

Eritrea Symposium 2023

Safeguarding Eritrea's Security and Sovereignty

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Keynote Address

Dear Participants of *Eritrea Symposium 2023*,

I would like to start our *Symposium* today by extending you a very warm welcome and wishing you all and our people, once again, a more fulfilling and prosperous 2023. I would also like to thank you all for coming here from Canada, Europe, and the United States to participate in this Symposium at a crucial moment in the status of Eritrea's national security.

We are gathered here under the theme of *Safeguarding Eritrea's Security and Sovereignty* to discuss the present situation in our beloved country and seek common ground for joint action to help safeguard its security and sovereignty through effective advocacy for the institution of the rule of law.

For over sixty years, the Eritrean people have endured a protracted war of national liberation, domestic oppression, and external aggression. Following the victory of the armed struggle and five years of independence, the double jeopardy of domestic oppression and external aggression have deprived the Eritrean people of basic human security and degraded their human condition.

Usurping state power in defiance of his transitional mandate, a malevolent autocrat has treated the Eritrean people as objects, run Eritrea as a private fiefdom, and dispensed with state assets and national resources like personal property. Citizens are deprived of fundamental freedoms and rights. They have no say in the policies and practices that govern their lives and determine their livelihoods. Under the flimsy guise of national security, the regime has imposed a brutal dictatorship, closed the political and economic space, isolated the country, and pushed the youth into mass exodus. It has failed to capitalise on Eritrea's ample resource base and significant geostrategic, geoeconomic and geopolitical advantages to develop the country and improve the livelihood of the people.

There is thus a paramount need for change in the conduct of the affairs of state, the management of the business of government, and the treatment of public finance. There must be transparent and accountable management of State revenues and expenditures. The revenues from the highly lucrative mining sector must be used to revive and rebuild the ruined coupon economy. The bare subsistence of the Eritrean people on meagre rations must come to an end.

It is shame on the regime that our people wallow in misery while our cities and ports languish in a state of decay, with their dilapidated buildings and potholed streets lying in utter disrepair. The ban long imposed on the economically important construction sector should be lifted immediately to resolve the acute shortage of housing. Urgent renovation of power and water

supply and delivery systems must be undertaken to end extended stoppages. Eritrea's ports must be serviced and used as a matter of urgency to generate valuable revenues.

The gallant Eritrean Defence Forces (EDF) have liberated hitherto occupied Eritrean territory in the borderlands and significantly degraded a source of an existential threat to the security, territorial integrity, and sovereignty of the State of Eritrea, at least for the short term. The victory makes a vital contribution to the national security of the State of Eritrea, the territorial integrity of Eritrea and Ethiopia, and the stability of the region. Defying unwarranted pressures instigated by a targeted smear campaign of defamation based on premeditated allegations of *genocide, sexual violence, and looting*, including the imposition of unjust unilateral sanctions, the EDF have effectively accomplished their mission and returned home in triumph.

The historic victory has brought about a new realignment of forces and a new military balance in the region favourable to the security of the State of Eritrea. But what do I mean by the security of the State of Eritrea?

National security has both military and non-military dimensions. Beyond safeguarding the physical safety of a State and its people, national security includes economic security, food security, environmental security, energy security and cyber security. It means, first and foremost, *the security and wellbeing of the Eritrean people to lead a fulfilling life in freedom, peace, and prosperity*. The meaning of national security thus comprises integral political, economic, military, and diplomatic elements that complement each other.

Let me make brief remarks on each of these integral elements of national security.

First, political security denotes the stability of a social order based not on severe repression but on the rule of law, meaning the rule of both domestic and international law. In concise terms, political security is the absence of government repression, violation of human rights, ill treatment, and enforced disappearance. Above all, political security depends on the human security of the people.

What constitutes *human security*? The UN defines human security as *the safety of the people from hunger, disease, and repression, including disruptions of daily life*. The concept includes economic security, environmental security, food security, health security, personal security, community security, political security, and the protection of women and minorities.

Second, economic security prevails when a State manages a nation's natural and human resources to develop the national economy. The ability of a nation's economy to create employment, produce wealth and generate prosperity for its citizens constitutes the primary measure of its economic security. Essentially, economic security determines the State's defence capability which, in turn, impacts its national security. A sound economy would enable Eritrea to sustain a credible defence capability as the foundation of a sound national security in a volatile region mired in constant turbulence.

Third, military security is predicated on the possession and maintenance of combat effective armed forces as an indispensable component of a credible national defence capability. It requires a stable social order, an ample and intact population base, sustainable economic development, and a capacity to apply modern science and technology. In our high-tech 21st century, this includes the acquisition, knowhow, and application of advanced weapons systems, modern military science and technology.

Fourth, proactive diplomacy represents an essential tool of national security. Diplomacy, like war, is an extension of politics by other means. It is often effectively deployed either as a substitute or as a complement of war. When deployed as a substitute, it can prevent the outbreak of war or the escalation of hostilities. When deployed as a complement of war, it helps ensure that military victory promotes national security. The effective pursuit of political objectives through war requires the simultaneous deployment of proactive diplomacy and effective communication feeding a constant flow of timely information.

Now, using these essential elements of national security, let us assess the actual reality in Eritrea today. It is, of course, quite clear that the prevailing reality in our country is the outcome of the policies and practices pursued by the government during the past thirty-two years. Do the Eritrean people have *the security and wellbeing to lead a fulfilling life in freedom, peace, and prosperity* today?

As regards political security, the reality on the ground is extremely dismal. Political security requires building a stable social order based on the rule of law. The application of the Constitution of Eritrea would establish the rule of law as a necessary condition for a stable social order. It would also open the political space, safeguard the fundamental freedoms and rights of the Eritrean people, and enhance their human security.

Economic security requires the opening of the economic space and the prudent management of national resources to develop the economy. Economic development creates employment, produces wealth, and generate prosperity. Economic security would encourage domestic investment and attract Eritrean entrepreneurs to return home to invest, flourish, create wealth, and contribute to national development in their own country rather than in other countries. It would also attract foreign direct investment (FDI). I would like to underscore here that economic security is the foundation of a State's sustainable defence capability and national security.

As regards military security, Eritrea today possesses combat effective armed forces capable of national defence *vis-à-vis* its relatively weaker neighbours. Sustaining and enhancing this defence capability requires the professionalisation of the EDF, the modernisation of its equipment and command-and-control structures, the maintenance of an intact and growing population base, the pursuit of sustainable economic development, and the building of technical capacity and knowhow. Furthermore, it requires the implementation of national service in accordance with the terms and spirit of its establishing *Proclamation 82/1995* (23 October 1995) to achieve its original aims, dissuade the youth from fleeing the country, and enable the normal expansion of the population base.

Equally important, diplomacy can be deployed as an essential tool of national security to resolve conflict, prevent war, deescalate hostilities, or achieve the political objectives of war. Deploying this vital tool, Eritrea's diplomacy today must leverage its military achievement and the EDF's sacrifices to secure:

1. Ethiopia's recognition of the Eritrea-Ethiopia colonial treaty border;
2. The physical demarcation of the colonial treaty border in line with the *Demarcation Directions* of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC); and
3. International support for and recognition of the boundary and its physical demarcation.

In the final analysis, a clearly demarcated and internationally recognised boundary would help avert future violations of Eritrea's sovereignty and territorial integrity, serve as a solid foundation for durable peace with Ethiopia, and promote Eritrea's national security.

During more than thirty years in power, the President of Eritrea has refused to apply the Constitution of Eritrea and institute *rule of law*. Instead, he has imposed the capricious *rule of man* on a law-abiding society proud of its centuries-old codified customary laws. He has obstructed the building of a functional state apparatus, viable state organs or operational administrative institutions. The regime has been unwilling and unable to establish constitutional governance, institute participatory politics, attain social progress, or develop the economy. It has failed to provide for basic needs and essential social services. It is obvious that this is primarily due to the lack of goodwill. Quite strangely, the president has the audacity to frequently bemoan the lack of adequate physical and social infrastructure and essential public goods and services in the country, as if his rule of over thirty years is not to blame.

It is crystal clear that the objective consequences of the policies and practices of the government undermine the various elements of national security and jeopardise the sovereignty of the State of Eritrea. The regime has thus demonstrated its inability to properly govern the country or provide for the basic needs of the people. The democratic seizure of power by the people has long been overdue. In a fundamental sense, the establishment of constitutional governance has become a matter of national security, an existential necessity for the survival and prosperity of an independent sovereign State of Eritrea.

There is thus a paramount need to crystallise an Eritrean-owned, home-grown change to ensure a stable transition to the rule of law. Patriotic Eritreans at home and in the Diaspora must coalesce and work together to contribute to a stable transition to constitutional governance.

Eri-Platform has, during the past six years, conducted successive *Symposiums* designed to gather pro-democracy groups and activist individuals to coalesce, pool ideas and resources together, and collaborate in support of change and stable transition in Eritrea. As a continuation of that effort, Eri-Platform is convening this year's follow-up conference, *Eritrea Symposium 2023*, under the theme of *Safeguarding Eritrea's Security and Sovereignty*.

In line with past practice, *Eritrea Symposium 2023* aims to:

1. Facilitate an informed discussion of the current situation in Eritrea and propose appropriate plans of action.
2. Build on the *acquis* of past symposiums to enhance coalescence and collaboration in pursuit of a stable transition to constitutional governance.
3. Provide a forum for networking and cooperation among pro-democracy Eritrean activists in the Diaspora.

Designed to facilitate frank and open dialogue, the *Symposium* is organised in five interrelated and complementary thematic panels, including a General Question and Answer session. Each panel comprises two panellists and a moderator.

Panel 1: Factors of National Security of the State of Eritrea

Panel 2: A Path to Durable Peace between Eritrea and Ethiopia

Panel 3: Catalysing Home-Grown Transition to Constitutional Governance

Panel 4: General Question & Answer Session

Panel 5: Coalescence in Defence of National Security

In the final analysis, the Eritrean people, just like any other people the world over, deserve *security and wellbeing to lead a fulfilling life in freedom, peace, and prosperity*. Eritreans deserve and have an inalienable right to enjoy fundamental freedoms and rights under the rule of law. We Eritreans deserve human security to live in dignity in our own country.

I strongly believe that advocacy for the establishment of constitutional governance in Eritrea; the human security and sovereignty of the Eritrean people; and the security, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the State of Eritrea is a democratic right and a national responsibility of citizenship. Let us thus coalesce and work together to help crystallise a home-grown stable transition to constitutional governance that promotes the human security of the Eritrean people and safeguards the security and sovereignty of the State of Eritrea.

I wish us a successful symposium.

Eternal glory to our heroic martyrs!

Long live independent and sovereign State of Eritrea!

God bless Eritrea and its people!

Thank you for your kind attention.