

THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINING THE CONTINUITY OF OUR GENERATIONS

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It is a normal and natural process to get married, form a family and have children. The children grow up, get married, form a family and have children of their own. The first generation continues to grow from one generation to another over time. As the result, the name and continuity of the family remains secured and protected from generation to generation. The presence and survival of a family consisting of the parents and its children is essential in maintaining and sustaining the continuity and survival of generations to come. If a certain family has children and the children grow up and have a family of their own, then there is continuity of one generation to another. In this case the parents become the first generation, the children are the second generation and the grandchildren are the third generation and thereafter the generations continue forever. If a family does not have children, or if its children do not have children of their own, or for some other unexpected situations or reasons, as the kind of family narrated below, the linkage or continuity of generations of the initial family becomes extinct. The story attempts to illustrate the kind of fate or destiny a typical Eritrean family must now face in its life cycle. Every new generation is a new breed that needs to be treated and nurtured with a compassionate care and respect to become the main source of family history for the next generation.

Some years ago, there was a beautiful family in our humble village. The family was composed of two parents and nine children – five sons and four daughters. The family depended on a meager income earned from crop farming and raising some livestock for its livelihood. All the children completed their high school education, and some graduated from the colleges in Eritrea. They served the country in various capacities and situations one after the other. It has become a normal condition for Eritrean children that they are separated from their parents at early ages to participate in every summer service program and national holiday ceremonies. These are followed by going to Sawa for military training. Finally, they join the military force for their endless national service. The negative outcome of these unfriendly programs and unhealthy circumstances is that Eritrean youth are deprived of adequate parental care and attention and lack a close family ties and attachments. With regards to the big family two sons and one daughter are martyred during the 30-year armed struggle for independence and liberation of Eritrea. One of the children is also martyred during the latest war with Ethiopia. One of the children is still on guard at the border with Ethiopia for his infinite national military service. He was married and later his wife together with their baby son left him because he could not support his family with the little pocket money he received for his service. With the help of her sisters in Switzerland both the mother and child managed to migrate to Germany. Two of the children, like many other young Eritreans, crossed the border to Sudan and finally migrated to Europe – one to Norway and the second one to Sweden. The last two of the children have also gone out of the country – one to Uganda and the second one to Ethiopia. Both are waiting to migrate to Europe, North America or Australia. At this time both parents of the family have passed away, their farmland is returned to the village, their livestock are sold, and their house is closed forever. The parents were not fortunate enough to witness and celebrate the weddings of their children and to see and enjoy the love and

joy of their grandchildren in their own house. The children did not have the opportunity to grow up fully at home and interact with their parents and get married and celebrate their weddings together with their family members and friends in their own village. If there was a normal life for this big family with its children and grandchildren and dwell in the same place surrounded by each other, considering the size and composition of the family, it could form a tiny village or a small viable community of its own. But, this big decent family has disappeared from the village because no son or daughter is going to be situated in the same village to sustain the continuity of its generation. This family house is not the only house closed in the same village. There are many family houses permanently closed in many villages of the country. Many families are uprooted from their respective villages and towns and ended up in refugee camps mainly in Ethiopia and Sudan expecting to migrate to Europe, North America and Australia. There are also many Eritrean refugees in Uganda, Kenya, Israel, Libya, and other countries expecting the same fate. The most alarming and scary situation in terms of preserving and sustaining one generation after another in Eritrea is becoming very critical because we have already created at least a two or three generation gaps in the country by losing our younger generation in the wars of aggression and through gross out-migration to foreign countries.

It is unfortunate to observe and witness with sadness a massive exodus of our younger generations from Eritrea to various countries around the world over the years. It is without any exaggeration based on personal rough estimate that there are not less than 1.5 million Eritreans in Diasporas namely, Europe, North America, Australia, Africa, Middle East and there are Eritreans even in Asia and Latin American countries. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR), more than 22 percent of the migrants who made the horrific journey in 2014 crossing the Mediterranean Sea in flimsy boats to seek asylum in Europe were Eritreans. It has also been reported in 2018 that most of the migrants to the smallest country of Luxemburg were Eritreans. Most of the migrants, about 80% of the Eritreans in Diasporas, are the younger generation who are under 50 years, of age, of which about 70% of them are under 30 years of age who were born after the declaration of Eritrean independence. These are the most productive age group who are desperately needed in the economic development and social progress of the country. Our younger generations have been both physically and financially the victims of merciless human traffickers and smugglers. Hundreds of our youth have perished crossing the Sahara and Sinai Deserts. Many Eritreans have been killed in the deserts and their kidneys and other vital organs have been taken by the smugglers. Many innocent Eritrean girls have been raped and molested by the smugglers in the deserts. Hundreds of Eritreans, including very small children, have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. The Lampedusa tragedy is a typical example of horrible human disaster affecting our younger generation. There are many Eritreans in the refugee camps of Libya under deplorable conditions and they are desperately seeking an immediate help from humanitarian organizations and fellow Eritreans in Diasporas. Those young Eritreans who were able to tolerate the scorching desert heat, the hardship of the sea, and the vicious crimes of the human traffickers and smugglers, are now scattered in various countries across the world, particularly in Europe, North America and Australia. It has been observed that there is no integration, coalition, or any kind of unifying factor between the new migrants and the old ones in Diasporas. It is obvious that these young Eritrean migrants need emotional support and guidance from the older generation. Surely, the older generation in the Eritrean

community and religious institution have the moral obligations and social responsibilities to create a friendly and supportive environment to embrace, guide and support the younger generation. If we respect our fellow Eritreans, we can break the barriers that separate and keep us apart. We need to build bridges of peace and harmony that can bring the younger and older generations together in unity because as our national unity was the means for our all-out fight against our many enemies to achieve our national independence so also our national unity of all Eritreans, based on our new common grounds, is the means that can set us all on fire to support one another in defending the sovereignty of our country and in advocating together for the welfare of the Eritrean people.

It is certain that the difference in time and age separate one generation from the generation that follows. It creates difference in experience and points of references. Subsequently, there is a difference of opinion or outlook of life between people of different generations. The difference in perspectives and viewpoints accompanied by lack of proper communication between the older and younger generations can be major obstacles in creating a peaceful intergenerational relationships and mutual understanding. It has been observed that the benefits of intergenerational relationships are numerous. The advantages are plentiful for both older and younger generations. The older and younger generations can learn a lot from one another by experience and events they have both witnessed in their lifetime. Older or younger, we all learn something from each other because we have been through different time periods and have seen different things. Each generation has faced different issues and challenges during its respective lifetime. The younger generation can learn valuable life lessons from the older generations who have experienced a great deal of setbacks and triumphs. The first kind of learning younger generation encounter with the older generation is that the younger generation constantly look up to the older generation as their role models at any age for that matter. They watch them how they move, listen to how they communicate, pay attention to the things they talk about in their daily lives and the kind of dialogue they entertain as related to political or socio-economic issues. These situations and relationships become a huge factor in shaping the type of people the younger generation grow up to be by considering their career, interests, passion, and beliefs in their daily lives. The older generation also benefits immensely from the interactions with the younger generation. These interactions can invigorate and revitalize the older generation, which can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Additionally, the older generation can share family stories or memories and family values with the younger generation and ensure that their life mattered. It is evident that each generation has a unique skill set to share with one another and contribute to the country in general. Younger generations can teach the older generations about the conventional application of information technology, while older generations can share with the younger generation the traditional values, cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge, languages, and history as related to Eritrea. We should not underestimate the power of a good conversation and interaction with our younger generation both in a formal and informal ways. We need to talk about our favorite accomplishments in life, our favorite memories with our family, our struggle for independence and liberation, the history of Eritrea as a colony of Italy, UK, Ethiopia and others, and our rich traditional and cultural heritage. As parents we need to empower our younger generation with the sense of belongingness to Eritrea and its people and assist them to develop the pride of Eritrean identity. A generation which ignores its national identity rejects its past family history and its future family destiny.

We must have learned in the social sciences that unity is strength. When we are united, we are strong, and we can win in any struggle, but when we are divided, we are weak, and we can lose in a simple battle. Even the weak ones become strong when they are united. If thousands of spiders bring themselves together in unity and collect their webs together, they can firmly tie the neck of a roaring lion. Similarly, the unity of faith and integrity in ourselves and the unity of love and sincerity for our people can create synergy among ourselves and miracles to our country. If we do not have enemies amongst ourselves, the enemies from outside cannot hurt us much. The worst thing to do in life is to become the adversary of ourselves and our own people. We should not worry about our enemies because we know them very well, but we must be very careful about our so-called friends, or those who pretend to be our good friends because they know us more than we know ourselves and they are very dangerous, and they would not hesitate to hurt us or to put us under their control at any time convenient for them. It is unavoidable reality that every generation usually revolt against its older generation because every younger generation seeks an innovative way of thinking, or a new revolution or change in life. But the unity and solidarity of both the younger and older generations can initiate and bring out the good qualities in one another's attitudes to build a friendly relationship among themselves. If we are not united, both the younger and older generations together, we are always vulnerable to unexpected danger from our advisories. We can have strong unity by respecting our diversity and putting our religious, political and other differences and disagreements aside to do the right thing. If we are really and deeply concerned by the apparent dire threat and danger to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Eritrea and if we desire to develop a synergy among ourselves and entertain a healthy dialogue on our political and social affairs, the wakeup call and appeal for our younger generation together with the support of the older generation. is to bring ourselves together in unity and build the power base and take over the leadership role in our Eritrean communities, religious institutions and political functions by uplifting the dynamics of public voice and support; by ensuring and maintaining a national unity based on common national goal and aspiration; by respecting our diversity irrespective of our age, regional, religious, ethnic and political differences; and by honoring our Eritrean identity based on our rich traditional values, history and cultural heritage, distinct territorial boundary, legitimate national sovereignty, and solid socio-political integrity. We, Eritreans in Diasporas, young and old, need to secure respect and dignity among ourselves to attain strength and build a powerful foundation for our national unity and integrity. We need to understand that the things that bring us together are far greater than the things that keep us apart. It is essential that both the younger and older generations are in peace with one another, tolerate and respect one another, bring ourselves together in unity, and get up together to make a difference in maintaining and sustaining the continuity of generations by getting involved in our current national affairs before it gets too late. We need to realize that the existence and survival of Eritrea as a sovereign country depends upon the sound and unconditional sustenance and continuity of our generations as Eritreans in our own country Eritrea. The measure of our success in life of the older generation is the kind of legacy we leave behind for our younger generation and likewise the measure of success in life of the younger generation is to pass on the kind of attributes and inheritance to the next generation that follows.

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