

**Proposal for forming legitimately elected representative of Diaspora
Eritreans**

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A. Introduction

In presenting this proposal, the aim is to: (a) underscore the need to form legitimate global representatives of pro-democracy, justice-seeking Eritreans in Diaspora , which we have tentatively called, the Eritrean National Congress (ENC), akin to Government in Exile, (b) present a mechanism on how to form the ENC in an expeditious manner, (c) outline the charges and the responsibilities of the ENC, (d) suggest the structure of the ENC, and (e) summary and conclusion.

B. The need for legitimate representatives of pro-democracy Eritreans in Diaspora – the ENC.

Pro-democracy Eritreans in Diaspora have demonstrated their interest in ending the illegal tenure of the dictatorial regime that has committed heinous crimes and is now threatening the sovereignty of our country. Unfortunately, so far, Eritreans in Diaspora have been operating in a fragmented manner that proved to be ineffective to save our people and our country. This fragmentation has to end. We need to unite and elect global representatives if we are going to make a meaningful contribution to ending dictatorship and transform Eritrea into a democratic country. The removal of the dictatorial regime and its replacement with a democratically elected government will usher a new era for the Eritrean people to live in peace and focus their energy on developing the country.

In order to end dictatorship and save the sovereignty of our country, there is a need to have a representative body that can speak for all pro-democracy, justice-seeking Eritreans in Diaspora with one voice and coordinate our activities. This body, which GI has tentatively called, the “**Eritrean National Congress (ENC)**”, has to be elected by the participation of all justice-seeking, pro-democracy Eritreans residing outside their country all over the world. This has to be done in an expeditious manner that is **all-inclusive** and **democratic**, using state-of-the art voting technology.

To implement all the above, GI strongly recommends the immediate formation of a **Registration and Election Commission (REC)**. The responsibility of this Commission is to devise an internet-based mechanism that will enable all justice-seeking, pro-democracy to elect the ENC. In order to ensure the legitimacy of the ENC, it is imperative that all, or the majority, of the various groups in the opposition agree on

forming a Registration and Election Commission, unless they can come up with a better mechanism that will ensure that all concerned Eritreans who are eager to play a role in saving their nation will participate in the formation of a legitimate global representatives (ENC). Involving all justice-seeking, pro-democracy Diaspora Eritreans in the election process will also ensure their active participation in the rebuilding of the country in the aftermath of the dictatorial regime.

C. The Role of the Eritrean National Congress (ENC)

C1 Facilitating the removal of the regime. The **primary goal** of the ENC should be to map out an effective strategy that will expedite the removal of the regime in the shortest possible time. Eritreans in Diaspora cannot remove the regime by staging demonstrations no matter how powerful and loud these demonstrations might be. In the end, it is the democratic forces inside the country who have the power to remove the regime. However, the ENC, speaking with one voice and acting in unison, can contribute in several significant ways to embolden the forces of change inside the country by providing them with moral, financial, and diplomatic support as described below.

C1.1. Winning the hearts and minds of the security/intelligence forces. The main reason why the Eritrean people inside the country have helplessly suffered under the dictatorial regime for the past 30 years is because of the fear of the regime's brutal security/intelligence forces. Hence, the first target of the ENC should be to win the hearts and minds of the security forces that are protecting the regime and who have intimidated and suppressed the population from rising up against the dictator. The security forces should be reminded that their loyalty should be to their country and the Eritrean people and not to a dictator who continues to destroy our country. To this end, the ENC needs to send well-crafted, powerful and appealing messages, using penetrating songs and heart touching poems that target the security forces through satellite TV programs, shortwave radios, through clandestine literature and other means of communication. These activities are already being done, to some extent, albeit in an uncoordinated manner. However, there is a need to raise the level and the degree of intensity and sophistication of these messages through well-coordinated and professionally prepared materials. The messages of the ENC should aim at

humanizing the security forces so that they will refrain from using their deadly weapons against the Eritrean people.

C1.2. Appealing to democratic forces within the army. Regime change will only come when armed forces who are disgusted with the dictator take bold action to remove the regime through a surgical military operation with minimum collateral damage. The ENC should send heroic and emboldening messages, as well as provide material support to those who will take the decisive measures to remove the regime. The ENC should engage activist Eritrean writers, poets, musicians and artists to use their talent to appeal to the democratic forces within the army to take a bold action to end dictatorship in Eritrea.

C1.3. Ground outreach. There is evidence that there are armed Eritrean groups in Tigray, Sudan, and other countries who are committed to infiltrate inside Eritrea to remove the regime. It is also reported that there are some political parties who have armed forces inside the country. The ENC can mobilise resources to bring these fragmented armed forces to form a united national force, and provide them with moral support, material assistance and the guidance to minimise confrontation with the Eritrean armed forces by sending messages to win the Eritrean Army to be on the side of the people's army so that the dictatorial regime will be removed with little or no bloodshed among Eritreans.

C1.4. Emboldening the civilian population inside the country. The civilian population has been silenced by the immense and overbearing power of the security forces who are merciless in suppressing any public dissent or uprising. But if the security apparatus of the regime could be persuaded not to aim its deadly weapons against innocent civilians, it is possible that the civilian population that has learned important lessons from events in the Sudan might be emboldened to challenge the system by staging peaceful demonstrations and by conducting civil resistance and disobedience that could cripple the regime. The ENC should send powerful and effective messages aimed at the civilian population that will embolden them to challenge the regime in a variety of ways suggested above.

C1.5. Advocacy, lobbying and diplomacy. The other important activity that should be performed by the ENC is in the **lobbying, advocacy** and **diplomatic** arena at International level. Eritreans in Diaspora have shown their commitment to regime change by conducting spontaneous demonstrations, writing petitions,

appearing in congressional hearings, at UN meetings in Geneva and in New York and in other cities. These activities have raised the awareness of International Community about the gross violations that are happening in Eritrea.

The fact that the UN found it necessary to set up a commission of inquiry and imposed sanctions on Eritrea may be attributed to the activities of Eritreans in Diaspora. The same can be said about why the EU and others suspended aid to the country. These are significant achievements, even though they had no significant influence on Isaias's regime. Diaspora Eritreans could have been more effective if their activities were conducted by a leadership group that has the legitimacy and the mandate to speak and represent all Eritreans in Diaspora such as the proposed ENC.

The ENC should be able to deploy high-calibre Eritrean technocrats with diplomatic and foreign relations experience who can approach International Organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), the African Union (AU), the Arab League and powerful nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and other sympathetic nations, to support the Eritrean people's demand for democratic governance. These organizations and the International Community as a whole must understand that Isaias has committed gross human rights violations against his people that amount to crimes against humanity which have been well documented by the Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. The world has also witnessed the recent atrocious deeds of Isaias in Tigray. Given what the world community knows about what Isaias has done to his own people for the last 30 years and his recent involvement in the war in Tigray, it should not be difficult to win the support of the International Community if we can only approach them with one united voice under one legitimate global representatives – the ENC. Through an effective and intensive diplomacy and lobbying, the ENC should be able to persuade the International Community to apply intensive pressure that will cripple the dictatorial regime.

The members of Global Yiakl, with proper training on effective lobbying, are best placed to conduct effective lobbying in their respective local areas. We have to realize that elected politicians tend to respond better to their local constituents and the ENC will need to work with Yiakl Baitos to achieve its goals.

C2. Preparing for a smooth transition. The other important role the ENC should play is to make advance preparation for a smooth transition to democracy, in the aftermath of the removal of Isaias's regime. Those democratic forces inside the country who may be able to remove the regime will not have the luxury, because of the security of the regime, to prepare the country for the challenges it might face when the regime is removed. We all know what happened in Somalia after the fall of Siad Bare, or what happened in Libya after the fall of Gadhafi. Hence, to avoid a repeat of the Somalia or Libyan experiences, it is imperative to make the necessary advance planning and preparation to ensure a smooth transition to democracy. Realizing this possibility, the ENC should make the necessary preparation to avoid confusion and chaos and to ensure peace and security when the regime is forced out. To this end, the ENC will engage Eritrean scholars and professionals to identify, in advance, the challenges that might be faced in the event the regime is removed. In addition some sort of a Transition Charter should also be prepared in consultation with the political parties to ensure a smooth transition to a democratic rule. **Eritrea Focus**, a London based organization that is committed to transition Eritrea to a democratic rule, has held conferences on "Building Democracy in Eritrea." The ENC should capitalize on the work and assistance of Eritrea Focus. **Eri-Platform**, and The Eritrean Research Institute for Policy and Strategy (**ERIPS**) are also good intellectual resources that can help the ENC in making the necessary preparations for a smooth transition in the aftermath of the removal of the dictatorial regime. The ENC should also consult the work of Sinit and other Study Groups that have prepared research-based scholarly work that can help in planning for smooth transition.

C3. Accelerating the development of the country. To jump start the economy and to accelerate the development of the different sectors of the country, the ENC should engage Eritrean scholars and professionals to prepare necessary whitepapers, policy documents and blue-prints that will serve the government ministries in democratic Eritrea. The Eritrean Research Institute for Policy and Strategy (**ERIPS**) which is an association of Eritrean scholars and professionals, is best placed to serve this role. Hence the ENC should cultivate a good working relationship with **ERIPS**. Eritrea is blessed to have so many well educated and high calibre, economists, engineers, lawyers, scientists, educators, journalists, money and banking professionals, accountants, public health professionals, tourism and hospitality professionals, those in the transportation industry, social scientists and experts in foreign policy matters, investment, marketing, information technology (IT) etc. who can be mobilised to build the country.

ERIPS is already taking steps to organize discipline-based professional associations with a view to preparing policy oriented whitepapers that can help the country in the aftermath of regime change. The ENC should urge ERIPS to push on the preparation of such whitepapers without any delay, anticipating regime change any time soon. The ENC should cultivate relationships with friendly and supportive governments and charitable NGOs who can help in rebuilding the critical infrastructure: hospitals, clinics, water distribution systems, etc.

C4. Fundraising. The ENC should be able to raise funds through registration fees, and from all Eritreans including professionals and businessmen to cover the operating expenses of the ENC and to provide financial assistance to the forces of change inside the country. In addition, the ENC should approach NGOs and International Organizations that provide funding to promote democracy. The ENC should also approach countries that have been hard hit by influx of Eritrean refugees for development assistance. These countries will most likely support the ENC. Supporting the ENC will create a win-win situation where a reduced refugee flow will be advantageous for nation building in Eritrea and also serve the interest of these countries by stopping the flow of refugees. .

C5. Helping Eritrean Refugees. Another important role of the ENC is to partner with the UNHCR and assist Eritrean refugees who are facing extreme hardship.

D. The Mechanism of Electing the Eritrean National Congress in Diaspora.

For the ENC in Diaspora to be a legitimate representative, it is important to create a mechanism that enables every justice-seeking, pro-democracy Eritrean in Diaspora, over the age of 18, to participate in the election process. Towards this end, the following approach is proposed:

D1. Forming a Registration and Election Commission. GI strongly feels that all stakeholders agree to form a Registration and Election Commission whose responsibility is to devise an internet-based mechanism, that will enable all justice-seeking, pro-democracy Eritreans in Diaspora to participate in the election process.

D2. The Role of the Registration and Election Commission. Once the majority of stakeholders in the opposition camp agree to form the Registration and Election Commission, a decision will be made by the Commission to form a Task Force composed of competent and computer savvy individuals to design an internet-based registration and election software. Another alternative is to hire a professional IT

firm to design a well-protected Internet-based registration system. Using the registration soft-ware, an intensive campaign should be made to register all justice-seeking Eritreans in Diaspora, giving essential demographic data such as the following.

- Full name,
- Gender
- Age by broad categories, (a) Youth (18-30), Middle Aged (31-55); Senior Citizens, (56 and above).
- Place of residence, City, State and Country
- Email address
- Religious affiliation (Christian/Moslem/Other)
- Ethnic identity
- Registration fee- the amount to be decided by the Registration and Election Commission, with exemption to those who cannot afford.

The above listed demographic data is meant to help the Registration & Election Commission to ensure the elected ENC members will reflect the diversity of the Eritrean people.

D3. The registration process. The Election and Registration Commission should make an urgent call to all justice-seeking Eritreans in Diaspora to register for the election of the ENC. The various stakeholders should also be urged to encourage their members to register in order to participate in the election process This urgent call should be in Tigrigna, Arabic and English and should be extensively advertised in all Eritrean websites, TV and Radio Stations and other social media outlets to be sure that every justice-seeking Eritrean in Diaspora is aware of the registration and election process. The registration process should be completed using the Internet in no more than 2 weeks. Other means of secured systems should be devised to register those who do not have access to the Internet.

D4. The nomination process. The next step is for the Registration and Election Committee to appoint a **Nomination Task Force** that will prepare a slate of nominees from the registered members, in consultation with the various stakeholders. Self-nomination should be allowed, and registered members should be encouraged to help the Nomination Task Force to identify worthy candidates. The Registration and Election Commission should provide guidelines on the attributes that should be considered for nominating individuals

which should include, the calibre of the individual, experience, integrity, dedication, etc. and the consent to serve as a member of ENC if elected. Campaign to publicize individuals worthy of being elected should be encouraged.

D5. Resumes of nominees. To help voters to have knowledge of the nominated individuals, those who are nominated should provide their resumes which will be posted on the website of the Registration and Election Commission.

D6. The election process. The election process may require a professional firm that will be viewed as a neutral body, to handle the process so that the election results will be accepted as being free of any tampering by the Registration and Election Commission or by any of the constituent groups. Elections should be on a one-person-one vote basis by all those individuals who have paid the required registration fee and those who are exempted to pay the required registration fee. Those registered should cast their vote to their favourite candidate, among those nominated, using the Internet. IT experts should develop a secured, state-of-the-art computer-based election system that is protected from hacking by Eritrean Government agents and that will not allow the unregistered from voting and also that prevents duplicate voting. Special controls should be installed to prevent supporters of the government from tampering with the registration and election process. Voting should be completed within a limited number of days to be determined by the Registration and Election Commission. Those who have received the highest number of votes will constitute the ENC. The number of the ENC should be decided by the Registration and Election Commission in consultation with the various stakeholders.

D7. Assuring diversity. To ensure that the ENC will reasonably reflect the diversity of the Eritrean people, the Registration and Election Commission should exercise an affirmative discretionary power to make sure the members of the ENC are a diverse group in terms of gender, religion, age and ethnic identity.

E. The Structure of the ENC: The ENC should serve as the legislative body. It should appoint an Executive Body from its members. The Executive Body should have:

- a. A chairperson
- b. Deputy Chairperson

- c. A Secretary
- d. A person in charge of media activities
- e. A person in charge of International Lobbying, Diplomacy and Advocacy
- f. A person in charge of Member Relations, finance, and Fund-raising
- g. A person in charge of Ground Outreach
- h. A person in charge of Refugees
- i. A person in charge of transitional affairs.
- j. A person in charge of preparing policy whitepapers and blueprints for the accelerated development of Eritrea

Summary and Conclusion. In brief, the document underscores the need to form a legitimate body, the Eritrean National Congress (ENC), an entity that can speak for all pro-democracy, justice-seeking Eritreans in Diaspora to expeditiously remove the dictatorial regime and to smoothly transform Eritrea into a multi-party democracy. In addition its outlines the role of the ENC and suggests an election mechanism that will allow the ENC to be accepted as legitimate representatives of justice-seeking, pro-democracy Eritreans in Diaspora, and by the International Community.

Last, Global Initiative (GI) wants to emphasise that it will be important that all stakeholders read the proposal carefully. It is our hope that all stakeholders discuss and improve the proposal or come up with a better alternative that can ensure the election of legitimate global representatives expeditiously through an **all-inclusive, democratic, and transparent process.**