

Sep 8, 2010

Coalition of unwilling: (Red Sea Afar's Analysis on NCDC)

Much has been said by many about the NCDC (National conference for democratic change in Eritrea) that took place on July 31, 2010 in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. The organizer (EDA) Eritrean Democratic Alliance called on all stakeholders, political organizations, civil society, Refugee groups, foreign dignitaries and many more to discuss the dire situations in Eritrea. The people have responded by coming out from many parts of Diaspora to sketch a plan together, to bring about a change, a change for Democratic principle and Rule of law, Respect for Human rights in hope of finding a common ground and build a consensus that will envision a new Eritrea, peaceful Eritrea with itself and its neighbors, a liberal democracy with all its potential for success.

Prior to this event many in Diaspora have written against the gathering, but by in large the opposition to the Regime in Asmara came out to participate. One of these participants was the Red Sea Afar Organization (RSADO). The Afar came prepared to the conference to join those who share the same vision for democratic Eritrea, A United Eritrea where everyone and every nationality is respected in their respected regions as equal citizens.

Given the diversity and competing interests that gathered for conference we think EDA has come out unscathed and by in large done a remarkable job. However, things are coming even clearer now that the conference is behind us. The usual suspects had accomplices this time around, an extraordinary reaction to key part of the NCDC conference in respect to self determination put forward by RSADO and other similar ethnicities, the objections to this core principle of coexistence mainly resonates from the suspensions, mistrust, old rivalries and special interest groups that plagued the recent history of Eritrean Movements.

What is most unfortunate however is the denial and objection to the quest of self determination as a core principle of democratic values and subsequent peaceful coexistence between different nationalities is coming from not only the Eritrean Regime and its supporters but also from those who say they're opposed to the regime in Asmara including some members of official opposition, like Eritrean Islamic Congress, EPDP, EIPJD, other intellectuals from Tigriña and Islamic camp. One cannot help but ask few questions, asked.

- a) Do these groups really believe in regime change in Eritrea?
- b) Do they have the slightest clue of magnitude of crimes committed against The Afar, Kunama and population at large, if so, do they believe there should be collective and viable solutions to protect them from such an abuse?
- c) Do they Condon these crimes against Humanity?
- d) Do they believe in stronger Eritrea, a united, Inclusive one that promotes and protects the rights of many minority groups/nationalities, the one that believes in safe guarding the minorities from the atrocities waged against them, or their rights as equal citizens, thus the rights of individual and nationalities is something worthwhile fighting for?

Afar and Kunama population is on the brink of extinction if the current atrocities continue on alarming rate we have seen happen in the past decade and the lack of focus of these special interest groups of (Ruling junta of Tigrigna and Islamic Camps) would most certainly prolongs the life of PFDJ and continuations of crimes against our people, it is like putting a cart before the horse, EDA should be applauded for putting together such a diverse group of organization under one roof, very commendable and courageous step on the right direction. These sad turn of events that followed the conference is irresponsible actions by the Eritrean Islamic congress, ENSF, EIPJD, and others working deliberately to sabotage the success achieved in Addis Ababa conference. Their actions are approval of atrocities committed against Afar in Eritrea today by Afewerki's shabia.

How long will you deny the atrocities committed against Red Sea afar people?

For indigenous population of Red Sea Afar in Dankalia, the birth of this tyrannical rule meant that they will forgo all their historic rights and ownership privileges as indigenous people, their land and Property, their freedom of movements and associations as semi-pastoralist, complete overhaul to their way of life, disfigurement of their land as well as demographic maneuvering that is underway, a systemic resettlement and relocations in favor of others to clear them out of their coastal habitat can be classified as **ETHNIC CLEANSING**. Some of the denials come from special interest groups who are disguised as opposition and were present in the conference, People like Amare Gebremariam Gebre, Nasser and former Ambassador Mohamed Nour Ahmed. Amare said his blood started to boil when reminded of highlanders colonizing afar land; I suggest he takes a blood-thinning medication.

The Costs to Human life:

Today the Red Sea Afar population whose number range anywhere from 12-15 % of 4.5 million population of Eritrea, home to Two ports, home to second largest province in Eritrea(DANKALIA) covers areas with highest potential economically, 76% of coastline, strategic significance to both regional and international community. The Afar today live in abject poverty and systemic exclusions. Nearly 2 out of 5 afar is either imprisoned, incommunicado, killed or forced into refuge, over 70 % of school aged afar children are not in school because of above mentioned systemic dismantlement of their family structure, Red Sea Afar refugee crisis has reached to the level not seen in our history.

During the PFDJ's 20 years in power, thousands of innocent and helpless sons and daughters of the Red Sea Afar have been subjected to heinous atrocities of ethnic cleansing through indiscriminate killings, everlasting disappearances, unwarranted detentions and mass expulsion into refugee camps in neighboring countries. The Red Sea Afar have patiently waited for a change of heart in Eritrea's ruling elite, while witnessing their livelihoods and ways of life being deliberately re-engineered by the PFDJ to fit the regime's narrow ethno-centric agenda. We have put our life on hold for you to be recognized and taste the sweetness of victory over your oppressors.

Environmental Impact,

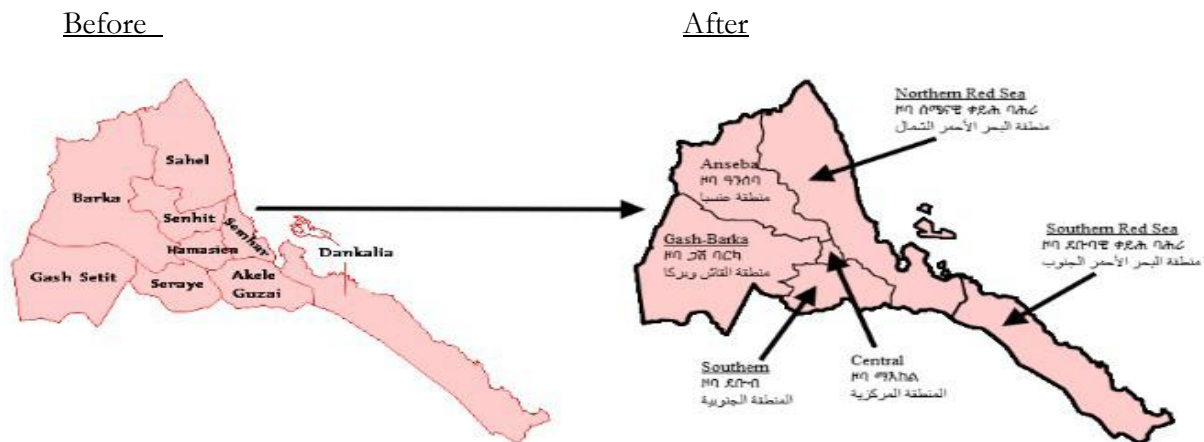
An Evidence of contaminating our future and destruction of our environment:

The Eritrean army is destroying scarce and precious trees like (Eqeebtto, Garaaytto and Galaqto) which is used as primary food to animals, instead these trees are being used as fire wood to fill the appetite of Eritrea's massive army (250,000). We have learned recently the regime is making Dankalia a dumping ground for toxic industrial and radioactive wastes at a remote barren area and by the coastal lines of the Red Sea, where tens of thousands of afar ethnic minority mainly depend on fishery to survive.

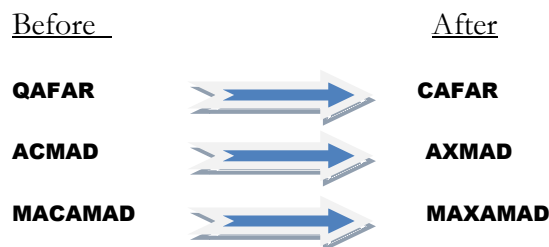
Social Engineering: Cultural Impact -

Demographic and social engineering Our Land, Language, Resources

An evidence of systemic disfigurement Map of Danklia below



An evidence of systemic disfigurement of our Language (QAFAR -AFF)



Self-Determination and Autonomy

Rights of Nationalities/ Minorities .

The afar brought with them A distinguish professor, Professor Joseph magnet, Is A Law professor , expert on constitutional Law, Federalism and rights of Indigenous people. This highly distinguished and learned expert was also a target of smear campaign which was put on by websites like Meskerem.

Professor Joseph E. Magnet is an independent thinker, a highly respected scholar all over the world previously he has given advises and expertise to governments, individuals and aboriginal peoples alike. Some critics and supporters of Eritrean regime accuse him of being an Ethiopian Tool, some say he has no business dealing with Afar, because they see afar are secessionist group that plays on Ethiopian agenda and so on.

Professor magnet has been a friend of Afar for same time and he is very familiar with their plight in Eritrea and elsewhere. He met with Afar elders, Political leaders, He has seen the dire Afar refugee situation first hand in Aysaita camp and donated sandals for barefooted afar children, he met with Refugee representative and listened to horrible stories they left behind. He is currently is an advisor to Afar people, an advisor to Afar elders and Refugees of Red Sea Afar people of Eritrea. Professor Magnet now carries a mandate of Afar people and is currently working to advocate their plight to international bodies. His participation and roll on this conference was to share his expertise on federalism ,rule of law and many experiences of federations of the world, those exemplary one's like USA, Canada, Sweden and those who are emerging one's like Ethiopia and Nigeria. On his presentation he advised and suggested to Eritrean people how federation works elsewhere, and federal system is the best tool dealing with the issues of different competing nationalities, minority and interest groups. He talked about old reveries, suspicions and mistrust that under minded the unity, the best way forward to solving these would be not to ignore and suppress but to come together and listen to the grievances of nationalities such as Afar, Kunam, Saho, and Nara and many others, and put down these ideas on a document and draft a constitution for a new Eritrea who is liberal democratic federation based on the principles of Freedom, Autonomy, Rule of Law and self determination for all nationality.

His Message was very clear to delegates, That if Eritrea would become a free, democratic state with rule of law and respect for human rights, then there should be a spirit of collaborations and a willing to accommodate the questions of nationalities, noting will be achieved for one unless the rights of all nationalities are respected. And Eritrea will risk being in the position of Iraq and other failed states.

De -Securitizing national thinking of Eritrea.

The Most take home message from Professor's presentation was not only to the regime and its supporters but to greater Eritrean people, that supporters of PFDJ needs to De-securitize its thinking, meaning, "if and when the rights for self determinations of nationalities are fulfilled , a new Eritrea should not make the assumptions that these nationalities will work against us by joining our enemies". There hasn't been any such case in number of federations over the world.

The message to Tigreans compatriots

The Issue of self determination for nationalities won't go away for a long while, it isn't simply something you would sweep under the rug and hope it will disappear. It is wise for all of you who are in the opposition camps to think, and start working for the future of all and build foundation that is just, a foundation that is sustainable for generations to come. Even if these decisions would mean a temporary loses in your statures, but in the long run would have far satisfying benefit for all that is good in the country. Eritrea is not the only nation that oppressed people are calling for the change for the aspirations of their citizens, Take a look at our immediate neighbor Sudan, the referendum that is underway, if the Sudanese government won't wise up and listen to the rightful owners of southern land and people of Darfur, there may not as well be any Sudan in a very near future.

The afar are not calling for the breakup of Eritrea ,since the birth of The current regime ,our history, our culture ,our economy ,our livelihood ,our way of life, our land and resources have all been re-engineered beyond recognition, and it must stop now. These crimes amount to crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing either way you slice it. Our dreams and aspirations have been put on hold for you to realize your independence, we haven't objected to that thus far. What the afar are saying is, we have seen what independent Eritrea has turned in to, and frankly some of you in the opposition camps seems to approve of the crimes committed against our people, (we say some because we have met many in the conference who share our aspirations and do wish as good in the future) but we say to those of you who continue to deny the afar, If you want the unity of a nation you won't get it by denying people of their rights. If this is about your promotion of your religious values, do so in your respective regions, if this is about your preserving your Tigrigna culture and Language, do so in your respective regions. We are not disputing with you about Keren or Tesene, we have told you in the conference , we want to live with you and others on a dignified ways of mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence , we want to share our differences, our values ,our land and resources, with you on the basis of the following , a liberal democratic federation based on the principles of freedom, autonomy, and equality for all nationalities, and a constitution that

respects these values and principles, The principle of rule of law, equality of each nationality , these nationalities shall exercise the right of self-determination in a federated autonomous regions; we want the rights of freedom of our religion, conscience, expression, press, media, assembly, equality, mobility, association and liberty and so , We have drafted a declaration and presented to you at the conference . This was a clear indication that we are very serious about our future in a united Eritrea. No Afar called for secession from Eritrea, no Afar called for Assab to go to Ethiopia, No Ethiopian agenda here, No reason for suppression, and name callings. This is a proven formula for a people of deferent nationalities to live and sustain their federation. The consequence of not upholding these values and principles would be a tremendous lose to the whole nation of Eritrea in fact it would lead to its demise and what you see in Somalia today is not only a possibility for Eritrea but unavoidable . The Regime in Eritrea thinks differently in its short sited “Hade Libi,Hade Hizbi”, and glory to our martyrs beating of the Drum , This regime in Eritrea is not your friend. PFDJ feels untouched with its 300,000 conscripts who are waiting for their opportunity to abscond and find an opening in heavily fortified borders on every corner; each one is waiting for other comrades to take the first step out. Let’s come to terms and really apply the model of Hade- Libi- Hade-Hizb in practice.

Afar Autonomy and Self determination in this region pre-dates any particular groups opposed to it currently.

Without getting to deep in to our history, The Afar rules over it territory was self-evident from 15 to 17 century up to recent visit by Italians, who are partly responsible for Danklia’s misfortune today, but it was actually the merchant Arab sailors who gave the name Dankalia to our home land by confusing the sub-clan name Dankali to the people, then of course The Italians modified it to their own liking that would rhyme with their spaghetti and wines to DANKALIA the Land. At that present time the afar lived as Sultanate ruling over a vast territories of today’s Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti and even as far as a tip of Sudan on the north and Somalia’s Zeil’a areas. The Afar Sultans, sheikdoms and Traditional chieftains have freely ruled over and exercised their self determinations without any opposition for centuries. Afar Sultan of Bidu in Dankalia, Sultan of Rahyta in Danklia, Sultan Tadgora in Djibouti, Sultan of Awsa in Ethiopia, Sultan of Goba’ad these are to name a few.

We hear from some of our friends in Eritrea who like to speak fondly of some of our Sultans likes Sultan Ibarhim and Sultan Hassan Ahmed who facilitated the stay of ensuing Colonialist Italians, they rather forget about our Beloved Sultan who was kidnapped and taken to Europe by colonizers of Old African Continent by taking their kings away(this was common practice for colonialist who would target the strongest leadership of indigenous people) , For afar this Sultan was Sultan Yassin Haysama, who’s remains are not yet claimed from Italy. Sultan Haysama fiercely resisted the Italian occupations for 46 long years from late 1880’s to early 1930’s. The afar Sultan was very religious man who honored his word and subsequently was conspired by some groups from our Muslim Eritrean brothers who I would rather not mention their name at the present time, which convinced and conspired against him to come for mediation with the Italians and that was the day he was

captured and taken away, thus paving the way for further occupations. Hope to remind our compatriots in opposition camp whether from Tigrigna or Islamic camp from the past and present, The Red Sea Afar will resist the occupation of our homeland and denial of our rights regardless of Religion of the occupier, or how long the occupation would last for, or however mighty or powerful the occupier be. The RSADO's struggle for self determination may have started 1999 but the struggle is the continuation of the unwavering resistance and resiliency that we inherited from our Sultans such as Yassin Haysama.

Historically; The Afar has not only exercised Autonomy and Self determination in this part of Horn of Africa but had a complete sovereignty and functioned as Independent Afar Nation. There by controlling their economic activities and system of governance, Taxations on Arabia and Ethiopia's Christian highlander's rulers. Even as recent as the fall of "DURG" and the emergence of Shabia the Afar enjoyed autonomy and self determinations over their Territories. Your denial of Afar's rights to self determination not only lacks justifiable credible historic argument but it just might be the reason and the spark that ignites the demise of Eritrea as a nation, What A shame that would be.

You either have seen the video (on shabia mouthpiece Meskerem website) by now or The Samara Declaration we brought to Addis Conference ,in fact let me copy it down below for those who have not seen the Samara Deceleration Yet, It send very clear message to friends and foe alike, It says, In no uncertain terms that we no longer tolerate the atrocities committed against our people, (not Just Red Seas Afar are speaking from this document but the entire Afar population of 3 -5 million including those in Djibouti and Ethiopia), It also says ,we come to you with an olive branch and solidarity to work hand in hand to get rid of the misery and despair and work for a new beginnings.

THE SAMARA DECLARATION

We, The Afar people, including the Afar State President, the Afar State Cabinet, the Afar State Officials, the Leaders of Red Sea Afar Democratic Organizations (RSADO), and the Afar Refugees from our homelands in Eritrea, together declare:

1. *OUR CONDEMNATION for the Murder, Torture, Rape, Disappearances, Expulsions, Forcible Confinements and Aggression against our Afar People in our ancestral homeland in Eritrea.*
2. *OUR RESOLVE to join hands with our fraternal nationalities in Eritrea to establish with them in the state of Eritrea, a liberal democratic federation based on the principles of Freedom and Autonomy for all nationality.*
3. *Our resolve that the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Eritrea shall now be based upon the following principle:*
 - a. *The rule of law;*
 - b. *The equality of each nationality;*

- c. *That each nationality shall exercise the right of self-determination in a federated autonomous region;*
 - d. *That the rights of freedom of religion, conscience, expression, assembly, equality, mobility, association and liberty shall be guaranteed;*
 - e. *That the people of all nationalities shall be secure in their persons, shall be free from arbitrary search, seizure, arrest, detention and charge;*
 - f. *That no conviction shall occur except by due process of law;*
 - g. *That the judicial branch shall be independent and secure in its tenure;*
 - h. *That each nationality shall, through the governments that they freely elect, own and control their lands and resources including surface and sub-surface resources, sea coasts, fisheries and air space and shall enjoy the profits there from.*
 - i. *That each nationality shall, through the governments they freely elect, have the right to protect and preserve the vitality of their language, culture, way of life and economy; and*
 - j. *That the rights of indigenous peoples and minorities shall be guaranteed and protected.*
- We, by our names, signatures and marks as set out below, pledge our commitment and resolve to these solemn principles.*

The Plight of Ignored Afar Refugees from Eritrea

In fact per capita there are more Afar refugees who fled their homes in Eritrea than any particular groups. Since the crack downs began late 1990's, some 200,000 (33.3 %) out of 600,000 population of Dankalia believed to have fled. There are some 24,000 afar refugees are registered in Ethiopia alone, there are 3 times that amount that are IDP's and who didn't get the chance to register, there are thousands who have been forgotten in Yemen, Djibouti, Saudi Arabia. Neither UNHCR nor international organization seems to bother with afar refugees. Not single Afar refugees have been given any consideration for resettlement in to third country. That is another form of discrimination that followed the Afar into these countries.

UNHCR has designated the afar refugee camps as community based camps, this means they are in the lowest priority list, Case in point of this neglect was ,there has been a visit by donor countries such as USA,EU, Australia ,and Canada and even recent visit by deputy commissioner of UNHCR, all these powerful representative countries did not visit afar camps, they have visited other three camps in Tigray region of Ethiopia where they have pledged assistance and resettlement opportunities for 3100 refugees from Eritrea for 2010, There has been over 6500 refugees who were resettled to USA ,Canada, Sweden and other countries ,not a single afar made the list so far.

There are wide case of infant mortality due to lack of nutrition ,old and weak are very vulnerable to starvation and death .The WFP(world food program) makes irregular visits, Rations sometimes takes three months to arrive . WFP provides 15kgs of wheat, 1/4 litter of cooking oil, and some lentil for a whole month per family. These rations are imposable to sustain any life.

The latest ARRA report show that Afar refugees are now outnumbering other Eritrean refugees in other camps in the region, UNHCR , and WFP have now promised to officially designate afar

camps in Asayita and Barahlee as a full camps, there are talks of building a food warehouse in close proximity to the camps, that remains to be seen. The biggest challenges for afar refugees remain, for not having an outside voice, their plight have been either does not make it to radar of the decision maker at the UN or have been ignored deliberately. There is sizable Tigrigna Diaspora who is directly assisting their kin folks from Tigrigna with funds raised in the west and advocate successfully for resettlements of their refugees, the afar are very few in number and don't have this chance.

A Clear indication of discrimination by UNHCR, Aid groups as well as stronger Eritrean Diaspora for not paying attention to afar refugee plight. **Petros Tesfagiorgis** to his credit mentioned on his recent comment of the NCDC conference about afar refugees that so little is known about their plight. He said "Another shocking revelation is the situation of the Afars. There are 20,000 afar refugees in Assaita. I was humbled by my ignorance of the Afar situation".

The message to Islamic groups opposed to afar self Determination

Do not confuse your vested interests with ethics. Do not identify the enemies of your privilege with the enemies of humanity. ~Max Lerner, *Actions and Passions*, 1949

To some members of the so called Islamic Movements(I say some because many of friends in Islamic party circle we have met do not share the views of Eritrean Islamic congress on the rights of minorities that includes Majlis Mukhtar's) If your party claim to uphold the values of Islamic principle then it shouldn't be difficult for your party or others, to deny the fundamental and inalienable rights of your fellow Muslims to exercise the rights to self determinations, their rights to live of their land and resources ,theirs right to develop their language ,their culture, their way of life and economy and so on. Your denial to these basic and fundamental principles to the nationalities such as Afar, Kunma, Saho, Nara and others is no different than the views espoused by Tyrant himself (Afewerki). when he said we do not want any democracy for 40 years, and the refugees are fleeing for a picnic .Our Muslim women are rape in front of their family, our elder and future generations is being wiped out, what are you thinking when you endorse the policy of PFDJ, they denounced our right to self determination in the name of Unity of Ertra. In what name are you denouncing us? Surely it is not on the name of Allah (SW). Do you know the history of Afar as a Muslims? Please brothers we urge you to take back your statements you made public, to the delight of Afewerki.

Your misgiving about the EDA should not let you be dragged and be compared with PFDJ.

Thank You;

Ahmed Mohamed
RSADO (Foreign Mission)
qasabadniimi@gmail.com