stirring the entire nation to join the revolution, and believed that the struggle won't succeed if any important segment of the population remained outside the orbit of the struggle. The founders of the ELF, like those of the ELM, saw unity as the only way to victory. Therefore, any claim to the contrary is a fabricated lie. That is why Nhnan Elamanan was a lie also in this regard. The document under review was talking about Jihad which did not exist except in the perception of the author(s). There is a writing confirming that Isayas Afeworki strongly talked about his fears of 'Jihad in Jebha' way back in April 1966, and long before he joined the fighters in the field. This should assist one's understanding of the preconceived perceptions of the author of Nhnan Elamanan.

As to Arabism, I remember reading Osman Saleh Sabbe's early writings which tried to show the closeness of Eritrean languages and history to the Arabian Peninsula. We understand that, at that time, there was no conviction or aim of creating an Arab Eritrea per se, although "diplomacy" and the absolute isolation of the Eritrean struggle could at times have had forced Sabbe and his colleagues of the day to note appreciation to their hosts talking of "brother Moslems and Arabs from Eritrea". The first Eritreans who claimed they were Arabs appeared with the birth of Adem Saleh's Obelites (the latter-day PLF-III, the allies of PLF-II) who charged the ELF of being anti-Islam and anti-Arab identity. They talked of 'venomous infiltration' of non-believers into the front. (Anyway, this issue may no longer remain controversial in light of the continued attempts for rapprochement with the Arab region by the old authors of Nhnan Elamanan.)

Five Zonal Commands

The division of the ELA into zonal commands was severely criticized in Nhnan Elamanan as well as in post-Adobaha (1969) writings of the ELF itself. But what the early Jebha leadership did in 1965 can be easily equated to what the GoE did in 1991 by calling on Eritreans to care only about their ancestral localities. No?

As noted in the previous essay, the year 1960 is generally considered as the period when the third world liberation movement started. The organizers of the ELF thus lacked helpful past experiences. The only available example was Algeria. When the ELA did not grow as expected during 1961-64, a young law graduate, Idris Osman Gelaidos, proposed at the Khartoum Congress in 1965 that the front should establish zonal armies, like the 'wilaya' divisions of the Algerian liberation army. They thought appeal to regional identities would assist a quick mobilization of human and material resources. Each regional command was to recruit only one third of its fighters from the region. The remaining two thirds were to come from outside that region, through the help of a central recruitment and training service. In balance, the experience proved harmful but the claim that it was based on evil intention to serve the interests of Jebha

"Rases/Princes" was a distortion of the reality that existed. One should leave it for history to judge.

Religious Wars/Ethnic Cleansing?

Until proven wrong, I am of the conviction that there were no religious wars in Eritrean history, and that no Jebha leaders were engaged in "ethnic cleansing" at any epoch during the years of our struggle. The distortions in Nhnan Elamanan of unfortunate events of the time were harmful to our unity. The incidents of 1967, and 1969-1970 had background totally different from what people had been informed and taught through Nhnan Elamanan and other versions of the same message in the form of political 'guides' like Poletikawi temihrti ni tegadelti of 1975 and Isayas' interview of 1997. The following paragraphs may help explain the sensitive issues presented by Isayas in a manner with lasting damage: (read the ugly material by supplanting the wisdom of: 'kab behali'us degami'u' with an equally convincing adage, 'Quslu zHabi'E fewsu yHabi'E'.)

a) 50 peasants killed at Sember in 1967 because they were Christians?

It is true that armed peasants were killed by gunmen at Sember - a locality not far from Badme and the graves of our new 50,000 martyrs. But the explanation presented in Nhnan Elamanan was not true. 1967 was a year of major crisis in Eritrea when Ethiopia intensified its scorched-earth policy to wide out the revolution. It was a year the Ethiopian army and the Israeli-trained Commandos devastated the countryside. Ethiopia also thought it was taking advantage of the Arab defeat in the six-day war of 1967. The first wave of Eritrean refugees crossed the border to the Sudan. In their places were settled armed peasants from other parts of the country. Sember was one. The circumstances are still to be verified, but can any action taken against armed settlers, say, by young survivors of the Ethiopian mass killings and evictions in places like Ad Abrihim and Sember be seen as genocidal "massacres of Christians by the Jihadist leaders of Jebha", as Nhnan Elamanan put it?

A clear example of what was going in 1967-68 was summarized in a statement by ELM dated 17 March 1968. Entitled "Return to the old game", the ELM accused Ethiopia of trying to incite civil war in Eritrea. The statement cited an incident which left 36 houses burned in a village near Senafe and that the Ethiopian government made people talk as if the incident was the work of "Christians". The statement, reprinted in Nawd's 1996 book, said that an investigation conducted by ELM members at that time concluded the incident to have had been planned and executed by agents of the Ethiopian government. The plan was not limited to the environs of Senafe. But the unfortunate thing was that Nhnan Elamanan had echoed exactly what the Ethiopians wanted in Eritrea.

b) Over 100 Christian fighters killed in 1967:

A number of ELF fighters were killed in one or two units of the liberation army during the crisis year of 1967. We will not know the final truth until we rigorously investigate the past, but the numbers will never tally with those wild claims in the said document. There are in fact strong arguments against the sectarian tone of the allegations in Nhnan Elamanan. Hishal Osman of Bogu, near Keren, was one of the "demons" in the claimed "genocides" and "ethnic cleansing" in Eritrea. Hishal grew frequenting both churches and mosques in an environment where religion was not a factor of identity, and he would be the last to be considered "a fanatic" Moslem. Hishal was asked in the late 1980s if he (Hishal) did indeed kill Christian fighters in 1967. His answer was: "Christians? no, but people who were taking our guns back to Ethiopia, yes. I did not care what religion they belonged to. They were Christians and Moslems. But I was shooting at whoever attacked our night guards and ran towards the enemy taking away our hard earned guns. I cannot regret having done it. It was *wajib watani*." Hishal Osman passed away this year and was buried in Kassala alongside Ibrahim Sultan, Sabbe, Said Saleh, Woldedawit Temesghen and others.

During the late 1960s, the Ghibi of the Emperor's representative in Eritrea housed a well-funded security apparatus which was said to have had recruited many jobless youth from highland Eritrea, mostly Christians, and sent them to the ELF. Their mission was to stay in the field for a number of months, and return to Asmara with at least a gun and lots of anti-revolution propaganda. The reward for a gun from ELF and radio/press interviews about the "Jihad" of the "Moslem Jebha" was a relatively good monthly salary for indefinite period. An Ethiopian friend who worked in that Ghibi is still alive and confirms that he closely knew young Eritreans who were rewarded with such payments after "desertion" from Jebha. In short, although the damage to the unity of our struggle and nation had been done, the irresponsible allegations of religious/ethnic killings reported in Nhnan Elamanan continue to cry for investigation and exposure.

c) The events of 1969-70:

The death of Kidane (alias Kebede) Kiflu and Woldai Ghidey in 1970 in the hands of lousy kidnappers in Kassala was a very tragic incident. It was true that the struggle was still bedeviled by crisis. Those who opposed schism considered anyone who wanted to form his own organization as a traitor, anti-unity and counter-revolutionary, irrespective of religion and village of origin. Kidane Kiflu and Wolday Ghidey were victims of that struggle. Other fighters were also victims of the same conflict. But we will not know the whole truth until the period is studied anew and until the authors of that document show the "mass graves" of those victims of a perceived "ethnic cleansing", as was rightly demanded in an editorial of Democrasiawit Eritra, issue No. 27 (an organ of the ELF-RC). But one can stress that the alleged figures on victims, which at times went ten-fold, should not be accepted even before investigations are made.

Anyway, the death of Kidane Kiflu and others was as shameful and as shocking as the death of Said Saleh in 1983 in the hands of trained EPLF killers who crushed his skull with iron bars in the centre of Kassala. It was as uncalled for as the bestial assassinations in the 1980s of Woldedawit Temeghen, Idris Hangela, Mohamoud Hassab, Haile Garza and many others. All the killings, old and new, were irrational. But more damaging than the brutal killings in both periods was the manipulation of the tragic incidents to promote narrow political ends which do not serve the people.

d) The others did not care?

Nhnan Elamanan was wrong to bluntly state that only Christians were concerned about what was happening in the field in those difficult years. This was unexplainable denial of the efforts and contributions of other fellow strugglers. Ignored by the infamous sectarian document were the genuine struggles put by the Reform Movement ('eslaH') and the Soldiers' Committee (Lejnet a'jnud), some of whose activists, from all faiths, are still alive although some were buried in unmarked graves in Hafera.

The concern and the care of the "others" for the unity of the fighting forces and the society continued, as affirmed at the Awate Conference of March 1970, which established a preparatory committee independent of the leadership so that trust could be cultivated among fighters. For a long time, the committee ran after Isayas and his group to beg them to stop sectarian politics. They wanted them to understand that the mistakes of the preceding period were unavoidable outcome of a struggle between old and new forces, and the new force belonged to all regions and religions in the country. In June 1970, the preparatory committee (chaired by Ibrahim Ghedem, with membership of Ahmed Nasser and others) met the future author of Nhnan Elamanan and begged him to attend the congress. They received pledges that his groups would attend the congress or at least send a written message. The pledge was not fulfilled. Instead, the document under review (backdated to 1970) was distributed a few weeks after the First National Congress of October 1971. The congress decided the possibility of military measures against two factions of the old leadership but excluded any armed resort against Isayas and his colleagues.

After the congress, a special committee headed by Ibrahim Mohammed Ali and Dr. Fitsum Ghebreselassie started another chase to locate and dialogue with Isayas. The peace messengers were evaded. As records show, Isayas and group tried a number of provocations to pull the ELF to armed clash. It killed all five of a small team of innocent ELA fighters at Ad Shuma. Action was refrained in this and related provocation. When the front refused them, Isayas and group decided to join the other two splinter groups and were found attacking ELA units in northern Sahel. That was how action against 'Isayasn bitsotun' could not be avoided.

These efforts are retold to show that the care, the interest for dialogue, reconciliation and rebuilding unity in the society was always there. Many cared except Isayas. The compromise he

could offer at anytime during the years of the struggle was "united front", and that only when he could feel to be the unchallenged top man. (A good illustration is what Ali Said Abdalla and Mohammed Ali Omaro (both top GoE officials) had to say about Isayas in February 1972 when he refused unity of the three splinter groups. Both accused him of being "promoter of sectarian divisions and a violent person prone to assassinations" and requested their organization not to reconsider unity with Isayas and his group. I think this much is enough.

Conclusion:

This essay (parts V and VI) tried to tell that Nhnan Elamanan was extremely harmful to the unity of the Eritrean people. It created perceptions of exaggerated fanaticism and talked of non-existent genocides in Eritrea. The document partly succeeded to present the ELF as a Moslem organization, with a backlash on the EPLF. Until the publication of the document and its propagation, Eritrean nationalists did not worry much about religious composition at a time when the ELF was 100 percent 'Moslem' in composition (minus 'Abdalla' Tsegai). They did not care when it became over 60% 'Christian' in the late 1970. They always took it to be a nationalist organization which gradually grew to become a microcosm of Eritrea in its entirety. But the inculcations based on Nhnan Elamanan spread a different message, which made further strides after the ELF was weakened militarily.

Whether you one sees it or not, Eritrea is in danger because of the politics of division, arrogance and exclusion. The harmful legacies and the structures of Nhnan Elamanan are, in a way or the other, still intact. They were the sources of division, the causes of civil wars, and the cause of our continued disunity as a people and as political forces.

A way out? They must be dilapidated and all the people of Eritrea with their political forces - of course including the EPLF - must come together and plan a new start. This cannot be done while the guardian of division, hate and exclusion - the author of Nhnan Elamanan - is at the helm of power. And for the best interest of Eritrea, Isayas must go, and most immediately.

Once this step is agreed upon and taken, the form of a transitional government will not be a difficult task to work out. The structures had already been hinted at one way or the other in the numerous proposals put forward within the past few months of newfound democratic dialogue and discussion through the electronic media.

The other task which will have to follow the fall of the regime of Isayas (and the legacies of chauvinism and division embodied in *Nhnan Elamanan*) is engaging in the investigation of our past without fear (Kagnew Station and all that) so that trust can be built by distinguishing fact from fiction, and leaving all charges and counter-charges behind us. The best process will be the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission à la Mandella's South Africa to revisit our past, at least since 1 September 1961.

That will be a day to celebrate. I trust Eritreans will bring about that day.

Source: <http://www.ehrea.org/Nhnan%20ElamMessage.htm>