

# **ERITREAN YOUTH IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE**

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The economic development and social progress of any country usually depend upon the development and availability of abundant natural resources together with the development and availability of human resources in the form of productive labor force. The family structure, the social fabrics, the political stability, the community formation, the religious institution, and the status of public service, particularly the education and health care services, play the most important roles in determining the supply of skilled workforce for the economic development and social progress of a country. It is the human workforce that develops institutions, that creates technology, and that exploits the natural resources. Lack of human resource creates lack of social and economic development. It is evident that the most progressive, productive and skilled human resource is the younger generation in any country capable to make the necessary changes. There is high interdependence between human resources and economic development.

It does not matter if a country is not endowed with rich natural resources. Israel and Japan do not have abundant natural resources, but both countries are among the most advanced and highly developed countries in the world. Japan turned its pile of rocks into valuable resources and Israel turned its desert land into fertile land. This is possible because both countries have the most skilled and productive human resources and sophisticated institutional formation. On the other hand, some African countries like Zimbabwe and the Republic of Congo, are endowed with abundant natural resources but because of lack of progressive and skilled human resources and corrupt institutional formation both countries are among the least developed countries in the world. Eritrea is relatively rich in its natural resources mainly in minerals and marine resources. Under a democratic political system with a progressive socio-economic institutional structure, and a proper orientation and training of its human resources in advanced science and appropriate technology, Eritrea has a great potential for rapid economic development and social progress. It is evident that the Eritrean youth can serve as the vanguard and pioneer for a positive change and development in the troubled Eritrea because the Eritrean youth are the principal sources and fountain for a productive human resource in the country. If a country loses the most productive younger generation in a devastating

prolonged war, epidemic diseases, or due to a massive out-migration of the younger generation to other countries, the objective realities create an economic disaster and social crisis in the country and that is what is currently happening in Eritrea.

The Eritrean youth do not have a decent and normal life. In their own country they live in a hostile and fearful environment characterized by constant harassment, intimidation, arbitrary arrest, and strict control by the PFDJ regime for no justifiable reasons. At their early age starting from the time they are in junior high school they are separated by force from their parents to go to the summer camps for two months every year. In this summer program they are forced to make terraces, plant trees, and dig ditches in the hill sides and mountains. During the last year of high school, they are brought to Sawa for military training. After one year military drills and political orientation and due to attending the ill-prepared and inadequate regular school program in Sawa, it is sad that only very few students join the ill-equipped so-called colleges and the very large student population are conscripted to be soldiers in the name of national military service for unlimited time. These young boys and girls are currently dispatched unwillingly to go to the ruthless and bloody war of aggression and atrocities in Tigray and other regions of Ethiopia for no apparent reasons or interest to Eritrea, except to quench the selfish desire of the PFDJ leadership. It was originally decided and declared by the PFDJ regime that the national military service would be only for 18 months, but later it was extended for indefinite length of time. In this so-called national military service, the Eritrean youth work for 72 hours a week and earn \$17 a month. They are involved in the kind of work that requires long hours of hard labor. It is nothing different from mass enslavement. Consequently, out of desperation and frustrating it is an empirical fact that many young boys and girls run away from the country to cross the borders to Ethiopia or Sudan. In view of the facts, Eritrea is currently characterized by economic disaster, social injustice, political corruption, and severe human rights violations.

The excessive massive exodus of Eritreans, particularly the youth, from their own country to other countries has never been a matter of choice. It has never been the choice of the Eritrean youth to be incarcerated in the horrible PFDJ prisons and containers without the proper trial in court. It has never been the choice of Eritrean young men, women and children to perish in the Sahara and Sinai deserts. It has never been the choice of the Eritrean men, women, and children, to face the danger of drowning in the

Mediterranean Sea and become the sources of food for the sharks. It has never been the choice of the Eritrean youth to be slaughtered for their kidneys and other vital organs by the merciless human traffickers. It has never been the choice of many Eritrean girls to be the victims of rape and molestation by military leaders and human traffickers. It has never been the choice of many Eritrean youth to get intoxicated with drugs and alcohol and sleep in the subways, under the bridges, alleys, sidewalks and on streets of European towns and cities. It has never been the choice of the Eritrean youth to suffer and die in the prisons and containers of Libya. It has never been the choice of the Eritrean youth to suffer from mental illness and psychological depression as the result of bad treatment in the horrible Eritrean prison. It has never been the choice of the innocent Eritrean youth to be drafted and sent to wars and conflicts anywhere and anytime and perish in disgrace on the mountains and valleys, villages and towns of Ethiopia. It has never been the desire of the young Eritrean soldier to shoot and kill an ordinary person and destroy a private property in an unlawful war in Ethiopia. It has never been a matter of choice for Eritreans to observe their households dismantled into ruins and their entire families uprooted from their homeland. It has never been a matter of choice for hundreds and thousands of Eritreans to be refugees in neighboring countries mainly in Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Egypt, Libya, Kenya, etc. Nobody desires to leave his/her own country, family, relatives and friends. The Eritrean people, especially the Eritrean youth are forced to go away because they cannot go to school or work in peace and harmony in their own country. It has been a matter of desperation, frustration and hopelessness for the younger generation to leave their own families and country. When they decide to cross the desert and sea, they knew before their departure that the risk of death is very high. They chose the risk of death in their dangerous journey against facing the risk of death inside their country. They believed that the survival rate in their journey is much higher than the survival rate in Eritrea under the cruel rule of PFDJ regime. The unbearable situation in Eritrea indicates that the danger inside Eritrea is far worse than the danger crossing the deserts and sea. Consequently, Eritrea is losing its valuable younger generation. It takes 100 years to replace or restore one generation. Eritrea has already lost not less than two generations. Who dares to blame this innocent younger generation?

If the rules of law, democracy, justice, and peace were prevailing in Eritrea, there would be little desire amongst Eritreans to flee from their own country and to seek refuge

in other countries as second citizen. Under normal circumstances, it would have been the desire of the Eritrean youth to be properly educated and appropriately guided by the Eritrean parents, religious leaders, village or town elders and neighbors. It would have been the choice of all Eritrean youth to live in Eritrea at home with their own parents and siblings with dignity and great honor. It would have been their desire to go to colleges of their choices, work in their own profession, get married, and raise children in their own country. It would have been their desire to farm their own land and go fishing in their own sea. It would have been their desire to work for their own government' They would have started their own factories and industries; they would have advanced their own import and export businesses through our two main ports; they would have built an effective and efficient transport facilities – roads, streets and highways and make Eritrea look beautiful; they would have the opportunity to actively participate in the economic development and social progress of Eritrea and in the promotion of the national education programs, health care and public services; and they would have enjoyed the cultural heritage and traditional values of their own people and recreate with pleasure along the sea coast of their own country. It would have been the desire of the Eritrean youth to be the principal sources of progressive and productive sources of human resources. It would have been the aspiration of the Eritrean youth to practice law and defend the human rights and privileges. The youth of a nation are usually the trustees of posterity. Our Eritrean youth should deserve to grow up, live and enjoy all the amenities of their own country with great pleasure and happiness throughout their lives. We have a powerful potential in our Eritrean youth, and the older generation must have the courage to change old habits, ideas and practices so that we may guide, encourage, and direct the power of the younger generation to advance forward successfully.

It is commonly observed amongst Eritreans, like in many cultures, that the Eritrean younger generation usually revolt peacefully against the wishes and desires of the Eritrean older generation. The Eritrean youth and elders disagree with each other in so many ways due to the differences in life experiences and activities associated with each generation. The Eritrean youth and elders think and see the world differently; they make choices and take risks differently; they appreciate and manage the use of time differently; they have different interests and priorities; and they have different attitudes and concerns towards our traditional values and cultural practices. It has been frequently observed that some of

us from the older generation who have lived in Diasporas for many years, complain about our younger generations. They say that the children of today love luxury and do not think about the future; they show disrespect for the elders when they address them; they do not listen to the elders and talk back with bad attitudes; complaints that the youth do not show respect to the elders usually come after they happen to meet and interact with each other in the same place; and they contradict the elders and consider them as primitive, conservative, outdated, and old fashioned. The elders complain that the younger generations do not appreciate or do not show interest to learn and inherit the indigenous knowledge and wisdom, the traditional values and social heritage, the ethnic languages and norms, and the national identity and pride from their elders. The older generation have also shown a negative attitude towards our Eritrean youth who have recently migrated to Europe, North America, Australia, and other destinations. We, the elders, have no ground to judge the Eritrean youth for leaving their country. We blame them for not staying in the country and serving the PFDJ regime. Under similar situation if we place ourselves in their position, we would not hesitate to do the same. In fact, we did the same thing they did because we did not return home to face the situation in Eritrea. Instead we chose to live as citizens of the countries of our residences. Our Eritrean youth have not been properly and appropriately welcomed by the Eritrean communities and religious institutions as much as it is desired because there is lack of unity and integrity among ourselves. We have failed to reach out to embrace them and to understand the trauma they have gone through in their horrible journey and to realize their emotional and psychological problems they have been facing every single day at home and abroad. We have failed to understand that they need guidance, encouragement and moral support from their elders. It is imperative that both the Eritrean youth and Eritrean elders promptly need to cultivate a respectful and positive perspectives of each other and develop a profound and powerful relationship between the two generations. We need to adopt the sense of humility and nobility to respect one another, to show the act of kindness, to promote the spirit of cooperation, and to enhance and raise the virtue of high moral standards and the desire for a peaceful relationship among ourselves.

It is unfortunate to learn that there is undesirable misunderstanding due to lack of proper communication and appropriate information exchanged between the Eritrean youth and Eritrean elders. Even though the generation gap has created a significant difference in

the lives of the two generations and despite the horrible conditions the Eritrean youth have encountered in their life journey and unpleasant attitudes of some of the older generation, the Eritrean youth have managed to hold the torch to initiate, galvanize and propel a dynamic Yeakel movement for all Eritreans – young and old, male and female – to actively participate in the Eritrean people’s movement and support and initiate a progressive movement like the Fenkil movement inside Eritrea. It is essential to realize that it is the Eritrean youth, who are inside Eritrea and in Diasporas, together in unity are the only generations capable to mobilize and lead the way in removing the PFDJ leadership in Eritrea and transfer the political power to the Eritrean people. Since the Eritrean youth have been tested in frequent wars, tempered by hardship, and disciplined by military training, they are well-prepared and committed to defend the sovereignty of Eritrea and determined to lead their movement to victory. However, all current events and developments considered, Eritrea is currently in great danger. It is unpleasant to observe that the sovereignty of Eritrea is at stake. It is a wake up call for all Eritreans in Diasporas and inside Eritrea to denounce and abort the hidden agenda of the PFDJ leader and the Prime Minister of Ethiopia because any agreement signed by the two leaders with regard to the destiny of Eritrea or its immediate relationship with Ethiopia without the full representation, consent and popular support of the Eritrean people, is totally illegal. It is high time for all Eritrean scholars and professionals, the Eritrean communities, the Eritrean religious institutions, the various Eritrean political opposition groups, and the Eritrean civic and professional associations, to identify a common ground for all and bring ourselves together in unity, irrespective of our ethnic, political, regional and religious differences, to actively join with the dynamic Yeakel movement and support the Eritrean youth in their struggle to defend and safeguard our national sovereignty, and to uphold and secure the existence and sustenance of the rules of law, justice, democracy, and peace in Eritrea. It won’t be late for the Eritrean political opposition groups to join with Yeakel movement and let the Eritrean youth coordinate and lead the movement at global, regional, national, and local levels. It could be a blessing for the political leaders to retire gracefully with great honor, respect and dignity and submit their political responsibilities, aspirations and strategies to the Eritrean youth. It could be challenging for these leaders to give up their political ambitions, personal reputations, leadership positions and public attentions, but it would be quite a rewarding experience to serve as senior advisors to the Eritrean youth

and share their political perspectives, leadership experiences and wisdom whenever it is appropriate and necessary. The rest of us may not be willing to go back to Eritrea and raise guns with the intention to remove the PFDJ regime from its political power in Eritrea, but the minimum effort we can contribute to the movement from wherever we are hibernating is to raise our all-out voices loud and clear in support of the Eritrean youth for liberty, justice and peace in Eritrea. . Victory to the Eritrean Youth! God bless Eritrea!

*We, all Eritreans located at home and in Diasporas, belong to Eritrea and Eritrea belongs to all Eritreans, nothing more and nothing less.*



*We open and safeguard our doors; we defend and honor our borders; we respect and salute our neighbors; we gratify and dignify our martyrs; and we cherish peace, justice, and order.*