



## Renaissance of Unity

Much has been said about the split that occurred in the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) following its second congress in February, 2007. Some thought that the incident was a final blow to the question of unity of the Eritrean Opposition. The Eritrean dictatorship believed that the split was a farewell moment for the existence of a strong opposition that would do away with their brutal rule. This temporarily provided the tyrant with a golden opportunity to boast that he had no opponents and that “all Eritreans” were behind him.

On the other hand, many held the view that such a difference in the opposition could actually foster fresh unity with better organization and workable plans. The three major organizations in Bloc I of the EDA had clearly stated from the outset that no victory could be achieved without unity. They had further declared their intention to work together and pave the way for their complete unity while at the same time calling on all other opposition movements to collaborate with them in the creation of a broad based, viable, truly national umbrella organization. They reiterated the need for a National Democratic Unity that can promote the ideals of democratic governance to overcome the problems of Eritrea.

The following information describes the initial statement of the three EDA-I organizations, namely, the Eritrean National Salvation Front (ENSF), the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP), and the Eritrean National Liberation Front/Revolutionary Council (ELF/RC), in their meeting of May 10, 2007 in Germany:

*After deep and constructive deliberations, the meeting agreed to upgrade relations and joint activities of the allied three organizations in the fields of diplomacy and public information, and to enhance relations with human rights organizations and civil societies with the aim of redoubling campaigns against the dictatorial regime in Eritrea by pulling together all opposition forces determined to shorten the life of the regime.*

*The group believed that the split that occurred in the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) in the aftermath of its recent second congress was an occurrence that saddened the opposition as well as the Eritrean people and friendly countries. The meeting highly commended the compromises and draft proposals tabled by the three organizations to avert a split in the EDA which eventually happened because of the unacceptable positions of the other members (EDA-2).*

*Also with the understanding of the importance of engaging the capacities of our people in the struggle to remove the dictatorial regime, the meeting mandated that the provisional EDA-1 leadership formulate a mechanism that can allow smooth coordination and work relations between the two blocs of the alliance.*

Though we cannot be sure about the root cause of the split, it is an unacceptable event by all standards for organizations that had agreed on all provisions of the charter, to then end up splitting based on the question of leadership election. The incident raises the question of the degree of commitment on the part of the opposition leaders for the just cause of the Eritrean people. A solution needs to be sought, above all else, under the context of Eritrea and selfless dedication to safeguard the country's sovereignty and its national interest. Narrow organizational sentiments and self-interest can take the struggle for democratic change nowhere.

In this respect, Dr. Beyene Kidane's (ENSF Foreign Relations Director) recent interview on EDA Radio gives a good definition of what should be done. He said, "As difference on clear point of view can by itself be basis for development, we do not see differences as a potential danger; what is more, a difference can be resolved through peaceful democratic means and thus we should not be taken aback by differences.

"If the two blocs of the EDA concentrate on carrying out their activities, the desired outcome can be achieved. We will struggle in order for the two sides of the EDA to have peaceful relations between them."

These are key words for bringing about a healthy unity of action among all forces of change in the Eritrean Opposition. The insightful thoughts were not merely the personal opinion of Dr. Beyene. His organization's (ENSF) central leadership officially endorsed them in its concluding statement in the middle of this month [July, 2007].

Part of the statement pertaining to unity reads:

*As a means of addressing and handling the question of the opposition, the meeting resolved to abide by the following guiding principles:*

- 1. The ENSF once again affirmed the necessity of bringing all Eritrean Opposition forces together under [at least] a minimum program, both as a means of jointly and effectively challenging the dictatorial regime now, and the long-term maintenance of peace and stability necessary because of the multiplicity of components of our society.*
- 2. ENSF Central Council declares it is obedient to the charter and regulations endorsed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> conference of EDA in February, 2007.*

In addition to these kinds of resolutions and declarations, the last two months have seen several activities going on in many parts of the world aimed at bringing unity of the Eritrean Opposition. Many scholars, civic associations, and other interested parties have shown serious efforts in hopes of persuading all agents of change for a united action for reform of rule in Eritrea.

For example, Mesfin Hagos, once the defense minister of Eritrea and the current chairman of the Eritrean Democratic Party (EDP), has precisely defined the situation of the country and had this to say in his call for unity:

“The split of the EDA into two does not mean that understanding one another and working together among Eritrean Oppositions has come to a deadlock. This cannot deter us from striving to create conditions conducive to allowing a better way of doing things than before, getting closer to one another and operating together. Eritrean Opposition organizations must give priority to the struggle for a common platform. An umbrella organization that can coordinate and lead the whole struggle of all organizations (or at least most of them) must be created.”

Leaders and members of EDA I have repeatedly called for unity of all forces to at least some degree. Past experience of EDA has taught us that it is possible to work together as far as each and every participant believes in the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law.

Unless individuals want to prioritize their personal-oriented ambitions, there are no grounds for believing that every organization has a different philosophy that makes it impossible to work with the others. Thus, after about six months of ups and downs, a great opportunity for unity seem to be emerging. The recent resolution of the ENSF is bearing fruit. Its decision to form a committee that handles the question of unity is getting a reply of same type from the EDA II bloc.

In their press release dated July 26, EDA-Bloc II has declared that they are ready for dialogue with EDA-I. They have said, “in order to heal the differences seen in the second congress of the EDA and to reinstate the EDA into its previous state of existence”, they have mandated a committee that carries out the dialog with EDA-I. This is a positive development in itself. Both sides need great wisdom to address the issue clearly. They need to show restraint and patience in order to expedite the activities for democratic change. They need the fortitude and foresight to see things in terms of the agony their own people are suffering daily, and to act accordingly.

The America Team would like to express its appreciation and encouragement for these new developments, and takes this opportunity to acknowledge its readiness to help out with this issue, and to work on preparations for a national conference.

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