




Challenges & Opportunities for Democratic Transition in Eritrea

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The Situation in Eritrean Today

- Economic suffocation, political paralysis, and societal disintegration.
- Our situation today is the outcome of the betrayal of the fundamental objectives of the armed struggle and the profound aspirations of the Eritrean people for freedom, democracy, justice, and prosperity.
- There is a lot that can be said about the present situation in Eritrea. Given the constraint of time, let's focus on what needs to be done today in order to secure our future as a people and as a country.
- I will briefly highlight the **Challenges and Opportunities for Democratic Transition in Eritrea** as a basis for our discussion.

Objective and Subjective Conditions

- Today, the objective and subjective conditions in Eritrea are ripe for change.
 - It is high time to own our present and seize our future.
 - The survival of the State of Eritrea and the wellbeing of the Eritrean people demand change and democratic transition, the sooner the better.
 - However, we must recognise and bear in mind that:
 - (1) Changing an authoritarian regime like ours is a difficult task;
 - (2) When change happens, the process of political transition to a democratic system of government would be even more difficult and complex; and
 - (3) Effective execution of change and democratic transition would require preparation, foresight and prudence.
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Sustain Hope

“Where there is life, there is hope!” Hope is a powerful force for change.

Hope, conviction and **confidence** are decisive for **successful action** in any endeavour.

(1) **Hope** of a better future, *turning what is into what should be*, drives people to action and to rise up and overcome challenges along the way.

(2) **Belief** that change and democratic transition are doable in Eritrea today is vital.

(3) **Confidence** that we can, through organised work and united action, bring about change and democratic transition is crucial for success.

Hope, conviction and **confidence** are essential elements to organise, sustain and carry out the hard work needed to effect change and democratic transition in Eritrea.

Change + Continuity

The transitional political process must embody change and continuity at the same time:

- ***Change* of the authoritarian regime and *continuity* of an independent sovereign State of Eritrea.**

A preparatory period, or a **period of transition**, with a definite timeframe would be necessary to establish a **democratic regime** in place of the ***ancien regime***, with all its rules, institutions, procedures, etc.

Furthermore, it would be essential to establish, build and reinforce functional institutions in order to consolidate the new regime and enable it to deliver freedom, democracy, and prosperity for the Eritrean people.

Possibilities...

Political transition is a process that, in most cases, results in the replacement of a old authoritarian regime with a new democratic regime.

However, this may not be always the case. It is thus important to recognise that the process may vary in content, structure and outcome.

Why?

Because we can expect 3 possibilities or scenarios in a reality like ours.

This means that the new regime could be:

1. Similar to the old regime, with slight changes in form or appearance;
2. Worse than the old regime;
3. Better than the old regime.

Of the 3 possibilities, we must aim for the third: the formation of a constitutional government committed to the rule of law, adheres to democratic principles, and guarantees the fundamental freedoms and basic rights of the Eritrean people.

Proactive Preparation

Beware that changing an authoritarian regime or effecting democratic transition in Eritrea could face **domestic** and **regional** challenges.

Proactively prepare to **minimise/overcome** the potential negative impacts.

The main domestic challenges to change and democratic transition stem from the nature of the regime:

The authoritarian regime is characterised by:

- (1) absolute dictatorship,
- (2) extreme predation,
- (3) extreme wastefulness
- (4) extreme dysfunction,
- (5) extreme malevolence, and
- (6) extreme impunity.

1. Absolute dictatorship:

The present regime is an outright dictatorship that has usurped absolute power; that possesses no functional state organs or government institutions; and that prolongs its rule through resort to coercion and violent force.

2. Extreme Predation:

It is a predatory regime that, having monopolised the country's natural, economic, social and cultural resources, devises various pretexts to plunder state assets and extort money from the people.

3. Extreme wastefulness:

It is a profligate regime that squanders the nation's productive manpower, the revenues from the extraction of the country's natural resources, and state assets and public finances at whim.

4. Extreme dysfunction:

A dysfunctional regime preoccupied with self-aggrandisement.

A defunct regime that has failed to provide for the basic necessities of the people.

An archaic regime that manages a degrading coupon economy in this 21st century.

An abominable regime characterised by rampant corruption.

5. Extreme malevolence:

It is a malevolent regime that nips any good initiative or positive development in Eritrea in the bud. It is a particularly mean regime that deliberately expands and deepens poverty in order to prolong its hold on power.

6. Extreme impunity:

It is a ruthless regime that has trampled underfoot the basic democratic, civil and human rights of the Eritrean people. It is a lawless regime that rules through the use of brutal force, without any due process or moral compunction.

The Horn of Africa and the Red Sea Basin

Beware of possible geopolitical challenges associated with the situation in our region:

- Characterised by wars, strife and instability; domestic crises and internal conflict;
- The people suffer from a general state of economic backwardness and abject poverty.

Change and democratic transition should secure the following objectives:

1. The continued existence of an independent **sovereign State of Eritrea**.
2. The **safety, stability** and **security** of the State of Eritrea.
3. A government of Eritrea with a **new structure, democratic composition** and **content**.
4. Administration of **transitional justice** to provide **closure for victims** and promote **national reconciliation**.
5. Consolidate **transparent** and **accountable institutions** of **political** and **economic governance** that embrace **fair representation** of the Eritrean people, in all of their **diversity**, and **functional social services** that cater to the **basic needs** of the **people**.

Reconcile and Move Forward!

Eritrean Diaspora pro-democracy forces must, first and foremost:

- Move on from **futile and counter-productive bickering** about the past; and
- Do away with the **negative politics** of **grievance** and **rivalry**;
- Focus on issues that we have the **capacity** and **the mandate** to address and resolve.

We must adopt a constructive perspective and work to:

1. Cultivate a **shared vision** and **common action** through **inclusive dialogue**.
2. Crystallise **democratic change** through **Eritrean ownership**.
3. Strengthen the **democratic resistance** at **home**.

In brief, change and democratic transition would require the establishment of a **national democratic movement**, embracing the democratic resistance at home and the pro-democracy forces in the Diaspora.

Beyond the transition, we must prepare to contribute to **state reconstitution** and **national reconstruction**.

Establish a Solid Foundation (i)

To achieve its objectives, the democratic movement must, at a minimum, embrace the following **basic principles** and **core values**:

1. Eritrea is the **shared homeland** of all Eritreans:
 - Ensure a future State of Eritrea that avails each citizen **equal rights, equal obligations** and **equal opportunities**.

2. Establish a constitutional government.
 - A **constitution** is the foundation of the **rule of law**; the guarantee of **fundamental freedoms** and **basic rights**; the repository of the **people's sovereignty**; and the source of all **legitimate authority**.

3. Constitute an inclusive democratic government that:
 - **Represents** the entire people of Eritrea.
 - Is put **in and out of power** with the free will of the people.
 - Ensures **special protection** for **women** and **minority rights**.

A Solid Foundation (ii)

4. Institute a **decentralised administrative** system:

- Allowing the people to **manage their daily life** as they deem fit and have a **voice** in the political, economic, social and cultural decisions affecting their livelihood.

5. Improve the livelihood of the people and deliver prosperity by:

- Formulating and implementing a macro-economic policy framework that mobilises the productive potential of Eritrea's manpower and kick starts economic development.

6. Cultivate new regional relations based on peaceful coexistence and good neighbourliness by:

- Focusing on **political cooperation** and **economic integration** that guarantee the **sovereignty, territorial integrity** and **peaceful development** of the State of Eritrea.



Thank you!