

**Part II**  
**Answers to Your Questions by EPDP Chairman,**  
**Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar**



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(Editor's Note: Questions may be rephrased for the sake of brevity, and prioritization in their line up is the prerogative of the responder. Those who pose questions are requested to kindly tell their genuine addresses).

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**Question/repeated for an extensive response:** Selam WadAmmar: I am one of those who keep close to the Horn of Africa region and always obtain many of the whispers first hand. The latest piece of information or, may be 'gossip', I heard is that Mr. Bashir Ishaq, an EDA leader, openly presented [to] a gathering (may be an official EDA meeting) of the opposition, the following accusation: "Waldesus WadAmmar described you, Eritrean Muslims, as Talibans, and insulted you, nationality-based organizations, as placards/tabelatat". There are no secrets that can be kept away from our public, my brother; we are a very small nation. Please let us know the truth. But if you do not like my question, just drop it out (**Derbush.K**).

**Answer:** Adequate response to this question was held up till now because of lack of space in Part One. I am again thankful for the raising of this question by Derbush.K , a name which somehow sounds familiar to my ears, especially by taking note of its suffix, K. Let start by reminding brother Derbush and readers in general that I consider myself one of the very, very few Eritreans who, rightly or wrongly, feel an equal affinity to both Muslims and Christians, Metahit/Kebessa in Eritrea do talk their heart without the fear

and inhibition that other Eritreans may have. This is one point in explaining the ongoing demonization campaign. The other problem with some parochial-minded beings is that they take a person like me as “a traitor” of one’s region, as if it is all of us who belong to “region–religion” based organizations, and as if we are supposed to struggle for the smaller parts of the whole – fractions of Eritrea.

To go back to the question, the ‘fatwa–like’ libelous allegation you raised was indeed made by the above mentioned EDA leader. The hard facts presented below do not only expose the malicious intention of those who repeat this falsehood, but do also ascertain that in no occasion did I describe Eritrean Muslims or the Islamic parties as ‘Talibans’, nor did I insult ethnicity–based organizations by calling them ‘placards/tabelatat’. This allegation is both irresponsible and criminal act that can, sooner or later, have legal consequences. By the way, Mr. Bashir Ishaq is head of an EDA member organization and chairman of the newly formed EDA preparatory committee for national conference. Indeed, some may find it hard to imagine this kind of charges coming from a person of his standing.

Needless to say, the intention of the multi–faceted renewed crusade is to demonize not just ‘WadAmmar’, but through him to the political party that he belongs to. This despicable politics, Eritrean style, has been going on for a while. Readers may at this point recall about all the filth that was thrown on path of one of our martyred heroes, Seyoum Ogbamichael. The current campaign regarding myself was intensified following my June 2009 interview with an Eritrean journalist, Michael Abraha. The following blameless paragraphs were part of the interview that was posted in the websites on 2 July 2009:

*“Question: Professor Berket Habteselassie has called for more secular and non–partisan politics for Eritrea. What is your take on these two issues?”*

*“Answer: Eritrea is not a place suitable for any organization with a religious agenda. Therefore, the reiteration of the call for the separation of religion from the state in Eritrea is agreeable to the vast majority of Eritreans who wish religion to remain the concern of the individual believer. Few would disagree with Professor Bereket on this issue because the*

great majority of Eritreans will not accept politics that would lead us towards creating a confessional state in Eritrea, or one that allows 'Swat Valleys' in its belly."

When I said "the vast majority of Eritreans" in the above response, I was primarily thinking of over 95% of Eritrean Muslims who, I still believe, are for the "separation of religion from the state". But to me and my party, separation from the state does not mean separation from the society!!

On top of that, my mention of Swat Valley in that interview had nothing to do with calling Eritrean Muslims or Islamic parties 'Talibans'. The interview was conducted while the religion-based conflict between Pakistan and one of its provinces was still a fresh event and I stated that Eritreans of all beliefs will not allow, as agreed in the EDA charter, the creation of a religion-based rule in Eritrea or any of its provinces. That is a genuine message about a principled enshrined in the EDA charter. I can repeat it any time. The malicious and distorted interpretation of Swat Valley, which was also alluded to by a number of website writers, was posed to me in the paltalk room presentation I made on 6 February 2010 as follows:

*"Q: In one interview, you aggrieved some Muslims by saying that your party will not allow the creation of something like Swat Valley in Eritrea. What did you mean by that?"*

Translated into English from both Arabic and Tigrinia, the answer I gave on 6 February 2010 was the following:

*"What I meant [in the interview of July 2009] was that, as stated in the EDA charter, the Eritrean state we build shall be established on a democratic multiparty system based on a national constitution agreed by all. It means that even a smaller section of Eritrea shall not be subjected to a different system of government. Thus, we do not expect any Eritrean party insisting to establish a system like that of the Pakistani Swat Valley in Eritrea; but if such a party emerges in the future, our party retains the right to [democratically] agitate against that party. The EDA charter and the position of my party are against the establishment of an Islamic state in Eritrea or one ruled under the Sharia law. This must be clear to all. But if there is anyone who is aggrieved by my firm statement that we will not allow the type of a provincial status like that of Swat Valley at one time, he or she must also inquire for the stated position of the EDA".*

The other misinterpretation ascribed to Mr. Bashir was in regard to nationality-based organizations which I did not describe as 'placards or tabelatat'. All what I said is the following:

“We are not going to be successful in the current struggle if we in the Eritrean opposition continue to remain ineffective as we have been for a decade now because many of our organizations are simple addresses”.

This was an expression of a general disgust we in the opposition have because of the fragmented state of our existence. A German journalist and a friend, who is drafting a useful directory on Eritrean parties/organizations, has so far listed about 80, most of which are by now sheer names and obsolete addresses. I was referring to this sad reality, which was worsened by two EDPs, two EPs, two ENSFs etc in the very recent past. I may repeat the same statement when the occasion arises. By the way, I used a similar epithet (*hanchemenchi wudibatna* – in English: our miniscule organizations) in a public address in Stuttgart a couple of years ago, and that correct statement was distorted and talked of as if I insulted “other Eritrean organizations as miniscule”.

I was on record calling for the merger of organizations with similar programs in order to create viable and more effective organizations. This call is made by EDA in recognition of the ineffectiveness of our organizations.

Similarly, I was asked in the said paltalk session last February, why I was insisting that all EDA member organizations should be allowed to conduct diplomatic activities alongside EDA, the umbrella organization. My reply can again be summarized as follows:

“The EDA alone cannot accomplish all the required diplomatic work in Africa, the Middle East the West and the rest of the world. It does not have the necessary human and financial resources to do it alone. Most of you in the paltalk rooms are not contributing anything to the EDA which does not have sufficient financial support from other sources. Do you guys know that a single organization has more resources than the EDA? I know very well that in past years, EDA’s annual budget was not more than that of EPP”.

This is very true. The EDA has financial and human power limitations. Why should we hide the truth? My guess is that a number of EDA member

organizations have more resources, both human and material, than the alliance itself. This statement of fact in no way implied that “EPP was equal to all the EDA member organizations put together.” This is another distortion of a clear fact. In fact, a number of EDA member organizations have bigger financial resources than my ex-EPP.

According to the existing EDA charter, member organizations have the right to conduct their own public, diplomatic, information and other activities. Thus, if the EDA member organizations are not allowed and encouraged to do diplomatic action, then we will end up having very little diplomatic work in many parts of the world.

I answered these frequently asked questions a length, and hope the innocent reader will appreciate the whole truth as stated above.

**Question:** Your website kept attacking Awate website for giving a platform for Muslims to voice their grievances. However, it was quiet when a certain Semere Tesfay attacked Eritrean Muslims and Islam. My questions to you are: 1. Did you approve when your website called [Saleh Johar] a friend of terrorists? 2. What is your view on the Eritrean Covenant considering that your website didn't even acknowledge the statement while it was making a lot of noise about fake national unity; 3. Don't you think it is legitimate for Eritrean Muslims to voice their grievances, especially about land issues and language concerns without being called Jihadists by your website? (**Jehan Essa**).

**Answer:** Dear Jehan: My assumption is that every bit of your questions can be easily responded by the readers themselves. But let me add brief notes for your sake, assuming you are an innocent inquirer:

1. Our website never called any Eritrean in the opposition a terrorist or friend of terrorists. In fact, it never attempted to respond to so many unfounded allegations posted in Awate.com against parties and personalities as well as against an entire Eritrean social segment. Regrettably, many of those writings encouraged not reconciliation but

polarization in our society. It should, however, be understood that websites retain the right to post writings by others if the authors identify themselves clearly and the contents are not harmful to individual liberties and to the society as a whole. I don't think Semere Tesfai's writing can be equated to other writings and be described in the way you put it.

2. The Eritrean Covenant, which was seen as a "serious window for dialogue" by well regarded compatriots in Australia, is a well written and important document. However, it still remains without an identifiable owner. I see it essential to know which parties or groups or personalities in the Eritrean opposition are behind it so that one can contact and engage them in serious dialogue. This will be important. Otherwise, hidden authors cannot claim to have come with a real agenda for serious consideration. As to Eritrean national unity, it is one of the fundamental principles that we in the EPDP champion. Therefore, no one would agree with you that we are making noise about a "fake" principle.
3. Where did you read, Jehan, our website calling Eritrean Muslims "jihadists"? You are challenged to produce any proof on this serious allegation. On the other hand, Eritrean Muslims of course have the right to express their grievances about any abuses against any system. However, it is not acceptable for any single party claiming to speak on behalf of all Eritrean Muslims. EPDP is a party committed to defend in general the rights of Eritreans, be they Muslims, Christians, atheists and of other belief systems. Issues of land and language are the concerns of EPDP as well and not the exclusive domain of one religious group or groups. You can refer to our writings, past and present.

**Happy Holiday Season to all!**