

A NEW UNITED DEMOCRATIC ERITREAN MOVEMENT WITH A NEW VISION HAS BEEN FORMED IN ETHIOPIA.

UDM PR-1

Axum June 14, 2008



After a long process of ups and down and many challenges, we the co-founders and facilitators of the founding Congress of our Movement that met at the historic city of Axum are pleased to announce the formation and regroupment of some Eritrean opposition under the name of UNITED DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (UDM) of Eritrea.

There is a merger of Hadish-Tesfa Network/ Hadish Tesfa Movement, "Tebegiso MEN-E SEYAT ERITREA and some of the core groups that broke away from EPM led by Ato Adhanom Gbheremariam nearly two years ago. Since we are committed to create a strong, United, credible, viable and effective Eritrean opposition to the fascist Dictatorship in Asmara and we want to put an end to the needless fragmentation and divisions of the Eritrean opposition, we have decided to go for a genuine merger of our respective organizations and movements thereby creating one cohesive and united Movement, as opposed to creating a loose umbrella where the members of the umbrella continue to focus on strengthening their own respective organizations and where mutual trust and confidence is manifestly absent as proved from past experiences with respect to many Eritrean opposition groups. Thus unlike others who formed

“united fronts” and “Alliances” our regroupment is a complete and genuine merger. It is also intended to mobilize our scarce financial, human, intellectual and other resources. Above all, there is a total unity and a sense of purpose between the founding members of our respective organizations and movements that have formed HIBRET. In a way, we do not only talk of “Hibret” and “Simret”, but we have also translated it in deeds. That is why we call ourselves HIBRET to signify our commitment to the unity of the Eritrean opposition groups and civil societies as well as individuals.

The political Program of HIBRET is as clear as a blue sea can be. We have managed to define our vision, mission, aims and objectives, our fundamental principles and beliefs and articulate our priority tasks as far as we can and under the circumstances we found ourselves. The document will soon be translated into English and released. It is not a perfect document, but it is a good workable political program at least for the very near future. We certainly welcome any constructive suggestions and feed backs.

At any rate, a highlight of our political Program is as follows: article 1 defines the name of our Movement. Article 2 articulates the interpretation of our logo and what the flag of Eritrea will be in the future in Eritrea beyond Isayas.

Article 3-4 articulates the **vision, mission and objectives** of UDM. Article 5 describes the **fundamental beliefs, aims and objectives**; Article 6 defines and spells out our **urgent and priority tasks** of UDM. Article 7 articulates our **economic policy**. Article 8 defines our **social justice policy**. Article 9 deals with our **public health policy**. Article 10 deals with the **rights of women and children**. Article 11 deals with our **Youth and development policy**. Article 12 deals with the **role and expectation of** our people from **Eritrean intellectuals**. Article 13 is a **comprehensive and all round equality of rights** provision that pertains to our people. We must stress here that UDM does acknowledge, recognize and promote the existence of diverse cultural identity of the people living in Eritrea. However, having regard to the Eritrean situation and having regard that we are living in the era of globalization and regional integration, UDM does not favour and support secession of its various components under the guise of the right of nations to self determination including session. However, this in no way suggests and should be interpreted that UDM is opposed to the right of nations and nationalities in neighbouring countries. What UDM is arguing is that as applied in Eritrea and having regard to the specificity of Eritrean circumstances which is already small and war torn country, we believe establishing a Government that treats every citizen equal is more advantageous than recognizing the right of secession. Article 14 deals with Eritreans in Diaspora world wide and the need to defend and protect their rights and promote their aspirations. Article 15 defines and articulates the type of **relationship our Movement** seeks and desires to promote **with all other Eritrean opposition groups** whether they are political, civil societies or individuals. Article 16 stipulates our position on **National Peace and Reconciliation Conference and on the need for the formation of GRAND COALITION** that would lead to the formation of a Provisional Government in Eritrea. Article 17 deals with all matters related to **our Defense Policy** and what our people expect from members of our Armed Forces, the Police and militias etc. Article 18 articulates our **foreign policy both with our neighbours and the rest of the world**.

One of the controversial articles that created a dead lock and took half day to debate and resolve was Article 19 of the draft Political Program on **Eritrea's future relationship with Ethiopia**. Those who drafted the Program and incorporated article 19 wanted to have a clear and unequivocal policy on what the vision is of UDME on Ethio-Eritrean relations. However, there were also concern among some Eritrean youth that are not willing to accept the harsh reality that recognizes the special historical, cultural, geographical, linguistic, socio-economic and political relationship between the people of Eritrea and Ethiopia. Since the vast majority of those present in our founding Congress consisted of Eritrean youth, their opinions won by two additional votes. Those who advocated for Article 19 accepted the democratic verdict of the Eritrean youth present at the meeting but made it clear that they will continue to advocate for its incorporation in the future either as it is or in its amended form.

Articles 20 -21 deal with who has the supreme authority and power to define and articulate the Political program and on issues related to amendment. Article 22 states when this Political program takes effect?

Some reasons why HIBRET/UDM of Eritrea is unique?

The establishment of the United Democratic Movement of Eritrea is unique in many ways. First, some of the key members of UDM consist of some veterans not only within ELF and EPLF but also other independent minded scholars and intellectuals like Prof. Dr. Fisseha-Tsion Menghistu who was the student prefect /head/ of individuals like the current President of Eritrea and the late Seyoum Ogbamichael of ELF-RC at Prince Makonnen Secondary school in Asmara and who is known to have impeccable track record of advocating (in the past) some sort of a new form of federal or confederal arrangement with Ethiopia and who has been opposed Isayas & Co. since day one and who have selflessly struggled for some 35 years of his life to find ways and means of averting the tragedy that is facing our people today. Thus, UDM of Eritrea, otherwise known as "HIBRET" is a unity of individuals who in the past had quite different aims and objectives and experiences.

Second, this is a new United Democratic Movement with a new vision for Eritrea not only how to alleviate poverty, restore the pride and dignity of our people, but also on how to bring about a lasting peace and reconciliation not only on the future of Ethio-Eritrean relations, but also in the context of the Horn of Africa.

Third, UDM is a movement that has made the Eritrean youth at the centre of its struggle. So far, over 85% of its Executive committee members consist of Eritrean youth living in Ethiopia and is trying its best to broaden its base worldwide.

Fourth, during its first founding Congress held at the historic city of Axum from June 2-6, 2008, it read and debated all the articles related to the Political Program and by laws one by one and each article was voted one by one as well.

Fifth, the manner and democratic procedure that was followed during the founding Congress was one of the most open, transparent and most interesting as well as most fascinating. It was free and democratic where every one was allowed to say whatever he/she wants. All controversies were discussed and debated in the open and votes taken.

Sixth, the election process was undertaken by secret ballot and administered by three independent individuals who are not members of UDM and the votes were counted by them independently and made public by them. It is the most democratic founding Congress ever held by any Eritrean political movement. It was a historic founding Congress where no one was inhibited from expressing his/her ideas. There were no hidden agendas what so ever. What is also interesting is that despite the controversies generated by **Prof. Dr. Fisseha-Tsion Menghistu**, he got two votes below the veteran ELF fighter Ato **Abraham Negassi** (who got the highest vote) and despite the fact that he was the one who advocated and insisted in favour of retaining for Article 19 and despite the fact that he publicly declared that he does not want to be either elected or to be a leader of the UDM of Eritrea and that he wanted to see a new generation of leaders to come up. However, he got 2 votes short of Ato Abraham Negassi. The truth is the two senior elders got the highest votes in a secret and democratic election by no less than 95% of the votes casted by Eritrean youth present in the founding Congress. Thus it was logical and democratic to respect the wishes of the voters at the founding Congress.

In a second round of election held within the members of the Executive Committee on the afternoon of Friday June 6th, 2008, another area of controversy that was discussed within the Executive Committee of UDM of Eritrea was the generation gap in thinking and vision between some of the Eritrean elders and some other Eritrean youth. Some Eritrean youth wanted to assume the highest positions within the UDM of Eritrea although they confessed that they lack some of the necessary knowledge and experience to assume instantly the highest offices within UDM.

However, as part of capacity building and honouring the commitment of the UDM of Eritrea to give the Eritrean youth a central role, the Executive Committee has elected and appointed 85-90% of other offices including the Office of Vice Chairman and all other departments and Offices of UDM by representatives of Eritrean youth living inside Ethiopia and outside.

Despite a heated debate the result was very interesting. The few elders who got the highest vote at the founding Congress were also re-elected at the Executive Committee meeting. Here again, the two elders were elected. Ato Abraham Negassi became the Chairperson and Prof. Dr. Fisseha-Tsion Menghistu was elected to be the Secretary General. He has also been given the mandate to have additional Portfolio for Foreign and Diplomatic Relations until such time that suitable, committed, dedicated and competent candidates are available.

It should be stressed that in the USA, Ato Michale Beyene and Tewoldebrahan Bahta are given the responsibility to mobilize the financial and human resources in the United States. Engineer Haile Kifle is given similar tasks in Canada. In Europe some of those elected to the Executive Committee include Ato Idris Bireray and Ato Woldemariam Abraham from Germany. There will

be many others who will be responsible for similar tasks and responsibilities not only in Europe, but also in the rest of the world.

Those genuinely concerned Eritreans who want a fundamental socio-economic and political changes in Eritrea and who are in deeds committed to sacrifice their time, money and human resources are kindly requested to contact the Secretary General's Office or via udme@live.com. It is also our sincere wish that we want to establish an extensive network wherever Eritreans are living around the world. So please do not hesitate to contact us. We know that every one is important and every one can have a role to play.

It should be stressed that the core and strength of **UDM is based on the financial and Intellectual support of some committed Eritreans living in the United States and Europe and elsewhere and man power resources of Eritrean Youth based in Ethiopia** and Sudan.

We must confess that all was not a smooth sailing. Some of those who are living in Sudan were held back on the Ethio-Sudanese border near Humera for nearly 10 days and were not lucky enough to participate at the founding Congress.

However, in recognition of their commitment and sacrifice, a seat has been reserved within the Executive Committee for the Eritreans living in Sudan. More seats will also be reserved for those living in Sudan. Any one who has been democratically elected by those living in Sudan will take his/her seat within the Executive Committee with full rights. The same rights and privileges will be accorded to those Eritreans living in the rest of the world provided that they make tangible and concrete contributions to our noble efforts in terms of sacrificing their time, money, knowledge and mobilization of other resources such as medicines and other needs in ways that would help UDM achieve concrete results and realize the aspirations of our people. We would also like to make it clear that so far, and unlike other organizations, we have not received any financial support from any Government or NGO or any one else. We have managed to survive from contributions made by our dedicated members and supporters outside Ethiopia. We take this opportunity to express our immense gratitude for those who have helped us so far. We hope, they and many others will continue to support us in ways that will help us deliver the desired results.

We like to make it absolutely clear that United Democratic Movement (UDM) is committed to do its part to unite most (and if possible all) democratic Eritrean groups. This is because we strongly believe Unity is strength and we like to end the needless and senseless fragmentation and divisions that now exist between Eritrean opposition groups and civil societies. As the Eritrean saying goes; **“YEHWAT MIS ZISEMRU TSELA-ETI YEBARIRU”**. **That is why we are committed for the unity of the Eritrean opposition and we have named our movement HIBRET**. Moreover, UDM is open and transparent and we would like other Eritrean opposition groups to follow suit.

FORMATION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

We wish there was a possibility for more founding members to participate at our historical Congress at the historic city of Axum. Unfortunately, we have to deal with the available persons present.

At any rate, after five days of intensive discussion the founding Congress nominated 33 persons out of which 23 full members have been elected to constitute the Executive Committee of UDM. In addition three alternate members have been elected to be part of the Executive Committee. Thus the Executive Committee now consists of 23 full members and 3 additional alternate members thus consisting of 26 members and not 33 as originally reported by VOA. This process of open, transparent and very democratic election process is unique in the history of Eritrean political movements and Eritrean struggle.

What gave the founding Congress extra ordinary colour; joy, dignity and success are also the drama and the fantastic music entertained by our Cultural Group and RIM band. We are immensely grateful for the creativity and dynamism of our artists and musicians. However, since they are short of musical instruments we hereby appeal ALL Eritreans of good will to contribute in kind all types of musical instruments so that our artists and musicians can exploit their creativity and talents. Those who like to contribute in kind or even in cash for such a noble objective can contact us via the above mentioned email.

UDM of Eritrea is committed to help and facilitate towards the formation of a united, credible, viable, durable and democratic alternative to the fascist dictatorship in Eritrea. That is why we have a clear socio-economic and political program.

The method of struggle that we will use to get rid of this brutal fascist dictatorship will be **all methods of struggle** that leads to the realization of such a noble objective. We thus call upon all Eritreans to create a new sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in ways that will restore the pride and dignity of our people and that would help our children and grand children to enjoy a lasting peace, and prosperity and thereby make poverty war and conflict a thing of the past. Here, we believe Eritreans in Diaspora can play a crucial role.

One of the main aims and objective of UDM is to eliminate or substantially reduce the unacceptable state of poverty and marginalisation that persist within our society and the satisfaction of BASIC and higher NEEDS. (Art.7)

The core virtue of our political program is the promoting Democracy; rule of law and ensuring justice for all. All fundamental rights, freedoms and liberties will be guaranteed. So all civil and political rights as well as the economic, social and cultural rights will be guaranteed. (See Articles 8-18)

What is more, to avoid the type of brutality and inhumanity of leaders against their own people, UDM will advocate that no leader no matter how genius and desirable he/she is will not be allowed to be the head of the State and stay in power more than two terms. In no way will the combined two terms exceed a maximum of ten years.

Since UDM is committed to be the most broad based and most democratic political movement with a new vision, it is ready and more than happy to work with and cooperate with those who are committed, genuine and dedicated persons, groups, civil societies and political organizations that are action oriented and are committed to contribute with finance, knowledge, time and human resources in ways that will bring about the down fall of the fascist dictator in Asmara. In our view, the process through which such a noble objective can be realized is via the formation of **NATIONAL PEACE AND RECONCILIATION CONFERENCE AND THE FORMATION OF GRAND COALITION**. (See Art. 15-16)

Our foreign policy is based on principles of sovereign equality, mutual benefits and mutual respect for each other and based on what is in the best interest of our people, and that promotes a lasting peace and reconciliation for our people and neighbours (See Art. 18)

In order to make UDM one of the most effective, credible and viable alternative opposition to the fascist we need the support of our people, the Eritrean youth, Eritrean women, intellectuals as well as the support of the members of the Eritrean Defence forces, the police and other armed groups. Time has come where those who want a fundamental change in Eritrea must show their support in deeds. We are action oriented movement. Thus what we need is concrete support that will help our movement to get concrete results. The days of rhetoric are over. We are committed to stop the virus of mutual suspicions, recriminations and divisions within the Eritrean opposition groups.

Hence, despite the fact that there had been many challenges facing the formation process of UDM of Eritrea and in fact some had tried to sabotage our founding Congress, we can confidently say our founding Congress was a resounding success and beyond our wildest expectations. A new history of peace and reconciliation is in the making. We are doing our part. What remains is your part. So, we kindly and respectfully appeal to all concerned Eritreans to help in more concrete ways to bring about a fundamental change in Eritrea and for Eritreans. Our objective is to restore the pride and dignity and to bring a lasting peace and prosperity for our people. Above all, we want to make poverty, war and conflict a thing of the past.