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**Radio Erena: Interview with Mr. Andebrhan Welde Giorgis
Comment on 16 January 2021
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Eri-Platform is pleased, with the kind consent of the author, to share this expanded incisive comment which adds significant value to a clearer understanding of the main issues addressed in Ambassador Andebrhan's interview with Radio Erena as a stand-alone piece to enable further debate and reach a wider audience.

Thanks to *Radio Erena* and the interviewer for providing the forum for Ambassador Andebrhan Welde Giorgis to share with us his thoughts and analysis about the current political status of Eritrea. Although we have had the opportunity to hear Mr. Andebrhan's previous assessments of the political developments in Eritrea, it is very refreshing to hear once again a very thoughtful deliberation of the current environment, including a rich analysis of the historical context. Particularly, during these divisive times where many are clamouring for partisan advantages through an onslaught of propaganda that limits social contestation and freedom of expression, it is significant and welcome to have a thoughtful and focused account on the present condition of Eritrea.

This segment vividly displays the views of a certain section of Eritreans, particularly, younger generation. It also indicates that Eritreans of certain age (older ones with experience) have a lot of work to do to engage and communicate with this new generation. I appreciate the interviewer's straightforwardness, probing approach, and pluck. However, it was frustrating to this viewer to watch the interviewer brusquely interrupting the guest in the 'journalistic' style of some western talk show hosts. At times, it seemed to this writer (and others who expressed similar frustrations) that the interviewer was more concerned about his next prepared question, rather than let his guest expound on his responses. However, generally it is an informative interview. Most importantly, the Eritrean people have been deprived of venues, whereby such kind of conversation and dialogue can take place in the internet media. Thanks Radio Erena for providing this interview. Much thanks to Mr. Andebrhan for engaging and sharing his thoughts and knowledge.

As for Eritrea and Ethiopia/Tigray *Kelil* border issue, Mr. Andebrhan delineates it authoritatively in his book - *Eritrea at a Crossroads* - and he has discussed it in various venues as well. Some Eritreans (PFDJ supporters, and not to mention Eritreans Weyane adherents, and some Eritreans with personal antipathy based on his official assignment in Eritrea) and Tigreans (in disguise as Eritreans, or those well-known shady 'digital Weyanes') have found Andebrhan's carefully documented

assessment of his own lived reality as an EPLF high personage, and later as government official a threat to their political interests and existence. This phenomena of the interrelationship of Eritreans and Tigreans (Weyane) has been brewing in a very unhealthy manner to a point now that some Eritreans are compelled to take sides, which has resulted in major distraction and divisiveness.

In recent times, Eritreans, particularly those who are in opposition of the present regime - Isaias and PFDJ - have been splintered into either outright adherent of Weyane, or advocates of one faction over another (divided by region, ethnicity, religion, and personalities). It would seem there is also a large 'silent majority' who convey their concern about Eritrea's welfare, but do not associate with one group or another. While it is well and good to have a positive feeling and live peacefully with Tigreans (as most Tigray people are decent and have lived with their neighbours harmoniously for centuries), and for that matter the rest of Ethiopians or other neighbourly countries, it has become unhealthy to enmesh Eritreans with either Tigray or the rest of Ethiopia at this stage in history when much of wounds have not yet healed or adjudicated properly.

Eritrea had barely begun to savour its sovereignty and freedom, when a devastating war broke out instigated by TPLF, (and coupled with Isaias' fumbling and insular leadership, as thoroughly described by Andebrhan) with a very fiendish preoccupation to destabilize, weaken and isolate Eritrea as a country. As time went on, it became clear that Weyane's grand idea went even further to threaten Eritreans' existence as a people; they began in earnest to lay down all kinds of schemes to realize their illusory ambitions of usurping power and creating a 'Greater Tigray'. This precarious plan, coupled with a tacit approval and support of the international powers, was primarily concocted to weaken Eritrean nationalism and self-determination. Clearly, it has brought on some collateral damage to Eritrean nationalism and much hardship, dislocation, and turmoil within Eritrean society. Needless to say, this grand idea and Weyane's repressive and avaricious governance also ran afoul of the rest of Ethiopian national sentiment, as they too have a lot of grievances, because of Weyanes' repression and overreach.

First and foremost, what has been a tragedy is that Eritreans have an unelected authoritarian leader, who has presided over a country since its inception, with no constitution, no rule of law, no national treasury, and no improvement in the standard of living of its citizens. Isaias' rule is a one man show with no semblance of capable cabinet members - he has absolute power and controls of every aspect of life and civil society. There is hardly any bureaucratic structure, judiciary, or civil organizations. All those who tried to bring reform and questioned this state of affairs were thrown in prison and have not been seen or heard from again (some of these Eritreans were leading men in the revolution, who have been imprisoned for over 25 years). What is amazing is that Isaias does not even feel he is beholden to the Eritrean people over whom he presides - he is aloof and sullen.

The country has been so neglected and destroyed economically, socially, and politically for decades, it threatens to pull apart its very social fabric that was kept it

intact even under successive brutal imperial regimes and harsh European colonialism in the past. This self-absorbed, autocratic leader is so tone-deaf that he shows up twice a year to so called presidential televised interviews and gives lectures about his ruminations on the politics of the Horn, Ethiopia and beyond brandishing his latest self-study on geopolitical intrigues and world affairs. He does not even venture to talk to Eritreans about their concerns and even those momentous 'peace agreement' and rapprochement with Ethiopia. Currently, the Eritrean people are in turmoil, dislocation and in isolation due to COVID-19; they are distressed and suppressed by this merciless dictator and either living in prison-like circumstances or abandoning their beloved country to go anywhere else and live as exiles or refugees. Eritreans who remain in the country are stoically enduring these hardships to maintain their hard-fought independence and freedom from foreign aggression.

At present, it is rumoured that Eritrean soldiers are engaged in war and Weyane missiles are crashing into Asmara airport and elsewhere, but Isaias does not feel that he is obligated to inform its citizenry about whether a war is being pursued outside Eritrea's borders, or to provide what is the rationale for such an incursion (or dismiss it as baseless propaganda) or communicate at all to Eritrean parents where their children (the troops) are, and how they are affected in this war that is raging in their backyard. It is heartless, obscene, and grotesque - history will judge Isaias for inflicting such suffering to a very noble Eritrean people who deserve a happy and prosperous life in their own land. So, rightly, Eritreans in the diaspora are bitterly wanting to get rid of this predatory, rapacious, and cruel regime. Hence, some Eritreans, in desperation, are aligning themselves with the willing and wily Weyanes. In addition, some Eritreans treasonously and despicably have jumped ship during the most critical period amid and after the war with Weyane in late 1980s, in order to cash in and/or become willing sycophants and promoters of Weyanes' campaign to destabilize Eritrea and incite conflict by advocating unity and accommodations, i.e., confederation, federation, outright amalgamation with Tigray or Ethiopia.

As for the Eritreans' relationship with Tigray, it is this writer's contention that overall, it is high time that Eritreans thoroughly analyse and discuss the historical and indeed the contemporary relations between them. Afterall, since it is our closest borderland in the South, they affect us very intimately. Both this discussion and Andebrhan's analysis highlight the bewildering degree to which Tigreans' irresponsible politics, callous misinformation, and barrage of propaganda, and pathological lies have seeped into the psyche of many Eritreans. It is heart breaking to watch young Eritreans in the diaspora feeling that they need assistance from others or want to outsource this element to these untrustworthy and corrupt 'Weyane' clique to extricate themselves from Isaias' dictatorial regime.

It is said that when some opposition groups asked the Weyane leadership if they could assist in overthrowing Isaias, the Weyanes cunningly said why should we do that. It is undeniable by then that what they were interested in was to weaken Eritrea by financing inexhaustible money embezzled from the Ethiopian treasury (mostly loan and aid money), so that they realize their wicked aspiration of becoming the supreme power in the region, representing Ethiopia and/or usurping Eritrean sovereignty

under the republic of 'Greater Tigray'. Well, it is a historical achievement that Eritreans fought the larger Ethiopian empire with all its powerful international enablers for 30 years to attain their goal of a sovereign state. Subsequently, Weyane was envisioning to short-circuit this and do an end run while destroying Eritrea.

As Weyane became comfortable in Menelik's palace, they began touting their ancient imperial history, appropriating Eritrean culture and values as their own, exaggerating their revolutionary prowess, embellishing it with some revisionist and newly concocted historical narratives. They wanted to leapfrog into becoming the next supreme power in the region. While they were emulating and sometimes outright plagiarizing Eritrean historical achievements during the revolution by appropriating events and even shamelessly photoshopping images of fighters as their own; they were also trafficking Tigrean youths audaciously to gain admittance as refugees to Western countries masquerading as Eritreans; and generally, Weyane brazenly recasting Eritrean history as their own.

What is remarkable is that they also assiduously pursued a crusade of disparaging and denigrating Eritrean history without reserve; and most monstrously impersonating Eritrean identity to create divisions, animosity among Eritreans through a fiercely well financed 'digital Weyane' campaign of disinformation, lies, innuendos, and harassment to demoralize Eritreans. The intent of all these divisiveness, malevolence and venom is to instil division, discord, and weaken Eritrean unity and resolve to independently attend to their own business of struggling for their rights in their own country. This phenomenon has even become extreme now in Weyane's desperation to find scapegoats in their unsuccessful foray against the central government of Ethiopia.

One wonders, how they expect to have a rapprochement with Eritreans after all these repugnant misdeeds and vile defamation. It was clear that Weyane's underlying interest was to remain the preeminent power representing Ethiopia and usurping Eritrean sovereignty under 'Greater Tigray'. So, for some Eritreans now to be in a consultative or to be a subsidiary to Weyane's interests - how does one square this with this conduct? When gallant Eritreans brought sovereignty on their own, not to mention that Eritreans helped TPLF (Weyane) to get on its feet since Tigray people were also oppressed by successive Ethiopian regimes. The EPLF literally escorted the TPLF to *Arat Kilo*, Menelik's Palace in 1991.

So, turning to this war that is raging south of the Eritrean border, it is quite something to watch the dissemination of disinformation and outright lies perpetrated by Weyane and its supporters, including the international media and social media. One ploy has been to implicate and embroil Eritrea in this war. One could speculate that the use of such an approach is to change the dismal reality on the ground - as it took only a few weeks for Weyane to find itself in disarray.

So perhaps this is a desperate and humiliating 'tactical' approach to internationalize this effort and have outside powers come in as 'mediators' or 'supporters' to rescue them. Secondly, there may be other pitiful aims - to demean Abiy as incapable of

waging a war against the 'mighty' Weyane (perhaps, a backhanded acknowledgment of Eritrean's prowess!! I would not hold my breath for that. It a bit their vanity and bigotry towards an Oromo leader which they have been denigrating all along). Also, perhaps to dog-whistle to old nationalist Amharas' resentment about Eritrea's intrusion and pre-eminence into the Ethiopian empire. Finally, to further divide Eritreans in the diaspora and have them align with them against the 'old imperial' Ethiopian onslaught. Whichever their rationale, it is a Weyane contrivance that is unprincipled, seeks to stir up biases, and is unrooted in facts and truth. Conceivably, too much cleverness and equivocation had rendered them softheaded and vacuous. With such hubris and immoral stand of the Weyane regime, its demise from the Ethiopian political scene is welcomed. It is also a defeat of biblical proportion.

What is galling is Weyane temerity to say anything vile about Eritrea as leverage to keep their ill-gained power and then condescendingly claim that they have the support of Eritrean brethren (perhaps, they meant their agents!). It is an insult and a defamation of the Eritrean people to depict Eritrean soldiers as marauders, thieves and rapists, while some Eritreans foolishly, and quite traitorously, parrot these malicious contentions and servilely extol praises and pity at Weyane's humiliating defeat. For Eritreans, the (justifiable) opposition to Isaias' regime is no excuse for not challenging this objectionable name calling and malicious tarnishing of Eritrea's image. When Weyane hurled missiles at Asmara, one despicable Eritrean opposition journalist and his supporters, who are financed by Weyane, hailed it as legitimate! Unbelievable. No wonder, most Eritreans do not join some of these opportunist and charlatan opposition groups. Nonetheless, there are a good number of Eritreans, who may be cast down by this turn of events that they remain silent (it is notable to see other Ethiopians coming forth to defend Eritreans and how some Eritreans are checking out Ethiopian media/social sites to fraternize and get information). Afterall, Eritreans know fully well the cost of war, and not to mention the trouble and dire circumstance our people find themselves inside our country.

If this contention is true, that Eritrean soldiers are fighting in Ethiopia and are perpetrating these types of lawlessness, then let's see the evidence and have a thorough investigation, as anything is possible during war. But, given the subterfuge, cheap political tactics and fraudulent news that have been disseminated daily through social media, *Twitter* and other *You Tube* 'news' outlets from digital Weyane and their supporters, with Western individual interests in Brussels, Oslo, London, Boston, it is not believable as they are known partisans, advocates, lobbyists and counterfeiterers. I guess they must wager that Eritreans (or the regime) will once again keep quiet or will not counter these narratives.

It is disgusting, as the Weyane always shamelessly vilify, slander, and dishonour Eritrea for their political advantage *vis a vis* the lazy international press, reporting chaos and mayhems, instead of adhering to their own journalistic standards and ethics when it pertains to reporting news about Africa. This seems to be Weyane's last card - I suppose they never thought they will be thrashed and routed so quickly. In fact, it was the Weyane themselves who did a lot of these types of heinous crimes (looting, killing and raping) against Eritrean villagers during the Badme war of 1998-

2000 (once again Eritrea did not broadcast it, which is a bad habit of the inept and aloof regime). The Western world did not say much about Weyane's crimes during that war and thereafter, including prior decades of Ethiopian soldiers' human rights abuse of civilians and bombing of entire villages in Eritrea during the 30 years of war of independence.

Now, to watch Westerners falling over each other to write about war crimes and unsubstantiated apocryphal news, using spurious data and posing as independent analysts and experts, citing and leaning on a handful 'Weyane sources' is very reprehensible and disgraceful. There are a handful individuals (4 or 5) of Westerners and opportunistic Eritrean collaborators who are driving the news of this war. They call themselves experts 'on peace and conflict', journalists, NGO workers, human rights advocates, etc. They are the talking heads and activists who call themselves 'experts' on the region (Horn of Africa) as program directors in universities, freelancers, and adjuncts for *Human Rights Watch*, *Crisis Groups*, *Amnesty International*, etc. They all live in the West and shamelessly assert that their 'analyses' rest on their 'Weyane sources', who are mostly auxiliaries and partisans residing in the West themselves.

These Western 'experts' and their Eritrean collaborators claim they are objective and agenda free, touting their affiliation with the academe, press and 'think tanks', and NGOs. It is a slick trade-off: Western 'analysts' and Weyane 'sources' lend each other a counterfeit 'legitimacy' imbued with power and pose as moral arbiters of the Western world and their native informants. This insular 'expert' groups pass around the same fictitious, uncorroborated and biased 'news' to the larger world press without any moral compunction or accountability to the millions who are affected by these devastating wars. What is incredible is that reputable news organizations, like *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *the BBC*, *The Guardian*, *Al Jazeera* also regurgitate the same 'news' without verification from other reputable sources, say Eritreans or Ethiopian scholars, professionals or independent observers, ignoring their own journalistic standards or ethical responsibility to their readers.

Eritreans are used to this type of bias and unfair treatment by the Western media for a long while. In general, this conflict within Ethiopia between the federal government and this arrogant and corrupt minority regional leaders is revealing. The West and East imperial powers' half-hearted and careless approach to African concerns and problems is notable, as powerful international entities and Western government's response to this war have been affected by social media and Twitter activists' onslaught instead of careful deliberation and assessment. We see now that the Ethiopian regime which has had a cosy and cordial relationship with the Western world, is finding itself on the receiving end of the arrogance and highhanded diplomatic scolding inflicted upon it as on other African countries. Of course, the clever Weyane are using this predilection to their advantage, utilizing the trendy approach of employing a barrage of fraudulent claims and relentless campaign on Twitter, Facebook, You Tube, etc., to attract international attention and influence foreign powers to respond to their specious claims of human rights violations and perhaps overturn the outcome of this war.

As for Eritrean military personnel, so far, alas nobody has stood up to advocate for and ward off such ghastly and awful disparagement. These troops are serving as the country's defence force - and they are our people after all. Besides, this kind of behaviour is not part of the Eritrean ethos and values. Eritreans, by and large, are honourable and hardworking people, with hardly any violence or crime in their own country. During the revolution, Eritrean fighters' treatment of captured Ethiopian soldiers has been internationally documented as humane and adherent to the Geneva Convention, even when the other side did horrific stuff to Eritrean war prisoners.

So, how does this square with Weyane's accusations of our military personnel now? Weyane's reprehensible and sophomoric accusations are repulsive and vile. Weyane's duplicity and chicanery have inflicted a lot of hardship, devastation, and divisions among Eritreans. It is quite clear now that there are many Eritreans (websites) who have been working for Weyane's interest and are financed by them. But sadly, the outcome of years of dislocation and suppression by Isaias' regime has driven Eritreans to become distracted, bewildered, and silenced. I agree with you Andebrhan: **'One can be vehemently, fully opposed to Isaias and his brutal dictatorial regime and, at the same time, unwaveringly reject the Weyanes' scheme, and machinations of undercutting Eritrea - they are the two sides of the same coin.'** Eritreans should fight for their rightful civil liberties, dignity and get their country back from Isaias' cruel clutches.

Finally, this war, as Mr. Andebrhan has said, is between the central government in Ethiopia and Weyane. Some Eritreans fear that if Tigray is defeated, the rest of Ethiopia will venture onwards toward Eritrea. While this fear has some plausibility, this concern at this time is misguided and off-balance. However, Weyane has proved to be equally a vicious rival and foe to Eritreans. It has done a lot of damage on many fronts to Eritrea since our independence. So, one could say that we do not need such an acquisitive, covetous, belligerent, and villainous adversary right next door.

If Eritrea is strong and unified, it can stand on its own two feet, against any foe, as it has done during the national liberation struggle. If the outcome of this war is that Eritrea has taken control and reclaimed its land, that is very welcome. If Eritrean soldiers are fighting in Tigray, it is of concern to this writer only because young Eritreans should not shed one drop of blood in Ethiopia again. The Eritrean people have a right to be consulted about all this as well. Also, in this war, if there is a 'militaristic' or strategic reason and this engagement was done to protect the interest of Eritrea, one should not jump to condemn it just because we have a rapacious dictatorial leader like Isaias. But, my people, these (Eritrean military troops) are your sons and daughters, and your sisters and brothers! At the end of the day, how could we not stand by them?