

Eritrean Movement for Democratic Governance (EMDG)
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Eritrean Movement for Democratic Governance (EMDG)

Political Statement and Program

In the present situation of global economic downturn, it is an inescapable truth that our country, Eritrea, is sinking deeper into economic devastation than other nations. Despite our long struggle and perseverance against a number of historical challenges, the Eritrean people have never been faced with such dire political, social, cultural, and economic suffering as we are currently facing under the PFDJ regime. We, the members of Eritrean Movement for Democratic Governance (EMDG), firmly believe that the only remaining option capable of restoring our people's freedom and dignity is that of a conscious, determined, and united fight against the PFDJ-led dictatorship of the government in Eritrea today.

Dictators, regardless of their country of origin, share one common characteristic of creating a system which disregards and often stifles the interests of the people, while at the same time promoting personal and/or party interests. No matter their national background, all dictators play by the same rules, imposing the relationship of oppressor and oppressed within their own nation rather than founding a relationship of peace and prosperity based on shared democratic culture and socio-economic progress and equality. The PFDJ regime turned the national victory of our people into a tragedy. There is nothing to distinguish the PFDJ regime from any other dictatorship that unexpectedly turns a people's victory into such a tragedy. We Eritreans, who gave our all for peace and prosperity, have become victims of poverty, torture, and exile under such inhumane conditions.

In the name of national service (Warsay Yikealo Project), the PFDJ regime is exploiting the labor of our people, turning our nation into a prison and our people into forced laborers. The diverse talents of the Eritrean people, including our scientists and intellectuals, who were supposed to be employed to rebuild a nation, are instead used to disseminate propaganda for the regime in a perpetual effort to prolong their rule. Thus, the present and future generations of our Eritrean nation are deprived of a thriving country and culture and are instead flung toward an unknown destiny.

While history is always a combination of positive and negative human accomplishments, today's generation witnesses only the negative; they know first-hand the travesty being perpetrated against our nation and society by the PFDJ. Eritrea and its people are alienated from every regional and international relationship. The regime has become a hindrance in our path to progress by destroying every attempt at political, economic, and social cooperation we attempt to

establish with our neighbors and the international community. These types of obstacles are forcing Eritreans to seek a way to rescue the sinking ship that is our nation. As we all ought to know from our past responses to foreign invaders attempting to squash our independence, we must get organized and take action. But this time against our own devil! “There is no revolution without organization!”

The example of the Eritrean revolution provides us with a crucial point of reference assuring us that our people will not remain confused about the nature of our enemy forever. There is a time to retreat from deceptive enemies and a time to stand up and expose and challenge them. It is only because we never resolved the issue of the absence of a unified organization—one committed to the downfall of the PFDJ dictatorial regime—that the potential of our people remains thwarted. Our movement is devoted to, not only, shedding light on this unresolved issue, but we are also ready to contribute to any collaborative effort aimed at establishing such an organization.

The opposition camp in general and the Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA) in particular are claiming to be genuine alternatives to the current regime in Eritrea. The question is: how effective are they really in opposing the oppressor’s state machinery? No dictatorial system is ever destroyed simply because a number of organizations oppose it. Uncoordinated groups of opposition forces with no central command will never carry the opposition to victory. A strategy alone without the necessary tactics frustrates the attempt to achieve the goal or the objective of the opposition. EDA, a stagnant umbrella of more than a dozen organizations, did not grow for years and failed to think along fresh lines. This is the basic deficiency of the opposition that needs urgent fixing or we will miss a critical opportunity to bring about change in Eritrea. Bringing this present situation to the forefront of public awareness is also the central concern of our movement’s objectives.

It is our belief that the strength of the Eritrean people can only be effective if there is a clear philosophical understanding of the nature of the dictatorial system, and if the people are organized under a clear political vision. It is in this preparedness that we can attract meaningful support from our neighbors and the international community. Any support obtained at the level of individual organizations will only serve to satisfy the goals of that particular organization.

The opposition camp, specifically EDA, remains incapable of resolving the question of organization in the manner we stated above and therefore provokes us to reorganize our movement in order to stay focused on the means of instituting a workable strategy. There is no path to follow when no one is leading. EDA is composed of various organizations with different understandings on how to dismantle the regime in Eritrea. Those who put forth peaceful means of struggle as their roadmap are on the verge of consolidating their positions. Others who think that the armed struggle is the only viable method are unaware of how much their disunity can put us in harm’s way. After analyzing the ineffectiveness of these consistently failing strategies, we are obliged to reveal our movement’s fundamental belief: only an armed struggle can succeed in bringing down the oppressive rule of PFDJ in Eritrea. However, it is also our contention that those already existing armed opposition forces must be organized under a structured central command.

Our movement is made up of individuals who have fought for—literally in terms of the struggle for independence—and continue to fight to improve the situation in Eritrea by urging the institution of a democratic government. These individuals have a wealth of experience and are gathered from a number of different organizations. This movement is not a spontaneous phenomenon, and as such, has grown over time to reach this founding platform.

Some barriers to forming a genuine organization:

- Our inability to comprehend our religious and ethnic diversity in relation to our national unity, emphasizing on the individual rights to practice our faith and identify ourselves with our ethnic heritage resulted in little attention being paid to our primary common goal of dismantling the regime hence causing setbacks in our struggle.
- Our inability to assess and evaluate the outcome of our revolutionary struggle in depth, and failure to put our ethnic diversity into perspective, often not spending enough effort to study the demands and interests of our diverse ethnic entities.
- Our unawareness—that the independence achieved is the sum of our positive achievements and negative drawbacks in the lifetime of our revolutionary struggle, often forgetting that the gains and setbacks from the beginning to the end is our history to be shared; Sticking to the old divisive philosophy of the liberation fronts-ELF and EPLF.
- Our inability to challenge PFDJ's divisive intrigues introduced in to the daily lives of our people including the ranks of the opposition camp, focusing on our differences instead of our commonalities hence weakening our efforts.
- The narrow nationalism inhibiting our judgment to reach an objective assessment of the regime's antagonistic behavior towards our neighboring countries has been a distraction. Our reluctance to voice strong opposition to the border-conflict schemes that have been carried out by the PFDJ dictatorial regime was a critical obstacle to our ability to advance our struggle for democratic change.
- Failure to reassure our people in preparing them for “change” as a result of our own doubts about the effectiveness of the opposition camp.
- In general, the uneven understanding and confusion of the nature of dictatorship, its growth and development and its consequences among the opposition camp, leading to confusion, and engagement in a lengthy unnecessary debate of determining to change the regime by peaceful means or armed struggle lead to pessimism and hopelessness.

Considering the factors stated above, the opposition camp requires a centrifugal shakeup to create a new momentum, alter the whole traditional practice, and join forces to form a powerful organization with a clear vision of how to obtain the desired result that can rescue our nation from disaster: regime change in Eritrea. Our past experiences should not inhibit us in our future actions. Let us beware, that the options left in front of us are to resolutely change the approach of our opposition to the PFDJ regime or conclude in a political captivity of death.

Our movement prefers not to be deterred by “fear of the unknown” and is determined to continue the journey of our struggle in a new organizational mode. This kind of organization will be no one's monopoly and is open to participation of all concerned individuals and groups of the opposition camp. We therefore call on everyone to join hands in this long overdue national imperative.

Concluding Statements: Our task at hand focuses on the areas where most of the opposition organizations failed to act decisively.

- Our main objective is to bring fundamental change to Eritrea by uprooting (eradicating) the current totalitarian system and replacing it with a democratic system governed by the rule of law and will of the people. This goal can only be achieved by laying down a clear strategy and tactics. Eritrean forces with a common goal of removing the regime using military force need to organize a well-trained army under a unified central command to fulfill our common objective.
- We call on all opposition groups to courageously address and tackle all political, socioeconomic and cultural differences and play positive roles in resolving them or debate them by setting clear platforms to narrow down differences.
- We are opposed to the opposition camp's uncoordinated military operations currently being waged by the armed organizations, or by organizations who now claim peaceful means but possess the potential to develop an armed wing in the future when situations change. This kind of decentralized military approach will not be effective in bringing about democratic change; in fact, it is reminiscent of warlordism, which if realized would eventually threaten the future of Eritrea.

On the question of religious and ethnic rights: Freedom of religion is a basic human right which has to be guaranteed by the constitution. Ethnic and religious rights must be seen within the context of our strategic objective. A nation with no democratic institutions cannot accommodate issues of ethnic or religious rights; Let alone these rights, but the basic right to move freely within one's daily life is not even guaranteed. Our movement, in principle, agrees that such rights must be constitutionally guaranteed, and we acknowledge and respect the rights of the individual organizations who are raising these issues. The implementation of these rights requires a discussion in the post-PFDJ national sphere, but at this point in time we must focus on our commonalities of abolishing the dictatorial regime. While ethnic and religious oppression exist within one society, people cannot live in peace and claim that they have a democratic nation.

On the question of governance: We believe that the historical "*Higi Adi's*" (Village law) and regional borders of "*Awraja*" administration, designed to ensure land ownership reflecting our traditional socio-economic structure, must be reinstated. We are of the opinion that forms of decentralized government be researched for the future of Eritrea. There could be several proposals on the table, and we are prepared to discuss them all with the Eritrean people and reach an agreement through a democratic congress of the Eritrean people. Our job at this point is to propose our respective visions of what this decentralized government will look like. After which we should leave the decision to the Eritrean people.

On the question of land ownership: The dominant economic activity of our society depends on land. Land monopoly by the state was brought about by PFDJ and must be abolished with the demise of the regime. All land appropriations by the regime are illegal and must not be

validated. Any land previously owned by the villages (*aditat*) or legally acquired by private owners must be returned to the villages (*aditat*) and the private owners. We strongly condemn PFDJ's policies of unlawful resettlement designed to create conflicts, disrupt lives and people's unity. At the same time, we call our people to consciously challenge the PFDJ regime by respecting each other's longstanding tradition of peaceful coexistence and oppose the divisive policies of the regime.

The role of the Government: The role of government in a democratic Eritrea will be to provide national security, manage national resources, and distribute those resources fairly and equitably to the administrative regions in accordance with scientific studies and guidelines set forth by the House of Representatives. The government must lay an extensive plan to exploit the pastoral resources of the nation.

On the question of sovereignty: The Eritrean people built their nation as a result of years of struggle and the ultimate sacrifice of our martyrs. The sovereign nation's land, sea, and air space will be eternally protected. A democratic Eritrea will be committed to peaceful approaches to conflict resolution in sovereignty issues with all neighboring nations. In addition, Eritrea will respect and obey all international laws that have been established for common interest of nations.

On the question of women: We are strong believers that no nation can have full-fledged progress without the participation of women in all sectors of national activity, and we will actively encourage women's involvement.

On the question of the youth: The youth are the guarantors of the country's future, and modern democratic transformation cannot take place without them. Our movement calls upon their full participation in the struggle against the dictatorial regime.

On the question of refugees: The PFDJ regime has suffocated the whole nation of Eritrea and left our society nearly lifeless. People are forced to flee their beloved country and families to unknown destinations—where life is uncertain—often resulting in the loss of life. Our movement will fight steadfastly to reverse this situation, and make sure that Eritrean refugees have the opportunity to return to a peaceful homeland and become full participants in their nation's democratic reconstruction. We hail the role of the Eritrean refugees during the liberation, we sympathize with the miserable life they're enduring at the refugee camps, and call on the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other nongovernmental organizations to extend their hands in providing them with assistance to sustain the basic standard of life.

On the question of Eritrean Defense Forces under the PFDJ regime: It is unquestionable that the Eritrean Defense Forces are part and parcel of the PFDJ state machinery. It is also understood that the military does not operate under a ratified constitution, and they answer to the regime—not the people. This being the case, reality also tells us that the soldiers in the Eritrean Defense Forces are recruited by coercion and have no rights at all. Our movement recognizes the situation and will work hard to convey the truth of the situation to the Eritrean Defense Forces so that we gain their support. On the other hand, those high ranking officers of the military and members of the PFDJ leadership, who have been instruments of the regime, will be brought to justice.

On the question of headquarters/base: Our designated headquarters is our beloved homeland. But, depending on security circumstances, we will have no prejudice to locations which do not undermine or contradict our declared objectives.

On the peaceful means of struggle: We stand and believe firmly that the PFDJ regime is undemocratic and constitutes a dictatorship. Such a regime, with its systemic failures, is not open to dialogue or any peaceful means of negotiation. Our movement is in search of a peaceful means of struggle, but at the same time, we are cognizant of the reality that the only option left for our people is to rise up with arms and free ourselves from PFDJ oppression.

On the opposition groups who believe in peaceful means of struggle: Our movement does not harbor any animosity towards opposition organizations that believe the PFDJ regime can be removed through peaceful means. The fact that these groups have chosen to oppose the dictatorship means that they are on the side of the Eritrean people. As long as “peaceful means” does not mean collaboration with the regime, we are open to forging a unified opposition. In truth, a formidable joint opposition is the missing piece in the puzzle, and unifying Eritrean opposition forces is our fundamental aim.

Regional Integration/Cooperation: Regional cooperation among concerned parties in the region in various spheres of political, social, economic and security institutions should be a contract of mutual understanding between the people of the nations involved. However, our movement foresees that such plans are only feasible when a nation is healthy and free from brutal dictatorship. A nation in darkness, a society that is deprived of its rights is not capable of entertaining such notions. Therefore, at this moment, our movement is not ready to address such abstract, multi-lateral arrangements.

On the proposal of government in exile: Even though a government-in-exile can be declared, the facts on the ground always affect the implementation of any such proposal. In the case of Eritrea, this is not feasible because the groundwork—necessary for such a plan to be successful—is not in place. Our opposition has to establish enough diplomatic connections and gain the confidence of the international community as a serious alternative to the current government, in order to receive their support and cooperation. It has to earn the respect and esteem of both regional and broader allies, which is a first step towards obtaining legitimacy. Our movement’s stand on this matter is that the Eritrean opposition needs to mature before shouldering such a responsibility.

On national reconciliation: National reconciliation does not mean bringing together political leaders. National reconciliation is a wider citizen-participatory process which is critical to our move towards democratic change. We must also be aware that leaders coming from conflicting political backgrounds could reach a consensus amongst themselves in the name of reconciliation. If there is no citizen-wide involvement in the process, there will be no checks and balances for these leaders, who could themselves evolve into oppressors. On the other hand, we must promote a genuine reconciliation that benefits our people. National reconciliation will focus on the inclusiveness of all citizens of the nation in accessing the opportunities of political empowerment and social advancement. Health, educational, and employment opportunities will be made

equally accessible to all citizens without discrimination or prejudice based on class, ethnicity, religion, or gender. In addition, the political power sharing must satisfy every citizen's desire to be represented in their government. At the deeper level, a democratic culture should flourish and be reflected in the freedom of expression of the individual in all areas of life—including in the media and literary spheres.

On matters of military intervention: Our movement firmly opposes foreign unilateral military intervention in Eritrea or any other place for that matter. We do not accept transplanting democracy by this type of military intervention. However this should not be confused with material and training assistance that may be received to support our political programs and principles. We say that the fruits of democracy need to be harvested from a tree that grows in the native soil when it comes to changing one's government.

POLITICAL PROGRAM

Nomenclature: Eritrean Movement for Democratic Governance (EMDG)

Logo: to be determined

Organ/ Website- "Teleaal.com": "ተላላል.ኮም" : "انتفاض"

Our goal: Our main goal is to preserve the Eritrean sovereignty that grew and became reality through the sacrifices of our martyrs. To maintain this national pride from generation to generation, our immediate challenge is to get rid of the tyranny of the PFDJ regime. A regime that forced our youth into endless national service and exile, violated our people's dignity, disregarded the fact the country's sovereignty was earned at the expense of precious lives, eroded our people's values and culture of respect, and put our infant nation in danger in exchange for a selfish and irresponsible grip on power must be uprooted and replaced by a constitutional democratic system. Our goal will be to ensure the establishment of a multi-party system based on democratic principles and institutions abiding by the country's constitution.

Democracy: Our understanding of democracy is based on the belief that the majority rule also signifies an inclusion of the interests of the minority. The resulting government is accountable to all citizens, and not merely to party interests.

Democratic obligations:

- Abiding by the power of majority under the rule of law
- Accepting decisions passed by majority vote
- Observance of peaceful elections and transfer of power
- Overall respect and loyalty to the nation's constitution

Democratic rights:

- Freedom of demonstration and civic protest
- Freedom of speech and expression
- Freedom of movement

- Freedom of employment
- Freedom of religious worship
- Freedom of assembly
- The right to vote
- The right to legal justice
- The right to gender equality
- The right to work and own property
- The right of free press; the Eritrean constitution will not allow media monopoly by the state.

Judicial System: We strongly believe and struggle to establish an independent judicial system free of influence by any branch of government.

The right of ethnic groups: Eritrea is a multi-ethnic country. We believe in the equality and rights of every section of the society to live in peace and harmony. This means that we believe in equal distribution of resources, including political power. Distribution of national wealth will have to be executed proportionally to the needs of all ethnic groups. The specific demands of ethnic groups will be resolved through democratic processes administered by the democratically elected members of the Legislative Assembly of the future democratic state of Eritrea.

The right of religious belief: Government intervention in religious belief and worship is a violation of human rights and will be considered unconstitutional.

Economic affairs:

- All national and public properties confiscated by the present PFDJ regime will be reclaimed by the nation and the public. Unfortunate consequences of the current policy will be subject to compensation and adjustment by lawmakers of the nation
- Eritrean economic policy will be open to free market competition, guarded by legislated regulation where necessary. In addition government guarantees foreign investment agreements between nations and international corporations.
- Investments by citizens will be encouraged. The Eritrean state will demand environmentally safe investments and working conditions
- Progressive tax will be imposed depending on income ceilings
- Researched investments for mutual benefit of foreign capital will be encouraged

Social affairs: To ensure democratic progress, at least the following institutions need to be established:

- Educational Institutions
- Employment and Retirement insurance
- Pension System
- Veteran's Affairs
- Governmental and non-governmental organizations to support public needs
- Public and private health institutions
- Sports and cultural centers

- Women and youth rehabilitation and support centers
- Child support centers
- Trade unions, etc...

National security affairs: To guarantee public safety and develop confidence in the police and the army, the Eritrean state will set up educational requirements in addition to further arrangements of professional training. The following will form the pillars of our national security.

- Police
- Military
- National Reserve Forces
- Productive national service units

Foreign policy: In our contemporary global economy, no nation can stand and develop independent of regional and international cooperation. The Eritrean nation will be committed to laying all necessary political, social and economic foundations for cooperation based on a broad understanding of global affairs. Thus, we will develop:

- A policy of non-intervention that promotes relations of respect and peaceful co-operation between nations
- Respect international treaties and institutions that Eritrea is signatory to.

N.B.: The program of our movement (EMDG) is summarized above. We recognize that there will be no easy way or short cuts to achieve our objectives. However, it is our unwavering belief that only the power of the Eritrean people will make the difference. We also believe that our movement is an essential instrument in bringing about the change stated in our political vision and program. On this day, we call upon all concerned Eritreans to come together and join hands for democratic change. We welcome others to join our movement, and our program is flexible enough to accommodate broader concerns.

Victory to Democratic Governance!
Eritrean Movement for Democratic Governance (EMDG)
May 8-10, 2009