

Speech delivered by W/o Adiam Haile-Rufael, a young Eritrean activist, at the ENS-Hidri and EPDP Joint Congress (Frankfurt, 3-4 August 2019)

ሓድነትን ውድብ ስራሕን

Unity and Organized Action

First and foremost, I would like to thank all of you who are present today attending this congress and festival. Many of you flew from different parts of the world and it is very inspiring to too see the sacrifices we all made to be here. It gives me hope to see such unity between **ድህነት** and **EPDP**. When the idea was explained to me initially, I was a bit taken aback, trying to understand how this will be possible; because some of our political ideologies differ from one another. However, when assessing the whole idea of HADENET I realized that it will only be through a United effort that we can achieve democratic change in Eritrea. We are fighting against an organized political regime that has been able to stay in existence for so long due to our lack of doing what we have begun to do at this Congress together. Which includes building a roadmap that will consist of working with all opposition groups, focusing on a strategy that revolves around building bridges and alliances. If we all pledge to have an open mind, with open communication and the best word to use in Tigrinya is (**ኣብ ንሓድሕድና ቅንዕና ኪህሉው ኣለዎ**) which I believe is the determining factor in achieving success. United we will be a force to be reckoned with and EPDP can play a leading role in our MDC.

Change in ERITREA; has been a consistent slogan within our movement. How do we define CHANGE? In our movement the word CHANGE is repeated constantly (**ደጋጊምና ኢና እንብሎ**). However, how do we as agents of CHANGE reflect the CHANGE that we are seeking to implement in a democratic ERITREA? This is a question I asked myself 8 years ago; and 8 years later I have been enlightened with a few answers from my experience within our MDC.

As a movement and political party we must be cognitive of the political warfare and attacks orchestrated by PFDJ; although I normally do not like to mention them or make them a topic of discussion it is necessary to do so in order to identify certain destructive obstacles within our movement. To be fair all blame cannot be laid on the regime, we must own our faults as well. However, right now, especially during the current Yikal social media rage, that created a calling for a mass movement there has been a systematic effort to eliminate **ዓባይቲ (ኣባታትናን ኣዴታትናን)** from our MDC.

Through technology, social media and as many of you are aware of, infiltration through individuals to disperse political division amongst the younger and older generations. These divisive tactics have been waged throughout our movement time and time again, and has caused chaos, mistrust and fractured organizations. However, as the time is coming near for democratic change we must not allow ourselves to be fooled into this divisive political propaganda. Instead we should recognize that it's a means to keep us further from HADENET and in turn attaining our dream of a free Eritrea.

When I first joined the MDC, I faced a lot of criticism for joining a **ውድብ** that had a lot of **ዓባይቲ**. Many of these **ደላይ ፍትሒ**, who were new arrivals from back home used to try to convince me

that “**ነዞም ዓበይቲ ንዮው በሎም**.” I recall thinking why I wouldn’t work with individuals who have been through the struggle and understand Eritrean politics like no other; and I also have an opportunity to work with both former ELF and EPLF **ተጋደልቲ**. My reply to these **ደላይ ፍትሒ**, who called themselves “youth” (although they were over 40 years old at the time) was and still is “**ተመዘኛ**” (experience) and wisdom “**አለዎም**” and “**ንሕና ከኣ ካብኦም ክንመሃር ንኸእልኢና**”...and quite honestly we are not in a position to lead at this point.” My general belief is through time, experience and hard work we can begin to learn what it takes to lead and do so successfully.

Were mistakes made by our elders? Yes, absolutely, all sides, politically in Eritrea made mistakes, which is why we are in the position that we are in today. It is important at this stage to re-instill our rich Eritrean cultural values that has been destroyed by the current regime/ **በቲ ስርዓት**. As the new generation we can learn from these past mistakes and make corrections continuing to improve the broken political systems that represent Eritrean politics today. The most effective manner to do this is hand in hand /**ኢድ ንኢድ ምሳኹም ምስ ኣባታትናን ኣዴታትናን**/. United, **ንእሽቶን ዓብን** all things are possible; and this is a principal we should maintain in order to reflect who we truly are as a people... Together with our mothers and fathers guiding us in our struggle, we will continue to learn from our elders and they too can learn from us, and time will then come when they will pass the torch. However, for this to occur we must not and cannot allow divisive tactics to infiltrate our movement for democratic change. As the new generation of activists, we must be mindful of this and be cautious on all fronts and maintain respect, inclusivity and tolerance, integral pieces to our democratic movement.

Along with maintaining these principles in regards towards tolerance of our seasoned **ደላይ ፍትሒ**, we must also be cautious of the negative sentiments and campaign attacks aimed against the **ወድባት**. **ወድባት** when translated from Tigrinya to English is defined as political party and since we are here in Germany, in German **ወድብ** is translated to *politische partei*. A political party is an organized group of people who have the same ideology, or who otherwise have the same political positions (Wikipedia). In Germany, for example, there is a federal, multi-party, parliamentary political system in place (<https://handbookgermany.de>). In the United States of America where I am from and reside, we have a two-party system dominated by the Democratic Party and the Republican party. In Eritrea, technically, the framework is a single-party system, PFDJ; led by a totalitarian dictator, Isaias Afwerki who is head of state and head of government (<https://en.wikipedia.org>).

This authoritarian rule currently in Eritrea is what we as **ደላይ ፍትሒ** are fighting against; and in order to replace this rogue political system we must have an organized party, and that is why having a **ወድብ** in place is necessary. **ወድባት ኣየድልየናን ኢዩ** is rhetoric that has been running rampant throughout our movement for democratic change. And it is an unhealthy and destructive perspective to have as democratic change seekers, because it is only if we are organized, we then can achieve our goal to implement democracy in Eritrea. And this organization is done through a **ወድብ**. We should not allow this type of ignorance to infiltrate our movement for democratic change; instead as **ደላይ ፍትሒ**, we must teach our people the significance of organizing ourselves and that doing so will quicken our path towards achieving democratic change in Eritrea.

Tolerance of women’s active involvement in our movement for democratic change, is important

when analyzing the "change" factor. Superficial purposes such as using women's faces for pictures and use of propaganda (simply to say "አለዋና") are not enough. Strategic genuine actions must be taken such as, ensuring gender equality by including women's thoughts and ideas in our programs at every juncture, assessing at all times the attendance of women throughout our political movements, assuring women's roles within our movement is equal to our male counter-parts and recognizing the achievements made by female **ደላይ ፍትሐ**, within our movement for democratic change. And most importantly ample consideration of allocating leadership positions, for women, within our political movement. It goes without saying, that women have paid huge sacrifices throughout our history; and it will be up to us, to ensure that the future Eritrea will genuinely include women at all levels; and leave behind the superficial past of "አለዋና."

Another very crucial factor when discussing "change," we must also address tolerance in regard to religion/hymont and awraja. When I joined the MDC, I came in as Adiam from San Diego. When other delay fithi used to ask me where I am from, my answer was San Diego. Where my parents came from was never a factor to me, all I knew was they were both born in Asmara and they instilled the passion and love I have for Eritrea and that was it. This innocence at times became corrupted due to what I mentioned earlier as divisive tactics applied by entities within our movement. When I began to learn about the religion and **አውራጃ** issues, I along with other fellow **ደላይ ፍትሐ** made it our mission to have workshops dedicated to open discussion about tolerating all Eritreans no matter what their religion or **አውራጃ** may be. When we look at the history of both ELF and EPLF both organizations included all of Eritrea which is why we were able to gain our independence. This same formula must be used now in our MDC and as an organization we must lead by example and continue to fight back on the divisiveness of religion and **አውራጃ**.

The last "change" factor I would like to address is the "face of our movement." In the U.S. we had Martin Luther King Jr. who was the face of the civil rights movement. MLK was the leader both J.F.K. and Robert Kennedy turned to during the heated era of racism and the black struggle for civil rights in America. Through MLK's leadership and other efforts, African Americans were able to gain their civil rights. It is time for our movement to have a "face." Many people I speak to who are interested in joining us, ask me "does the opposition have a leader," then I am forced to explain all the number of political groups and honestly many people become discouraged. I believe now is the time we begin to think about who our leader can be, globally, especially in our current momentum of YIKAL. I know many of you may be thinking there are a number of **ውድባት** and they all have leaders; however this is why we are unable to attract the masses. As we have now come together, I would like to suggest that as a political organization we focus on this important and crucial political factor; and create a highly strong and pragmatic political propaganda campaign to propel our leadership to the world.

I would like to thank you all for taking the time out to listen to my thoughts and ideas; and I am grateful to have been given a platform to speak. When I was first called about coming to Germany to attend this Unity Congress, I just gave birth to my baby girl Zion Mariam, and a year prior to my baby-boy Gabriel. Zion was about 7 months old when I discussed with my family about coming to Germany; and made the decision to participate in our Unity Congress in which my family highly encouraged. Also members of **ግንባር ሃገራዊ ድህነት** who I met back in 2010 have been my heroes and inspiration **ኣብዚ ቃልስና** also played a huge role in my decision to attend the Unity Congress. Although members of **ድህነት ሕድሪ** are former ELF and EPLF **ተጋደልቲ** they do not allow those

facts to dictate who they are as activists today. The men and women of **ድሕነት** exemplify Eritreans genuinely working together always respecting one another on our journey. I am surrounded by men and women who put their past political affiliations aside with the determination to work together towards a common goal which is removal of the authoritarian regime led by Isaias Afewrki. In the United States, no matter where there is a demonstration or a seminar that I am involved in organizing, all members of **ድሕነት ሕድሪ** do their best to assist and be supportive in any way possible. We all live in different states, from Seattle to California, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Atlanta, Ohio, Florida and New York...yet we always work as a team utilizing our networks to make sure all events are successful.

In the same regards I have had the pleasure of working with EPDP members like Tesfay Digiga and his wife Asgedet in the Bay Area for the **ሓውኻ አበይ አሎ** and the Boston Demo on behalf of our brothers and sisters that died in Lampedusa back in 2013. Even our brother **ትኩላ** from Canada was very active when I was involved in the leadership in organizing our COIE New York Demo in 2013. So, my point is, all of us, both members of EPDP and **ድሕነት ሕድሪ** have been working on the ground together on grassroots projects **/አብ ናይ ህዝቢ ጉዳይ**; and the fact that we have now come together officially was a move that felt natural. Being here with you all this week has been a very fruitful, enlightening and democratic experience. Having Feven Gideon (**ፈሽን ወንጫር**) here someone who I admire through social media and the cherry on top a female Chairwoman Adiam Tefera was a wonderful introduction for me when arriving here to Germany; and even more of a motivation that as an activist I am in the right place. Thank you all, I look forward to our journey together...**ዓወትና ናይ ግድን ኢዩ!**

ሓፍትኹም ፡ ብጸይትኹም ዓልኩም፤

Adiam Haile-Rufael...**የቐንየለይ**