

## Eritrea: From dictatorship to democracy

By Fesseha Nair

Over the past decade democracy and dictatorship as a form of governments have been debated and discussed by Eritreans. Dictatorship is characterized by its authoritarian rule, human rights abuses, lack of accountability and transparency, lack of rule of law and economic crisis. Democratic system of governance is characterized by collective decision making about the rules and policies of a group, association or society. Decision making can be said to be democratic to the extent that it is subject to the controlling influence of all members of the collectivity considered as equals. The key characteristic of democratic system is when it follows the principles of **popular control and political equality**.

In a dictatorship, there are no popular control or political equality. In Eritrea, today, there are two camps of struggle, one favouring dictatorship and the other camp struggling to make popular control over public decisions making both effective and more inclusive, to remove an elite monopoly over decision making and its benefits, and overcome obstacles, such as those of gender, ethnicity, religion, language, class, wealth, etc, to the equal exercise of citizenship rights. How can the forces for democratic change overcome dictatorship and build a democratic Eritrea are the two challenges facing the camp for democracy. In this article , I will deal with the two challenges and how to face them. I will try to explain the effective ways used to disintegrate the dictator in Eritrea and prevent the rise of a new one.

The Eritrean people are suffering under a brutal regime and seems lost hope to liberate themselves from the dictator. They are unwilling to struggle because they have no confidence in their ability to face the dictator and no way to save themselves, except going to exile to escape the brutality of the dictator. Since the independence of the country there are about 80000 youth left the country and sought asylum in neighbouring countries like Sudan, Ethiopia and the western nations.

Dictatorships usually exist primarily because of internal power distribution in the home country. The internal power distribution of the Eritrean dictator is to keep the population weak that it cannot cause serious problem to it. Wealth and power are concentrated in the hands of his yes men. If the camp of democracy wants to bring down the dictatorship effectively and with a least cost then must have immediate tasks:

- must strengthen the oppressed population in their determination, self-confidence and resistance skills,
- must strengthen the independent social groups and institutions of the oppressed people,
- must create a powerful internal resistance force; and
- must develop a wise grand strategy plan for liberation and implement it skilfully.

How are the opposition political organizations strengthen and build self confidence of the oppressed people? The opposition forces must stand together and strengthen those amongst themselves, when they make this issue ripe then they establish a strong self-reliant force with a wise strategy. Liberation from the dictatorship depends on the people's ability which is not developed inside the opposition forces at this time. Can the opposition struggling for democratic change dismantle the dictatorship in Eritrea by negotiation? Is the Eritrean dictator agreeable to peaceful negotiation at this time? Never, at all. Negotiations have merits and limitations. The merits are when negotiations resolve the conflict issues appropriately.

The limitations of negotiations are when they are used by the dictator to surrender the opposition while the violence of the dictator continues. The Eritrean democratic opposition must be aware not to be trapped by a negotiation process initiated by the dictator. The proper role of negotiation may

occur at the end of decisive struggle in which the power of the dictator has been effectively destroyed and seek personal safe passage to international airport.

How can the opposition achieve the freedom and peace in Eritrea? This is not a simple task. It requires great strategic skill, organization, and planning. Above all it will require power. The Eritrean forces for democratic change cannot hope to bring down the dictatorship in Eritrea and establish political freedom without the ability to apply their own power effectively. How is this possible? What kind of power can the democratic opposition mobilize that will be sufficient to destroy the dictatorship and its vast military and security networks?

How comes power? The method is simple. The tricks of the dictator must be disclosed by enlightening our people. Dictators cannot live without the assistance of the people they rule. They cannot secure and maintain the source of political power without the support of the people. The source of power includes:

- Authority, the belief among people that the regime is legitimate, and that they have a moral duty to obey it ( **ንሕና ንመንግስትና፣ መንግስትና ንሕና.... መንግስቲ ይቀትል፣ይኣስር...**
- Human resources, the number and importance of the persons and groups which are obeying, cooperating, or providing assistance to the rulers **ሕዝባዊ መኸተ፣ ሎሚ ዘይከተተ ብደዉ ዝሞተ፣ ትግራይ ክወሩኹም ኢዮም፣**
- Skills and knowledge, needed by the regime to perform specific actions and supplied by the cooperating persons and groups( **ሽማግሌ ክተት፣ ካልኣት ሕልናኦም ዝሸጡ ምሁራት በሃልቲ .....ወዘተ**
- Intangible factors, psychological and ideological factors that may induce people to obey and assist the rulers **ወልድኻ ክኣስርዎም ኢዮም ፣ ገዛኹም ክወርስዎ ኢዮም፣ ኢድና ነዋሕ ኢዮ...ወዘተ**
- Material resources, the degree to which the rulers control or have access to property, natural resources, financial resources, the economic system, and means of communication and transportation ( **ኩሉ ነገራዊ ምንጭታት- መረት ናይ መንግስቲ ኢዮ፣ ባህርያዊ ይኹን ፊናንሳዊ፣ቁጠባዊ ስርዓት፣ ናይ መራኽብን መገ-ዓዓዝያን፣ ኣብ ኢድ ምልኪ.....ምኻን**
- Sanctions, punishments, threatened or applied, against the disobedient and non-cooperative to ensure the submission and cooperation that are needed for the regime to exist and carry out its policies ( **ደቅኻ ሰለ ዝህደምካ 50000 ናቕፋ ክፈል፣ እስርዎም፣ ሰላም ኣይትበልዎም፣ ኣብ መር ዓኣምን ሓዘኖምን ኣይትኸዱ.....**

It is these sources the democratic forces take in their strategy to mobilize the oppressed to withdraw their cooperation and support that sever the availability of the sources until the Eritrean regime weakens and dissolves.

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