

DECOLONIZING THE AFAR IN ERITREA

ERITREAN AFAR NATIONAL CONGRESS (EANC)

Celebrating our 5th anniversary in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA - JULY 1st, 2023



ERITREAN AFAR NATIONAL CONGRESS

Restoring self-determination of the Eritrean Afar nation

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JULY 1ST, 2023

Eretriyah Qafar Isim Isih Madqittaamih Cakki Daabisenno!

It is our distinct pleasure to invite you, friends and supporters from various political and civil society groups from the Eritrean Diaspora, human rights groups and regional experts to join us and engage in a discussion about post-Isaias Afwerki/PFDJ Eritrea.

This Year's conference theme is "Decolonizing the Eritrean Afar and Dankalia from PFDJ."

This year our event will be held in the city of Harrisburg, a beautiful capital of Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, situated along the banks of the Susquehanna River. Harrisburg is home to newly arrived Eritrean Afar refugees to America. All day conference will include presentations from experts on democratic transition of Eritrea, entertainment, an evening of traditional Afar food and cultural show hosted by the local Afar community.

EANC: Our vision for Afar and Eritrea

The Eritrean Afar National Congress (EANC), an indigenous organization representing the Afar people rights to self-determination including political, cultural and socioeconomic rights of Afar nation in Eritrea. **EANC** aspires to establish a democratically elected Eritrean Afar state in Dankalia, (a traditional homeland of indigenous Afar) in Eritrea.

Our vision is to foster a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious democratic federation between pluralistic Eritrean societies founded on the principles of the rule of law, fundamental rights and freedoms, equality of each nationality and respect for the human rights of all citizens of Eritrea. EANC's mission is to strive for a democratic transition of Eritrea from the current authoritarian military rule to a full-fledged democratic nation.

The Government of Eritrea (PFDJ) and Its Colonial Policies towards the Afar

The current Eritrean regime is removing the Afar from their homeland in Dankalia and colonizing the area with others. To remove the Afar, the Government of Eritrea is using mass murder, terror, intimidation and other forms of violence, including destroying the basis of the Afar economy.

Ethnic Afar are fleeing Dankalia by the tens of thousands as result of persecution. Eritrean security personnel have orders to shoot-to-kill the Afar as they attempt to cross the border to places of refuge. Many Afar have perished trying to escape Eritrea. As a result, thousands of Afar are now living as refugees in Ethiopia, Sudan, Djibouti, Yemen and other countries throughout the world. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has documented Afar refugees by the 10's of thousands.

United Nations investigations found Eritrea guilty of crimes against humanity and persecution of Afar on ethnic grounds

Eritrea's marginalization and persecutions of Afar was examined in detail by the United Nations Commission on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea [COI-Eritrea] and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea [SR-Eritrea] since 2013. Both UN entities found that Eritrea engaged in widespread and systematic persecution of the Afar population, including ethnic cleansing of Afar people from their traditional lands and strategic resources by violence, displacement and mass murder. Both UN instrumentalities concluded that Eritrea's persecution of the Afar constitute crimes against humanity. Both UN entities recommended that the UN Security Council refer these crimes, and the Eritrean officials responsible for them, to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court for action.

UN findings through 2013- 2019 (UN reports on Afar)

- "The Commission [of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea] collected information that the Afar people have been subjected to extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearance by the Eritrean Government since 2000. These killings have also triggered their displacement from their lands within the country and across borders to Ethiopia and Djibouti. This has posed great difficulty to their livelihoods as they depend on their traditional lands for the sustenance as an indigenous ethnic group;" ⁱ (2016, para 1120b)

- “The Afar and Kunama ethnic groups were particularly targeted in the period from 1998 to 2001. Persecution has been an integral part of the Government's efforts to maintain its authority in a manner contrary to international law. The commission, therefore, finds that Eritrean officials have committed the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, in a widespread and systematic manner since May 1991.”ⁱⁱ
- The COI stated the actions by Eritrean authority “may be construed as an intentional act to dispossess them [the Afar] of their ancestral lands, their livelihood and their culture” (Paragraph 56) and that:
- The COI also “confirmed” that: Land traditionally belonging to or used by the Afars was seized in the framework of the land reform and afterwards by decision of the Government, without consultation of the impacted communities; (2016, para 1157)
http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIEritrea/A_HRC_29_CRP-1.pdf
- The Commission also has reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials have intentionally and severely deprived Eritrean Kunama and Afar of fundamental rights contrary to international law on ethnic grounds. (para, 295)
http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIEritrea/A_HRC_32_CRP.1_read-only.pdf
- May 16, 2019, the new UN Special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Eritrea rapporteur Ms. Daniela Kravetz, yet again acknowledged ethnic violence and discrimination against Afar in Eritrea is persistent and immediate. Please see paragraphs 50-52
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1914037.pdf>

Eritrea’s geo-politics and new partnership internationally (China and Russia)

In May 2022, Eritrea became the only African country that voted against the United Nations General Assembly resolution demanding the withdrawal of Russia’s military forces from Ukraine, this strong statement of support for Russia gained Eritrea special friendship from the Kremlin and secured strategic relationship for economic and military partnership between Russia- Eritrea in the region.

In Jan 2023, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki in Asmara, thanked Eritrea for their consistent support of Russian initiatives in the UN, and pledged Russia’s readiness to assist Eritrea. In March, the Eritrean delegation headed by Foreign Minister Osman Saleh visited Russia following Lavrov's visit in January. In order to cooperate on regional and international issues, particularly at the United Nations, the delegation discussed bilateral trade, economics and military-technical fields.

Eritrea also sent a strong message to the West when Eritrea’s president Issais Afwerki made a state visit to China in May 2023. President Afwerki was warmly received by Chinese President Xi Jinping. In return, Eritrea’s continuous support for Beijing at the UN, earned Asmara a vote of confidence from the Chinese leadership. According to the state-run news agency Xinhua, President Xi views Eritrea “from a strategic and long-term perspective and as a reliable friend of China.” President Xi said China will enhance its bilateral cooperation with Eritrea in infrastructure, telecommunications, agriculture, mining and fisheries as well as other investments.

Eritrea is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-regional state. The state just turned 32 yrs. old. The Afar region in Eritrea (Dankalia) is at the center of Eritrean government's geopolitical leverage and geostrategic economic agenda. Eritrea's new partnerships with China and Russia could spell disaster for the people of Eritrea who have long suffered and eagerly crave for their country's transition to democracy away from military rule.

For Eritrean regime, the new partnership with China and Russia would mean new lease on life. The Eritrean regime knows China and Russia could care less about its internal matters, a no-strings-attached relationships could provide its oppressive military rule a financial boost and highly desired influence throughout the Horn of Africa.

Governing structure of current Eritrea

Although the Eritrean regime has officially prevented the 1997 Eritrean constitution from becoming a law, the regime has quietly used certain articles of the 1997 constitution to better support its fundamental ideologies to govern the country using an iron fist to enforce a highly centralized rule with all power held by the ruling People's Front for Democracy and Justice, PFDJ.

Using the highly centralized rule, the current Eritrean regime decided to make Eritrea a single-party rule, supporting the vision of its PFDJ, feed its ideologies, economic monopoly, and repressing the human rights of the Eritrean people, thus preventing the Eritrean society from participating in its governance.

Let's look at how the state enforced its single cultural Identity ideology to marginalize the diversity of cultures

Soon after becoming a government, PFDJ altered Eritrea's long-established multicultural and multiethnic diversity in favor of creating a new national identity at the expense of other smaller nations. According to Eritrean rulers, the new country would embrace a single cultural identity, articulated by the article 9 of the unimplemented 1997 Eritrean constitution. The article reads, "The State shall be responsible for creating and promoting conditions conducive for developing a national culture capable of expressing national identity, unity and progress of the Eritrean people". Because of the regime's interference with the culture of the nation, smaller nations such as the Afar do not have any means of protecting their cultural identity and continue to be assimilated culturally, marginalized and subservient to Tigriña culture, which dominates the country.

Let's look at how PFDJ exploits Land ownership and Land Laws in Eritrea

In 1994, the new Eritrean government issued series of land proclamations to legalize the seizure of traditional and communal lands and strategic resources privately owned by nations such as the Afar. The state justified the taking of indigenous lands by attacking pre-existed the customary laws which used to govern the land ownership and the use of the traditional lands and resources by Eritrean people. The illegal land expropriation became a law, as seen in this government land PROCLAMATION NO. 58/1994ⁱⁱⁱ, Section Two A. Principles, Article 3. State ownership of land 1. "In Eritrea, land is owned by the State."

After the adoption of this new land laws, the Eritrean state began to remove the indigenous Afar from the strategic resources and traditional Afar territories in Dankalia. In 2015, the Eritrean government granted strategic coastal region near the port of Assab on the Red Sea, a historically Afar territory used for traditional salt mining and fishing to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for the establishment of a military base to be used in the war against Yemen.

The joint operation by UAE-Eritrea began to remove the local Afar population violently, cutting down thousands of indigenous trees, fencing off massive territories used for local fishing and various traditional economic activities, disrupting and displacing thousands of people and those who dared to go to the Sea were hunted down as criminals using UAE attack helicopter gunships to gravely wound and kill the Afar civilians as they carry out their traditional fishing activities in their traditional Red Sea coast of Eritrea. For over three years, the killings of Afar people went unnoticed. Till this day, no compensation has been paid by the government of Eritrea nor by the UAE for the theft of the traditional lands or for causing the loss of life of Afar civilians. The UN has finally condemned the countries involved after years of advocacy by EANC, but it was too little too late for the Afar population since many of them have fled the country as result of violent land grab.

Eritrea's land grab policies against the Afar and their displacement from Dankalia continued as the Eritrean regime allowed more multinationals to take over traditional lands and resources freely. In 2013 Eritrean regime, acting through the Eritrean National Mining Company (ENAMCO), signed 50-50 joint venture deal with Australia's Danakali Limited (formerly South Boulder Mines) to develop the potash resource in Afar territory. A massive potash rich territory spanning over 400 km².

In 2017, the Eritrean military cleared the Afar population from potash site and the surrounding region by force and intimidation so that potash mining could begin. Since then, the Australia's Danakali Ltd sold its share to a Chinese company, Sichuan Road and Bridge Group for \$166 million USD.

There is no doubt that the policies and actions of the current Eritrean government against the indigenous Afar in Eritrea constitute a new form of colonialism. As a national minority and indigenous group in Eritrea the Afar are under increasing existential threat to survival, not only from the violent and racist internal policies by the current government of Eritrea but its international partners who are vying for geopolitical influences in the region.

In conclusion, Eritreans need to reclaim their freedom from the current military tyrannical regime.

The Afar Nation of Eritrea, as surviving victims of persecution in Eritrea, invites all our brothers and sisters of Eritrea, justice seekers, forces of democratic change, political leaders and civil society experts to join us for a discussion on bringing democratic transition to Eritrea.

Our goal is to commit ourselves to struggle to end the current Eritrean regime's repressive system and undemocratic rule, help our nation Eritrea transition from being one of the most repressive states in Africa to becoming one where citizens' rights are respected, democratic governance is practiced, national reconciliation and coexistence are built between Eritrea's diverse cultures, power and governance are shared within Eritrean society, and peace and security are maintained within the region and among Eritreans.

We now present to you the Afar model.

THE AFAR MODEL (ROADMAP) FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION OF ERITREA

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination and that in exercising their right to self-determination, Indigenous Peoples have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs;^{iv}

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that Indigenous individuals have the rights to life, security of the person, to live in freedom, peace, and security as distinct

peoples, to not be subjected to any act of genocide or any other act of violence, to not be subjected to forced assimilation or destruction of their culture, and to not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories;^v

The Solemn will of the Afar Nation of Eritrea as envisioned at the Uppsala Congress

WE, the Indigenous Afar People of Eritrea, including Afar Elders, women, refugees, youth, Afar political and civic entities, and their senior representative organization, the Eritrean Afar National Congress (EANC), assembled together in Congress at the City of **Uppsala, Sweden**, declare to the World the ^{vi}solemn will of the Eritrean Afar People as follows:

WE CONDEMN the persecution, crimes against humanity, murder, torture, rape, disappearances, expulsions, forcible confinements, the destruction of Afar identity, culture, economy and way of life and condemn the uncompensated land expropriations and exploitation of resources in the Afar traditional territory (Dankalia) by the Government of Eritrea and Eritrean officials.

RESOLVE that indigenous Afar People of Eritrea are entitled to autonomy and self-government within their traditional territories; and

WE DECLARE that it is the solemn will of the Eritrean Afar People to participate in a democratic and transitional process for the democratization of Eritrea based on principles of the rule of law, democracy, and equality of Eritrea's nine (9) plus nationalities the Afar, the Blien, the Hidareb, the Kunama, the Nara, the Rashaida, the Saho, the Tigre and the Tigrinya)

TOGETHER we are committed to establish a federal democratic Eritrea for all Eritrea's multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multilingual population

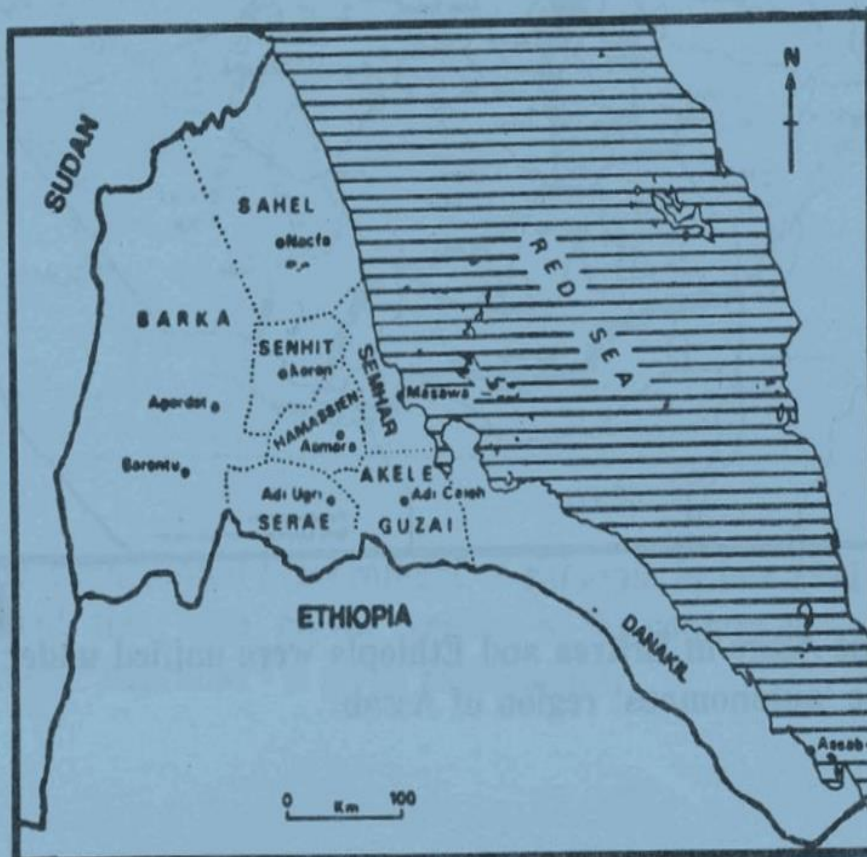
- 1) Establishing a power sharing constitution, sharing power between the federal state of Eritrea and its eight (8) provinces known as (Akale-Guzai, Barka, Dankalia, Hamasien, Sahel, Semhar, Serae, Senhit).
- 2) That each province (regional state) and nationalities including, the Afar nation of Dankalia, shall exercise their rights to internal self-determination and political autonomy in their respective regions within the Federation of Eritrea.
- 3) Each province (regional state) through the governments that they freely elect, shall have the right to own and control their lands and natural resources.
- 4) The rights of Eritrea's national minorities and indigenous peoples shall have their rights guaranteed under the Eritrean federal constitution in order to address longstanding grievances related to political repression, marginalization, economic exclusion, cultural assimilation, and illegal land expropriation.
- 5) Adoption of an all-inclusive economic development model for natural resources and revenue sharing between the central government and provinces (regional states) in order to reduce poverty and create equality between the have and have not regions of Eritrea.

We look forward to your participation and in depth discussion and analysis of this very important document on the future of Eritrea and uniting the views of the democratic opposition in the Diaspora.

For Inquiries please email us at info@dankalia.org,

United we can reclaim our democracy and our country. Giclo-Bisoh!

Eritrea: Provinces and major towns



Provincial map of Eritrea - Eight provinces (Akale-Guzai, Barka, Dankalia, Hamasien, Sahel, Semhar, Seraye, Senhit).

ⁱ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea* (2016), para 1121, UN Doc A/HRC/32/CPR.1, http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoIEritrea/A_HRC_29_CRP-1_Chapter_VI.pdf

ⁱⁱ *Id.*, paras 88, 112

ⁱⁱⁱ Eritrean land proclamation NO. 58/1994 <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/eri8227.pdf>

^{iv} United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, arts 3,4

^v United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, arts 7, 8, 10

^{vi} The Uppsala Declaration: <http://dankalia.org/uppsala-declaration-july-1-2018/>