

## **Mejlis Ibrahim Mukhtar First Public Call for Input**

At the outset, we would like express our utmost appreciation for the public and private support we received from all Eritreans. We are very pleased to note that the Eritrean Covenant's general message has been well received in the same spirit it was written. We believe it has ushered a new level of public discourse and elevated the debate to a more substantive level, a positive development we welcome with great enthusiasm. We are particularly appreciative of the many words of encouragement, comments, feedbacks and questions that we have received. The outpour of support propels us to press on harder in the quest for the common good of Eritreans.

One of the recurring feedbacks we received suggested that we produce a documented study that elaborates on the many topics we touched on in the Covenant. We gladly oblige to do so in this first of a series of public calls for papers and contributions on the topics suggested below. Once again, we take this challenge to offer a vision that promotes the welfare of all Eritreans by first establishing the relevant facts, offering analysis, and then provide possible solutions that would move us forward towards achieving our shared goals.

To do so, we are adopting the true and tried approach that we followed in producing the Eritrean Covenant: soliciting inputs, authoring and publishing the study to make it publicly owned.

We strongly believe that this approach helps people focus on the issues instead on personalities and allows them to make judgments solely based on the facts. Therefore, we kindly invite you to be a contributing partner by sending us your comments, views, anecdotes, references, statistics, scholarly papers or even views. We will synthesize the inputs and formalize it in a single paper to be owned by the public and be referenced by any entity that concerns itself with Eritreans and their country. To live up to the faith bestowed on us, we will consider both prevailing and dissenting views for inclusion in the document.

In order to streamline the integration of the contributions that we anticipate to receive, we have laid an outline of suggested topics for you to comment on. Please follow the section headings. If your contribution does not fall under any of the suggested headings, please feel free to create new ones and add them at the end of the list. If you have nothing to add on a particular section, just skip it.

In order to have ample time to prepare a worthy paper, we would appreciate it if you could kindly send your contributions by June 30, 2010 to the email address below. We also suggest, as we have found it to be very helpful for us, that you analyze these issues and brainstorm for possible solutions in small groups in your respective communities and social circles. We believe your participation is important as these issues are too important and too complex to be left to politicians alone.

As you provide your input, please give extra emphasis on the role of women and the means of affirming their rights in all the topics and subtitles below.

Address: [EritreanCovenant@gmail.com](mailto:EritreanCovenant@gmail.com)

**Key Time Line:**

June 7, 2010: First of a series of calls for papers and participations.

June 30, 2010: Deadline for input submission.

July 7, 2010: First draft circulated for review and comments.

July 15, 2010: Release date of final version.

**Suggested Topics**

**I. Understanding the Nature of the PFDJ regime.**

This section will expound on the analysis presented in the Eritrean Covenant to provide specific details on the following topics:

1. General characterization of the ethnocratic regime (historical background and current reality).
2. The regime's relationships: a) internally, b) regionally, and c) internationally.
3. The regime military adventure in Ethiopia, Sudan, Yemen, Djibouti, and Somalia.
4. Political ramifications: failing to establish justice, stability and an inclusive political system.
5. Threat to national unity and peaceful coexistence among all religious and ethnic groups.
6. Social ramifications: failing to remedy social tensions and militarization of the society (slave labor, dismantling the family unit, failing to facilitate the return of refugees and increasing it, etc).
7. Economic ramifications: destroying & excluding the private sector and monopolizing resources.
8. Any positive aspects/accomplishments of the PFDJ regime? What does it really stand for? Has the interest of the PFDJ and its power base completely diverged from the national interest?
9. Who are the social and economic beneficiaries of the regime? Who are these Individuals and groups?
10. What is the composition, military readiness, and morale of the Eritrean defense forces? Would/could its rank and file play a role in effecting/opposing/facilitating democratic change?
11. What is the regime's strategy for sustaining itself? How far will it go to hold its grip on power? Will it retreat to Sahel? Will it have national followings? Could it resume guerilla warfare to regain power in the event it is ousted from power? Is the regime capable and willing to ignite and wage a civil war to regain power?

**Objectives:** A clear understanding of the regime, its practice, roles, relevance, policies, self-perception, and prospect for its survival.

**II. Strengthening the Opposition Umbrella**

This section will detail what have been the experiences of the Eritrean people pre 2001 resistance and the post 2001 opposition to PFDJ regime.

1. Historical background of political organizations in Eritrea.
2. Which ones are resisting and which ones are opposing the regime?
3. Which ones have armed resistance wings?
4. What are their stated goals and vision for the future?
5. Which ones oppose only Issias and not PFDJ?
6. What is best estimate of their membership numbers and compositions?
7. Who are their leadership and the roles they played?
8. Where does the leadership reside and what are the sources of its funding?
9. Negative/positive historical luggage.
10. What are the views on different trends within the opposition camp?
11. What are the main converging and diverging issues on how to bring about change?
12. What are the priorities of the most pressing issues that need to be resolved immediately? Post Issias-regime? Assuming the PFDJ regime survives after Isaias is gone, how will this priority change?
13. Resistance/opposition groups views on foreign forces militarily removing the PFDJ regime.
14. Change effected and managed by NGO's and other interest groups.
15. Political and social problems hindering the formation of a robust resistance organization.
16. The formation and characterization of the EDA and its current status. Its shortcomings and challenges
17. Analysis of the components of the EDA.
18. Reasons and excuses for joining and not joining the EDA?
19. What are the incentives/disincentives of joining and subscribing to the EDA?
20. What are available resources that have not been tapped to strengthen EDA?
21. What interests are campaigning to undermine EDA?

**Objectives:** A clear understanding of the resistance and opposition groups and what had transpired in the last 19 years of resisting and opposing the PFDJ regime. What are the lessons that need to be learned and unlearned?

### **III: Towards Affirming Eritrea's Independence and Unity**

This section will envision the way forward towards asserting Eritrea's right to exist as a strong, stable, and independent state while achieving justice, peace, and equality for all of its citizens. Though it is impossible to guess how and when change will occur in Eritrea, we believe the situation is ripe for certain change. Therefore, we will assume several plausible scenarios, identify and recommend the path of least resistance for change. Further, we also seek to identify what should be the appropriate responsive measures in the event that any of these eventualities materializes. We also believe there should be a transitional authority consisting of legislative and executive caretaker body mandated to manage the change with the aim of making it a smooth transition. With that in mind, we pose the following questions.

#### **A. Effecting Change**

1. Under what scenarios will the regime collapse/implode or be forcibly removed?
2. How should the pro-change forces lead the struggle in hastening the downfall of the regime?
3. What tactics and strategies should pro-change forces utilize to achieve their goals?

4. How should the pro-change forces be prepared for the eventuality of the regime in Asmara collapsing?
5. What are the leadership qualities needed to effect change?
6. Should it negotiate with the regime? With Issias? With some elements in the regime now or after the removal of Isaias?
7. How can any change have a national face without losing the diversity of the Eritrean society?
8. How should the military wings be structured (what is defensive and offensive strategies?) Under what rules of engagement should they operate? Which targets should be off limits?
9. How should the interest of regional and international powers be leveraged in the interest of the Eritrean people.
10. Who are the mining companies currently operating in Eritrea? What should be done with them now and post-PFDJ period? Is there a risk that their facilities and physical assets would be considered an acceptable and necessary military target?
11. What are the steps the umbrella needs to take to dispel the misperception that post Isaias regime will be chaotic.

## **B. Resistance/Opposition Umbrella**

1. What is the expected/unexpected outcome of the National Conference?
2. What are the ramifications of some groups not participating or boycotting the national Conference?
3. What strategic resisting changes should be made after the National Conference?
4. How should representation be decided (big organization versus small—how do you determine and achieve diversity, etc)
5. How should the umbrella fully represent and include all stakeholders in order to bring everyone under the tent?
6. How could the squabbles and negative competition among member organization be minimized?
7. What should be the conflict resolution mechanism to mediate on disputes within the resistance camp? Should this be the role of Eritrean elderly and religious leaders? How could it be structured?
8. What should be the parameters under which the umbrella operates in relation with the Ethiopia, Sudan, and Yemen?
9. Views and formal position on the internal matters of: Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Djibouti and Yemen.
10. General views on the roles of regional and international powers in Eritrean affairs.

## **C. Role of Civil Societies and Media Outlets:**

1. What is the operational definition of a Civil Society that would qualify it to be part of the political process?
  - a. How could the membership roster of organizations be audited while safeguarding the privacy of its members.
  - b. Transparency of organizational structure.
  - c. Auditing of financial statement for greater disclosure of funding sources and expenditures.
  - d. How to reconcile/challenge the stated goals vs. actual goals?

2. How should opposition media be included (or what is its role) in the umbrella? Which ones are considered opposition media?

#### **D. Transitional Authority**

1. How should it be formed? What should be the mandates, roles, and duration of the proposed transitional authority?
2. How soon should it call for regional and national elections?
3. What must be the rules and regulations that should govern political parties now and in the future?
4. What are the checks and balances that would ensure national unity and harmonious coexistence between Christians and Muslims and all ethnic groups?
5. What about ethnic group rights?
6. Should it start drafting a new constitution? Amend or/and merge the 1997 and 1952 constitution?
7. What steps should be taken to ensure the protection of civil and human rights of Eritrean during the transition period?
8. How and when should it start dismantling the ethnocratic state apparatus and lay the foundation for a national unity government?

**Objectives:** Articulate the vision, strategy, and leadership competence required to effect change in such a manner that would ease the expected concerns and anxieties of Eritreans in anticipating change that, because of inherent uncertainty, is unsettling.

#### **IV. Solving the Refugees Problems**

This section will discuss how to alleviate the sufferings of and ultimately solve the refugees problems – both the long forgotten ones and the ones that no one is paying enough attention to.

1. Description of a refugee: old and new, distinction between economic and political refugees, internal displacement, exiled, deported, etc.
2. Historical facts about Eritrean refugees. Their number and geographical distribution (age, gender and other relevant stats)
3. The roles, attitudes, policies, practice of
  - a. United Nations and other International Organizations.
  - b. Host countries: Sudan, Ethiopia and Yemen.
  - c. Eritrean Government
  - d. Role of profiteering groups (researchers, refugee issues centered careerist, academics, Eritreans employed at the UN, NGO, civil societies, human rights, some in the groups) in creating an apathy towards Eritrean refugees in Sudan.
  - e. Individuals, organizations governments that benefit by the current status of the refugees.
4. Where do refugee issues rank in priorities among the different oppositions group?
5. The case for and against refugees being re-victimized by demographics politics of the ethnocratic regime of PFDJ and its polices.
6. Legal status of refugees as of now, their rights, and obligations in the host countries.
7. Resettlement projects, their fairness, pros and cons and role of Western countries, NGO in their selection criteria of resettling refugees in the West.

8. Who helps them now? Why some refugees are helped more than others? Does their identity matters in getting help?
9. The political clout and undue influence of refugees/transnational/Diaspora communities. How does the demographics shape their outlook and indifference towards others?
10. Why Eritrean individuals, civil societies, human rights group in the West are indifferent towards Eritrean refugees in Sudan while advocating for rights of new refugees.
11. Analysis of Diaspora roles in the politics and economic developments of Eritrea.
12. Repatriation obstacles, real and perceived.
13. How to restore refugees' legal status.
14. Lobbying UNHCR to increase its budget for Eritrean refugees.
15. How to encourage researchers, academics, and policy makers to come up with ways of assisting refugees.
16. How to coordinate tasks of existing refugee centered associations, help them raise funds, and provide them get resources to help all refugees.

**Objectives:** Provide a clear understanding in a manner that would increase public awareness of the plight of all Eritrean refugees and alleviate their suffering until the time comes when they will be able to home.