

# National Dialogue for building democracy in Eritrea

By Fesseha Nair

1. **What is Dialogue and What are its benefits? Why is national dialogue important in transition from dictatorship to democracy?**
2. **How can we perform dialogue?**
3. **The 4 Rs**

Dialogue is the platform that **encourages** diversity of thoughts and opinions but not **suppressing** them. It leads to mutual understanding of problems and opportunities and search for common understanding. In practicing dialogue, there is an agreement that one person's concepts or beliefs should not take precedence over those of others, and common agreement should not be sought at the cost of the others.

We believe dialogue is the main instrument to discuss the opportunities and problems for democratic transition and to develop strategies to address the issues of common interest.

A dialogue to be effective must be built on certain **principles** that serve to guide and structure the discussions.

We , in the Eritrean opposition struggling from dictatorship to democracy need dialogue within ourselves and listen each other for a deeper awareness and understanding of what is actually taking place nationally, regionally and globally. The recent joint communique by four political organizations must be cherished and nurtured.

I think the conflict between the various political and civil society organizations is not about the main issues but of personalities and individuals. Our focus has been on personalities instead of issues. The methods of our communication were not based on the ideal theory of dialogue, but it was a debate or negotiation. The word dialogue i comes from the Greek language meaning dia-through and logus meaning thoughts. Let flow your thoughts freely. Look below the difference between the terms.

<b>Debate</b>	<b>Negotiation</b>	<b>Dialogue</b>
Get victorious	compromise	Exploring for common good
Blame	pressure	Listening

Mine best

mediation

crafting solution together

Twisting

suspending

inquiring

1. Eritreans for freedom and change

### The benefits of dialogue

- generate momentum to reinforce the democratic process.
- enables to assess the pace of the transition.
- helps us assess/ **evaluate** the experience of the past years in the opposition camp.
- enables us to identify issues of priority.
- allows us to evaluate the impact of external democracy assistance.

### Dialogue and conflict

Conflict in itself is not necessarily negative. It is **unmanaged conflict**, where stakeholders attempt to resolve their disputes through **unconstitutional** or even violent means, that poses the most complex problems.

If we all believe in democracy, democracy is all about managing conflict peacefully. Dialogue is a democratic method that acts as a mechanism to help **prevent, manage and resolve conflict**.

- **As a mechanism for the prevention of conflict.** By bringing various actors together for structured, critical, and constructive discussions on the state of the nation, dialogue can result in consensus on the reforms that are needed to avoid confrontation and conflict.

I urge the leaders of all political organizations to avoid confrontations and come together round table discussion.

- **As a mechanism for the management of conflict.** Dialogue can help put in place democratic institutions and procedures that can structure and set the limits of political conflict. Democratic leaders provide mechanisms for political consultation and joint action that can peacefully manage potential conflicts.

**As a mechanism for the resolution of conflict.** Political dialogue can defuse potential crises by proposing appropriate peaceful solutions. Democratic institutions and procedures provide a framework to sustain peace settlements and prevent the recurrence of conflict.

## **What should be the guiding principles for the dialogue in national reconciliation between the opposition forces?**

hope all the opposition forces believe in these principles.

- Partnership and cooperation promoting democratization.
- Disseminating democratic principles in all areas of the cooperation
- Deepening the dialogue at both national and international level
- Assessing the democratic struggle
- Assisting the democratic development

### **Dialogue framework**

- We in the Eritrean opposition the capacity and will of the dialogue to identify the challenges, analyzing the participants, evaluating available resources.
- Participants: political society, civil society, national and international experts both at the national and international dialogue promoting the Eritrean people's aspirations and expectations.
- Objectives: Analyzing the dynamics of the transition, seeking a national consensus on priorities and searching for effective cooperation.
- Assessing results and monitoring the implementation.

### **Who can be the actors and their roles at the intra-Eritrean National Dialogue?**

Three key functions to be fulfilled in the dialogue for democratic change at the national level.

**Analysis function.** By providing a comprehensive analysis of the constraints and opportunities for further democratization, the dialogue contributes to diagnosing the flow of events and experiences at the national and regional level.

**Dialogue function.** By providing a platform for change of experiences and lessons learned and a forum for building consensus on the challenges and opportunities for democratic change, the dialogue contributes in itself to the consolidation of democracy. It should ultimately lead to the articulation of a democratic reform agenda with specific policy recommendations primarily defined by the national participants and thus owned by them.

**Brokering function.** By providing international institutions and donor agencies involved in and committed to democratization with a reference framework, the dialogue contributes a mechanism to assist the international partners to identify concrete support measures, better target their interventions and co-ordinate their assistance.

**The national dialogue for democratic change could be structured around three main groups with specific roles:**

The Dialogue Group: Composed of prominent national experts and key players in the process of democratic change in Eritrea .

The dialogue group should be sufficiently **representative and have legitimacy and leverage** to make the dialogue meaningful and sustainable. The members of the dialogue group should hence be carefully selected, based on their **professionalism, reputation and willingness** to enter into a genuine dialogue.

**The Expert Group.** Composed of international experts with undisputed credentials and reputation, the expert group provides the national participants with comparative experiences and lessons learned in other contexts which could be of assistance in the design of democratic change in Eritrea.

**The Support Group:** Both National and international organizations Composed of representatives of the international community involved in and committed to the democratic process in Eritrea represented as observers of the dialogue. The support group constitutes a structure assisting the democratization process in Eritrea. External partners or facilitators should not dictate but can only support the process of democratic change.

**It is of utmost urgency that all the opposition political organizations convene a conference- platform where they can come out with one national political charter and form one leadership.**

**The recent held national dialogues between various Eritrean civil and political organizations are appreciable promoting democracy building in Eritrea based on the 4 Rs- Representation, Recognition Rights and Resources.**

It is a political maturity to create a political space for a national dialogue that would lead us to reconciliation instead of confrontation. We still lack skills and knowledge on democracy and its foundations in building an all-inclusive unity in diversity.

Ending the conflicts in the opposition camp requires more political courage than simply neglecting each other in minor things.

I urge all the political organizations regardless of their affiliations to come to their minds and take responsibility and show political courage.

#### References

1. Lijphart, Arend. 1977. Democracy in plural societies. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
2. Horowitz, Donald L. 1985, Ethnic Groups in conflict. Berkeley. CA: University of California.
3. Dialogue for Democratic Development, by IDEA- International Institute for Democracy and Electoral

#### **Assistance**

4. Carnegie, Dale, How to win friends and influence people, pocket books 2010.
5. Peter G. Northouse, Leadership, Theory and Practice.