

Afar Unity Congress

Uppsala, Sweden

30 June 2018

## **Solidarity Message**

Thank you, Mr Chairman,  
Fellow Compatriots,  
Invited Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you here in Uppsala wearing two hats: that of Eri-Platform and the FND. In standing in solidarity with our compatriots in the Afar Unity Congress (AUC), I would like to share with you a viable vision of *unity, nationhood and democratic governance* founded on a *constitution* for the Eritrea of the future.

Eritrea is the common homeland of all Eritreans. An independent sovereign State of Eritrea is the product of the protracted collective political and armed struggles, sacrifices and efforts of the entire Eritrean people. As a people, we fought hard and paid huge sacrifices for the right to self-determination and to take our destiny into our own hands.

However, the present regime's betrayal of the fundamental aims of the armed struggle and the profound aspirations of the Eritrean people for freedom, democracy, justice and prosperity has, instead, imposed a vicious dictatorship, brought about the international isolation of our country and sowed a state of wretched misery for our people.

The authoritarian regime has perpetrated brutal repression and gross violations of democratic, civil and human rights. The absence of the 'rule of law' and the exercise of the 'rule of man' have stifled basic freedoms and subjected Eritrean society to a system of rigid regimentation, tight control, constant surveillance, arbitrary detention, and endless national service. Eritrean citizens, whether in the Highlands or the Lowlands, whether in the coastal areas or the hinterland, have been denied the right to live and work in peace on land and at sea, to earn their living and improve their livelihood through farming, fishing, salt mining, trading, etc. It is no wonder that Eritrea today, twenty-seven years after independence, suffers from economic suffocation, political paralysis and societal disintegration.

Dear compatriots and invited guests, it is a case of supreme historical irony that we fought for freedom, democracy, justice and prosperity and ended up with the polar opposites.

Today, the prospect of peace with Ethiopia is on the horizon. With all attention focused on the resolution of the border issue, it is vital that we remain actively engaged with our domestic situation and the struggles of our people at home. Securing the peace should restore normal life to our society and redirect focus to our domestic challenges. We must embrace and propel the wind of change blowing in Ethiopia to crossover into Eritrea.

The time has come to devise a strategy for a vision of the *Eritrea of the Future* that enables us to own our present and seize our future. A vision of an *Eritrea* founded on the rule of law; built on civic nationalism; *united in diversity*. An Eritrea that safeguards the basic rights, the innate dignity and the security of all its people; guarantees equal rights, equal freedoms and equal opportunities for all its citizens; and produces justice, tranquillity and prosperity for all its people.

We must wage a united effort to ensure a democratic transition that safeguards the individual liberties of our citizens, celebrates the beauty of our diversity and strengthens the unity of our people; establish a constitutional government that avails equal opportunity to each citizen to actualise his/her potential and uplift the human condition.

We are a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious society. Building reciprocal trust and solidarity would help avert the binary view of *us* vs *them* that plague ethnic based political systems. Equality of citizens is the foundation of unity, progress and prosperity. Citizenship must be nurtured by the individual's desire to belong to and be a part of a greater community and by the community to be inclusive and see its members as fellow citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity, social class, religion, language or gender, *as one of their own*.

A State built on civic nationalism would nurture nationhood through inclusive community and foster citizenship based on shared values of justice, freedom and equality. The civil State and its secular institutions would protect individual rights and reinforce the shared principles. With Eritrean citizenship as the unifying bond, regardless of place of birth, ethnicity or religion, safeguarding the rights and freedoms of the individual citizen would *per se* safeguard the diverse cultures, traditions and languages of all citizens.

A State system built on ethnic nationalism eventually stokes contestation, rivalry and tensions. It may even escalate into violence if the situation spirals out of control, as in Rwanda and ex-Yugoslavia, producing horrific atrocities on vulnerable and marginalised communities.

The policies and actions of the regime target Eritrean society as a whole. Going it alone, pursuing one's own justice, would not be a winning option. It would only be a recipe for collective disaster. Coalescence would allow us to reorient and move together in alignment with the original objectives of our armed struggle for independence as *one* people: a free, democratic and prosperous Eritrea for our children and generations to come.

I wish you a successful congress.

Eternal glory to our martyrs!

Thank you for your kind attention.