



THE ERITREAN NATIONAL SALVATION FRONT

POLITICAL PROGRAM

***Adopted by:
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Political Program

Introduction:

The decade 1942-1952 is in some discourses –Arabic political literature mostly- referred to as the period of self-determination. This characterization apparently was to encapsulate the conceptualization the political process at that time had run its course to seal off the fate of Eritrea after Italy's colonial rule had ended. By and large, and with focus on that process, thus, the newly emerged political movement in Eritrea saw robust growth both in terms of geographical space and clarity of purpose. This eventually crystallized into two major contending trends. The Independence Bloc, which embraced several political parties, struggled to set up an independent entity. The second actor was the unionist party, which was committed to unconditional annexation of Eritrea to the Ethiopian empire of the time. The unionists enjoyed unequivocal support of Emperor Haile Sellassie I in close league with his regional and international allies.

The struggle of the two camps came to a close when the anti-independence forces through concerted efforts aborted the legitimate desire of a major sector of the inhabitants for independence, and succeeded to have a resolution passed in the General Assembly of the United Nations that tied Eritrea to Ethiopia federally. As events revealed later on, the UN sponsored arrangement was a mere first step in Ethiopia's aim of fully annexing Eritrea. This became a done deal in 1962 when Ethiopia unilaterally abrogated the Federation in flagrant disregard of its legal and political obligations under the UN resolution, and at the expense of the majority of the Eritreans who were demanding freedom in their own independent state.

However, the will of those who cherished freedom and independence was not broken or weakened by the violation of the federal agreement. They carried on their resistance with determination, albeit in conditions that required them to shift to new strategy of organized and peaceful political action. Actually, it was this new condition of political awareness that gave birth to the Eritrean Liberation Movement in 1958, which spearheaded the first methodical political pursuit that set as its endgame the eventual expulsion of the Ethiopian forces from the country. Reflecting the receptiveness of the political mood, the movement quickly made

remarkable surge in clandestine recruitments and mobilization among broad sectors of the population, conspicuously among the urban inhabitants, which irked the Ethiopian authorities and made them to respond with brute violence and widespread persecution. However, this did not turn the tide in their favor; and on the contrary, the Eritrean patriots wasted no time to weigh their choices and opt for a strategy that befitted the requirements the new phase of the resistance demanded.

Thus, the founding of the Eritrea Liberation Front in 1960 was indeed the practical response to the violence and incarcerations, which the Ethiopian authorities had unleashed to undermine and destroy the expanding peaceful resistance. To face the challenge, the Eritrean Liberation Front was set up to dedicate itself to yet another level of a new strategy of armed combat against Ethiopian occupation forces. For that end, therefore, on 1 September 1962 Martyr Hamid Idris Awate ushered in a new era in Eritrea's modern history by firing the first shot in the long patriotic war of liberation.

Besides military accomplishments, the politico-armed struggle did register democratic gains which the ELF had been sanctioning in its programs through its congresses since 1971 to become indelible legacy of its political culture even though it was not surprising to had also passed through much disillusionment and setbacks in view of the subjective and objective conditions that intermittently tested the unity of the patriotic forces who were operating in socially and culturally diverse setting. Despite all these, and concomitant costly sacrifices that span through thirty years, however, the patriotic freedom fighters had crowned the cumulative national liberation war efforts by clearing the entire homeland from the Ethiopian occupation forces in 1991. At that point in time, therefore, the Eritrean national liberation movement attained one of the key objectives of the national endeavor.

As soon as independence was secured, the patriotic movement stood face to face with testing national challenges vis-à-vis the people of a nation that had given everything precious for the sake of an independent state under which they hoped their patriotic aspirations of unity and democratic rights would be fulfilled. At the top of the agenda that forcefully came to the fore immediately in the aftermath of liberation were:

- 1. Handling national unity with a measure of objectivity.**
- 2. Laying down sound conditions for democracy.**
- 3. Consolidating and putting safeguards for national sovereignty.**

- 4. Drawing minimum program to guide nation building.**
- 5. Devising a timetable for the return of refugees to their abodes and homes.**

However, the Eritrean national liberation movement failed to cope with these and other challenges. One of the fundamental reasons was the exclusionist and hegemonic attitude of the EPLF leadership that usurped the prerogative of national decision-making that led to the installment and entrenchment of the current dictatorship. Consequently, Eritrea was effectively set on track to endure devastating crisis for more than 18 years now, which has been worsening by the day exposing the naked failure of the dictator and his henchmen. This has been made evident in no uncertain terms by:

- 1. Lose of sovereignty on large swathes of land due to a senseless war with Ethiopia.**
- 2. Bankrupt economy that caused unprecedented misery and poverty.**
- 3. Sharpening social and economic tensions, which the willy-nilly policies of the regime have been fuelling, and which continues to damage and disrupt the harmonious coexistence amongst our heterogeneous society.**
- 4. Unabated exodus of the youth from the country in numbers unseen before.**
- 5. Crippling regional and international isolation of the country.**

The past decade and half demonstrated the lack of credence and will of the regime to respond to the basic material and democratic rights of our people. Its incompetence to run the affairs of the state has been unambiguously proven. In the face of this grim situation, thus, their remains no way out for the vital patriotic and democratic forces except closing ranks and mobilizing the material and moral resources to mount organized resistance capable of toppling the dictatorship.

In partnership with the anti-regime forces, therefore, we in the Eritrean National Salvation Front are fully engaged in the current resistance with full awareness of the internal and external conditions impacting the national efforts underway. In the context of these circumstances, hence, our outlook, which emanates from our national perspective, stands on the following postulations:

- 1. That Eritrea is a nation of religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity.**

- 2. That big gaps separate development levels of the various regions of the country, which can broadly be encapsulated in terms of the highlands and the lowlands.**
- 3. That Eritrea is still suffering from the legacy of colonial exploitation that has still been hindering the evolutionary process of its social and economic transformations, and hence, keeping our population in backwardness and poverty.**
- 4. That poor sedentary farmers, pastoral herdsmen, fishermen, semi-skilled work force constitute the majority of the population. The tens of thousands of the youth who are leaving the country to escape harsh economic and political conditions do hail from these socio-economic formations. At the same time, the civilian-military bureaucratic groups and their collaborators have been amassing wealth and propping up their political and social positions.**
- 5. That Eritrea lies in a strategic location, which while this has often fostered regional and international rivalries, it can also bestow on our nation significant role in the peace and security of the region, which could facilitate politico-economic cooperation among the countries of the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea basin.**

General principles

The Eritrean National Salvation Front:

- 1. Upholds that the State of Eritrea should be built on the principles of democracy, equality, social justice, national unity and peace.**
- 2. Believes that our citizens should, in the bosom of democracy, enjoy fully human, social, religious, intellectual and political rights. Only in a democratic environment can they make their creative contributions to rebuild what various foreign occupiers had destroyed, and the current dictatorship has been continuing; and in the process, they would enjoy the happiness that development and prosperity shall provide.**
- 3. Champions equality and abhors discrimination and injustice, and shall fight for equal opportunities among citizens irrespective of faith, gender, language or class. Firmly standing on this principle, therefore, the Salvation Front shall never spare an effort for ensuring fair sharing of power and wealth of the nation among all the national groups of our society.**
- 4. Social justice is the core concept in the vision of the Salvation Front. It emphatically asserts that this constitutes the key dynamic for extricating our citizens from the current poverty, ignorance and**

diseases, and helps our working people enjoy the fruits of their labor by freely utilizing their creative faculties to benefit from national and foreign capital investments within the framework of over all development of our national economy.

Our stand on the current regime

The regime has been throughout the past 18 years consolidating the pillars of the dictatorship. No constitution is there to define rights and obligations of citizens, nor is there safeguards to separate the powers of legislative, judicial and executive. Decrees and orders, which the dictator has arbitrarily been issuing from time to time, serve as the only references to his henchmen and repressive organs. Demands for basic freedoms to organize, express opinions and practice faiths are deemed to be felonies liable to punishment. The whole country has been turned to a big hellish prison. Tens of thousands of youth and able-bodied citizens are being forced to leave their country due to harsh political and economic conditions. Besides, the economy has been paralyzed and ruined due to deployment of the productive labor for indefinite military service as reserve forces for the senseless adventures of the dictator.

Struggling for democracy under such sad realities, the Eritrea National Salvation Front believes that its contradiction with the regime is primary since democracy and dictatorship cannot coexist. We shall, therefore, continue to struggle until the dictatorship will be toppled and replaced by legitimate democratic system of government. For that end, therefore, and without overlooking objective and subjective conditions that may obtain, we shall use all means necessary to get rid of the dictatorship.

Objectives

1. Politically:

- a. Preserving and defend sovereignty, territorial and demographic unity of the nation.**
- b. Establishing a democratic system that guarantees political pluralism, democratic rights, and that constitutionally enshrines elections as the only means for accession to power, and separates the legislative, judicial and executive branches of government.**

- c. Adopting a permanent constitution, which the people shall endorse in a free and transparent referendum.**
- d. Struggling to safeguard equality of all the national groups, and ensure that no group or groups shall dominate the rest.**
- e. A foreign policy anchored on promotion of democracy and peace, refrains from interference in the affairs of others, and strives for political and economic cooperation and integration with the neighboring states.**

2. On state administration:

- a. Clarity and transparency in the work of state institutions through monitoring agencies and robust civil society under guidelines enacted by the legislative branch of government, and that the media shall be entrusted as watchdog that puts facts in the public domain.**
- b. Adopting de-centralization to allow the regions to share power on the national level so that the injustices, which the diverse national groups have been suffering due to disproportionate development, shall be addressed.**

3. On relation of the state and religion:

- a. Religion shall be separated from political authority; and the moral and ethical values of all faiths shall be utilized.**
- b. All religions shall be equal before the law.**
- c. The state shall respect all faiths, refrain from interfering in their internal matters and shall be autonomous in running their internal affairs.**

4. On the economy:

The economic policies of our organization shall be committed to public and private sectors streamlined to modernize the national economy, and in which individual and entrepreneurial partnerships shall be central motivating elements. At the top of the priorities shall be providing for the basic needs of the overwhelming majority of our people and improvement of their standard of life. Within this context, therefore, the following measures shall have to be undertaken:

- 1. Adopting policies aimed at narrowing and eventually eliminating the existing disproportionate development between the provinces.**
- 2. Giving priority to infrastructures that provide for basic services such as shelter, clean water, health services, energy, transportation and other means of communication.**
- 3. Underscoring that land in Eritrea as governed by the various forms of customary laws is an inviolable property of its owners, the Salvation Front moreover underscores the need for a comprehensive study of the land tenure system as prelude to legislating land law that should not prejudice the social and historical relations of ownerships rights, national unity and judicious use of land in the general framework of broad economic strategy for national transformation.**
- 4. The state shall own not less than 51% of the capital, which companies may invest in the mining, gas and petroleum sectors.**

5. On official languages:

Whereas all the national languages are equal, Arabic and Tigrigna are the official languages in Eritrea. Since the Salvation Front is committed to this as mandatory national principle, it shall work with all the national forces to translate it on the ground as a concrete reality.

6. Right of nationalities, ethnic and other social groups

Departing from the mandatory national principles the Eritrean National Salvation Front upholds, we shall adopt de-centralized system of administration that shall rest on:

- 1. Guarantying equal rights and duties of all the social and national components and/or ethnic, linguistic and religious groups to ensure unity and stability of the nation.**
- 2. Guarantying that each of the social components of our society to have the right of managing the affairs of its own regions or locality.**
- 3. Guarantying just participation of all the social components of our society in all institutions of the state and administrative organs on the national level.**

- 4. Guarantying all social components to have the right to preserve their heritages, languages, cultures and things of importance to them.**
 - 5. Closing the existing development gab between regions and provinces with special focus on the least developed regions of the country.**
 - 6. Conviction that implementation of the measures enumerated above would strengthen the social bonds among the various social components, and therefore, reinforce national unity.**
- 7. The congress mandated the leadership to draw future plans in the spirit and substance of the principles enshrined in this political program in accordance with resources at its disposal and conditions that may obtain.**
- 8. The congress is the sole authority that can change this political program.**

-II-

Political Resolutions

- 1. The first congress of the Eritrea National Salvation Front resolved that land in Eritrea is the inalienable property of its owners that can neither be taken nor utilized without duly expressed will of its owner(s) or payment of fair compensation. The congress resolved that the land, which the regime had confiscated, must be returned to its rightful owners.**
- 2. The congress resolved that the former administrative divisions should have to be restored.**
- 3. Recognizing that the Eritrea Democratic Alliance is an inclusive umbrella of the Eritrean opposition forces, the congress stressed that its role should be enhanced to make it an indispensable factor that cannot be overlooked vis-à-vis the Eritrean affairs regionally and internationally. In conjunction with this, the congress underscored the importance of convening a national conference for democratic change.**
- 4. The congress mandated the political leadership to make maximum effort to draw the attention of states and humanitarian organizations to the plight of the Eritrean refugees.**
- 5. The congress condemned the regime's attempt to conceal the miserable economic conditions in our country, especially the hunger, which our people have been enduring. It demanded the international community to apply meaningful pressure on the regime to allow humanitarian organizations to work inside Eritrea.**
- 6. The congress condemned the repressive practices and policies of the regime, especially its policy of establishing demographic change through uprooting inhabitants from the highlands and settling them on land of others in the western lowlands adjacent to the Sudanese borders with the purpose of obliterating the features that distinguish the Eritrean national personality socially, culturally and religiously.**

- 7. The congress called on the Eritrea Defense Forces to abandon the regime and align themselves on the side of their people's struggle for freedom and democracy.**
- 8. The congress hailed the resilience of the popular resistance in the eastern regions of Eritrea and has called upon our people inside and outside to support it.**
- 9. The congress applauded the ongoing coordination of our organization with sister organizations in the Eritrea Democratic Alliance and recognized the importance of unifying all the military wings.**

-III-

Declaration

The first congress of the Eritrea National Salvation Front (ENSF) had convened from 15-21 October 2009. Held under the theme: "To build a dynamic organization that would play vanguard role in the struggle for the salvation of the people and the nation", delegates from branches worldwide, representatives of units of the salvation army as well as the political leadership took part in it.

The opening ceremony was witnessed by the representative of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and Chairman of the Secretariat of the Sana'a Cooperation Forum, the Head of the EDA Executive Bureau, representatives of sister opposition organizations and reporters from the Ethiopian and as well as from the EDA media outlets.

The Chairman of the Preparatory Committee welcomed the delegates and guests at the ceremony. He indicated the fact that the convening of congress on the date set for it was a formidable challenge in view of the internal circumstances through which the organization had been passing, and recognized that had it not been for the devotion and firm support of the grassroots the convening of the congress on time would not have been possible.

Next, the Chairman of the Executive Body of the Salvation Front also applauded with appreciation the bases for their moral and material support. Moreover, besides discussing the current abnormal political conditions inside the homeland, he underscored the importance of reinforcing the struggle for saving our people from the dictatorial regime.

The invited guests also addressed the delegates in succession. The representative of the Ethiopian Government and Chairman of the Secretariat of the Sa'ana Cooperation Forum saluted the congress and emphasized his country's firm stand on the side of the Eritrean people's legitimate struggle for democracy. Moreover, the Chairman of the EDA Executive Bureau as well as the representatives of sister organizations took up the podium to express their felicitation and goodwill for the success of the congress.

Initiated by sense of national and organizational responsibility, the congress had at the first plenary session of its work formed a committee to talk to individuals who refrained from taking part in the congress and to persuade them to change their decision. However, they obdurately insisted on their position. Hence, the congress denounced some elements among them who had attempted to disrupt security of the organization and the public order of the host country.

The congress heard and thoroughly evaluated all reports presented to it by the various offices of the out going Executive Body, and judged that there had been shortcomings and loopholes in several areas in their performances on both organizational and political levels. Meanwhile, the congress hailed the heroism the armed units of Salvation Front Army registered in the recent past in confrontations with the security agencies of the dictatorial regime. The congress also praised the operational cooperation with Democratic Organization of Red Sea Afar in particulars, and coordination with the military wings of most of the Eritrean opposition organizations in general; and had called for their expansion and upgrading.

With high recognition, the congress applauded the dedication and role of the Salvation Front bases worldwide for their moral and material support that enabled their organization to overcome all hurdles on the way of convening the congress. The congress acknowledged the commitment of the bases did surprise observers who have been watching the course through which the organization has been transiting during the past three years.

The congress established that the regime is in its weakest state of condition, especially in the area of the economy, security and regional and international relations. It denounced the regime's oppressive policies and practices against our people, particularly its policy of demographic change which the regime has been executing by moving inhabitants from the highlands and settling them on the land of others in the western lowlands adjacent to the borders with the Sudan with the aim of suppressing and eventually erasing the marks that define the Eritrean national personality socially, culturally and religiously through a strategy of uprooting and supplanting in order to engineer a society with new traits on the ruins of the peculiarities which the components of the Eritrean society have inherited since ancient times. The congress condemned the grabbing of land belonging to others and owning it to new settlers. In this regard, the congress firmly resolved that land in Eritrea is by right the property of its

owners and that no one has the right to utilize it without their duly expressed will. Accordingly, the congress demanded that land taken by regime from its owners must be given back to the rightful owners. Similarly also the congress demanded the restoration of the previous provincial divisions.

In regard to the opposition forces, the congress believed the drawbacks that accompanied its existence notwithstanding, the EDA is an important national political umbrella. It stressed that it is incumbent on all stakeholders to work towards transforming its role on all spheres of activity. The congress underlined that the planned national conference for democratic change is a crucial indicator for which serious efforts should be made in order that the Democratic Alliance could count as an indispensable factor that cannot be ignored when Eritrea's affairs dealt with in the regional and international arena. However, the congress believed that this would not happen unless the existing shortcomings are properly corrected, and the performance of the Alliance improved on all spheres of activity so that the way could be opened for the people who have the best interest in the change for democracy to rally behind it.

The congress posed long on the sad conditions under which the refugees have been living in Ethiopia and the Sudan with due attention on the suffering of the youth who have been escaping from so called national service in search of security. In this regard, the congress expressed gratitude to Ethiopia and the Sudan for hosting the refugees and reducing their suffering, especially the Sudan, which embraced the Eritrean refugees for half a century. The congress recommended that the political leadership should pay extra attention to the problems of the refugees on the highest level through contact with relevant states and organizations. The congress also called upon humanitarian organizations to be cautious in channeling aid through the dictatorial regime, which habitually uses it for sustaining its despotic.

The congress saluted the steadfastness our people have been demonstrating inside the homeland despite the ordeals and extreme crisis situation they have been enduring. Moreover, it underlined the importance of supporting with all available means the popular resistance that has recently erupted in the eastern regions of the country, and which could probably engulf wider areas of the nation soon.

The congress called on the international community and humanitarian organizations to provide crucial food aid to our people inside Eritrea in view of (other than the repressive practices of the regime) the shortages and the real hunger that is worsening by the day due to draught conditions that hit the larger African Horn in the past few years as expert reports have acknowledged. The congress has condemned the regime for refusing to allow humanitarian aid workers, and appealed to the international community to put pressure on it to open the way for them to operate inside and help our people.

With high consideration, the congress thanked all those who have made contributions in one form or another to remove difficulties on the way of convening the congress as planned, particularly the Government and people of Ethiopia for their support to host it. The congress expressed moreover gratitude to members and friends – nationals or non-nationals- for sending solidarity messages in writing or otherwise.

The congress appealed to the fraternal people of Somalia to stop internal fighting and resolve their differences in peaceful way in order that the Somalis could enjoy security and stability of which they have been denied for two decades.

The congress also reiterated its stand on the side of the right of the people of Palestine to establish their independent state on their own land side by side with the state of Israel, at the same time expressing solidarity with all oppressed peoples around the globe.

The congress approved the political program, the basic organizational statute as well as an interim task program, in addition to important political resolutions and recommendations. The congress ended its work after electing a new political leadership democratically and authorized it to lead the organization up to the next the congress.

***Victory to democracy and justice!
Death to the dictatorship!
Eternal glory to our martyrs!***

***The first congress of the Eritrea
National Salvation Front,
21 October 2009
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.***