

## PRESENTATION TO EEPA CONFERENCE ON POLICY TOWARDS ERITREA AND THE HORN

Thank you for the kind introduction and the invitation to this important meeting.

When I was a lad my mother instructed that if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.

Well, if we applied that piece of advice to this conference we would endure two days of total silence, only interrupted by words of thanks to the organizers of the meeting.

What is happening in Eritrea today is an outrage, merits this meeting, and maximum publicity.

Now, I fully expect that the propaganda organs of the dictatorship in Eritrea are already drafting their denunciations of this gathering, and the distinguished participants here assembled. Wear, my friends, the anticipated cascade of calumny, as a badge of honor.

For this is a gathering of the friends of Eritrea. People who remember the promise of this new state, and the remarkable contributions of dedicated Eritreans, many of whom have languished in prison for close to a decade.

Many of you responded to Dr. Bereket Hapte Selassie's invitation to contribute to the process of drafting a constitution for the new State of Eritrea. Others shepherded humanitarian relief and development projects.

Others, academics, historians, and journalists chronicled the remarkable history of the EPLF and recognized something deemed to be unique and special.

No, I don't think we friends of Eritrea, were naïve, dumb, or a gaggle of groupies. We may, however, have missed signals and been guilty of thinking the best too often. Fundamentally, we were betrayed, but not as badly as the people of Eritrea...

I suspect at least a few of you come here in high dudgeon, and eager to chastise and sanction the leadership of Eritrea. I sympathize with those emotions, but appeal to all to remember the people of Eritrea, those who endure hell every day. Will our conclusions or recommended actions improve their lot? All too often when sanctions and punitive actions are invoked, the malevolent leadership elements easily escape the impact and the people suffer, even after a change of regime.

I recall, with frustration, even today, my service as the Chief of the American Diplomatic Mission in Ethiopia when the Dergue died, and the EPRDF came to power. The sanctions and legislative prohibitions on assistance to Ethiopia that were justifiably imposed by the U.S. Congress took more than six months to remove, delaying critical assistance to a new government.

Let our penchant for imposing sanctions; be matched by an energy to remove them with alacrity when change occurs.

Long retired, I do not have the privilege of speaking for the United States Government. An esteemed colleague from the Department of State will do so later in the program.

Nonetheless, as what some describe as an old hand in the Horn of Africa, I would like to offer some thoughts and recommendations for the consideration of the conference.

First, let us admit, albeit reluctantly, that there are no quick fixes for the Eritrean tragedy, given the nation's obdurate and delusional leadership. In my long career, I have never encountered a national leader so unwilling to accept hands of friendship, and devoid of diplomatic skills.

What many of us thought an admirable commitment to self-reliance has been perverted and become an enabler for xenophobia and a self imposed isolation.

Yet, there are things we can do today to relieve suffering, and help prepare for future change.

Tens of thousands of Eritreans, overwhelming young people deserting the Army and National Youth Service, are escaping at great peril to join the hundreds of thousands who already have become refugees. Many are being warehoused in camps in Ethiopia and the Sudan. We, the affluent donors, have to receive and assist many more of these unfortunates.

The virtual destruction of the higher education system in Eritrea should enthrone a special donor effort to afford higher educational opportunities to this new wave of refugees. When change does come, Eritrea will require doctors, jurists, teachers, technicians and managers. If this issue is not addressed, a new Eritrea will be retarded because of a lost generation of leadership.

Information activities need to be augmented to inform the isolated populace of Eritrea. Denied accurate reports of what is happening in their own country, the region, and the larger world, foreign media have an important role to play. The international services of national radios like the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and the Voice of America should pay special

attention to Eritrea and give serious consideration to the length and frequency of their transmissions, as well as to expanding the number of indigenous Eritrean languages in which they broadcast.

The internet is a powerful tool and I am sure it is far from being fully exploited in providing timely and accurate information to the Eritrean people... And letting them know they are not forgotten by the international community.

One of the greatest frustrations in dealing with a closed society like Eritrea's is the lack of accurate information on what is going on inside the country. There are a number of exile websites that try to help fill the information void. Frankly, they are less than satisfying; as too often they are populated by emotional screeds from frustrated political exiles. What the foreign policy community longs for is more and better information; a special effort to fund serious research would be a real boon.

Scholars, with knowledge of indigenous languages could begin by mining the web sites, separating the wheat from the chaff, picking leads to topics worthy of investigation, and providing analysis. This is classic open source research that could be undertaken by universities or foundations if provided adequate resources.

The burgeoning refugee community has not been systematically counted, surveyed or mined for information. Just having an accurate estimate of how many have fled Eritrea in recent years and knowledge of their demographic (age, sex, ethnicity, education, etc.) would be extremely valuable.

And finally, the Ethiopia Eritrea Border Commission ruling needs to be implemented. The parties agreed to the binding arbitration and have to live up to their commitments. International pressure as appropriate should be applied to both Eritrea and Ethiopia. The unresolved border issue underlines much of the tension in the Horn and is spilling over into Somalia in most unsettling ways.

I look forward to the remarks of the other speakers and an active dialogue on the ideas presented to resolve the multiple issues of the Horn.

Thank you for your attention.