

Understanding Eritrea and the Tragedy at Lampedusa

While the unfortunate deaths of many would-be immigrants that have been widely reported by the international media lately is an agonizingly heart wrenching experience, understanding the root cause of the unauthorized migration is half of any solution that may be contemplated by any well-wishers. But, for most part, what we have been witnessing is finger pointing at each other and arguing incessantly about something that cannot be undone, which is no solution at all.

The key question that one needs to ask is “Who are these ‘refugees’ that seem to be determined to cross the harrowing journeys through some desolate and arduous desert trails; and sailing on some rickety and dinky boats in the high seas of the world to reach at whatever destination their handlers promise them to”?

Limiting this discussion only to African refugees for brevity’s sake, they are men, women of various ages and children (including babies) from the Horn of Africa, but also from different countries in East, West and North Africa as well. Although hard and fast statistics may not be easy to come by, they seem to be people with various socio economic mixes and originate from countries that are governed by different political systems. These realities make it difficult to pinpoint exactly as to what motivate these people to literally buy their ticket to a potential untimely death!

However, it is easy to see some of the commonality these victims all have. To begin with:

- Their border crossing is done illegally without any official documentation from their respective home countries.
- Somehow, they managed to muster all the necessary hard currency required to pay to their human cargo handlers, when, even at best of times, they could ill afford.
- They are victims of some vicious and malicious propaganda in which they were invariably told and retold that the “Grass is greener” on the other side of the border (borders, in many cases) by various individuals and organizations for the latter’s criminal and irresponsible activities. Their enticers usually advise them some tantalizing rewards like obtaining visas and opportunity for “better life”. In the case of Eritrea, the US stands out like a sore thumb in this treacherous department of human trafficking as confirmed by the wikileaks cables between the State Department and the then US Ambassador to Eritrea. Other behind the scene encouragers to commit the illegal activities include from the very naïve relative of the ‘refugees’ in the Diaspora to certain so called “Humanitarian organizations” that actually make a living out of the misery of the gullible would-be immigrants and their financiers.

That being the facts on the ground, how is it possible to lump these multinational refugees who come with all sorts of hues and colors as “Eritreans” unless one is dumb and stupid and/or has some ulterior motives against the people and government of Eritrea? While Eritrea had her share of being a victim of these international human traffickers, why has the international media found it convenient to call any and all refugee mishap as “Eritrean”? Go figure!

Then again, we have what I call the canned “Go to” dis-information that some western media love to regurgitate, like that there is a “worst human right” situation in Eritrea, from which the refugees are running away, which begs the question: “Is there a different Eritrea” the foreigners know that we Eritreans don’t? And which continent or perhaps which planet would that be

located at? The Eritrean people have become the casualty of open hostility since they achieved their hard won independence and have been unfairly accused of doing things they were no party of or have nothing to do with. They have been the victims of two unfair and unjust sanctions. The “No war no peace” policy that exists on the border with the US supported Weyane ruled Ethiopia has helped slow down the otherwise bustling and fledgling economy by necessitating the maintenance of robust defense forces in Eritrea.

Another favorite devilry the western presses love to repeat to the point of boredom is “Eritreans are escaping the Sawa “Military Training” facility! Oh really? Why would they do that? Why would a person with no axe to grind against the Government of Eritrea do that when he or she is offered education with room and board all for free? Oh yes, that “Military” thing. Although Sawa was conceived primarily as a facility for military training, because of many positive developments since its inception, only a few months are relegated for that purpose, the majority time being spent on academic and vocational training to enhance the preparedness of the youngsters to enter the various colleges scattered throughout the country. Incidentally, Eritrea is not the only country in the world with such responsible “Military readiness” activities. Add to that the volatile neighborhood she finds herself in, it is only visionary and sheer prudence to never abandon such noble, responsible and necessary national program. Thus, for the information of those uninvited foreign “advisers”, they can bet their life that Sawa will be there come rain or shine.

When the scope of the latest tragedy was being played out for political expediency by the Eritrea detractors, and if it wasn't the ‘human right’ card, it was accusing the Eritrean government of being ‘too slow’ to react. React for what? Based on the ongoing trials and tribulations the western media has been actively engaging in and habitually lumping all refugee mishaps, be it in the Sahara desert or the Gulf of Aden, as “Eritrean”, it was reasonable for the government of Eritrea to be cautious before some data was available and avoid jumping on the bandwagon like the rest of the irresponsible media outlets to claim them as “Eritrean” when they might not be. There was nothing sinister about that when the aim was simply ‘not to alarm unnecessarily’ any of the victims’ relatives. When certain reliability was affirmed in the data, however, the Government did what all responsible governments do and offered to bring the Eritrean victims back home for proper burial. That of course depends on the activity of the Italian government, which has been giving contradictory statements since it planned to bestow “Italian citizenship” to the deceased with “State funeral”! If that is not a parody of justice, I don't know what is?

The point is, we Eritreans need to be exceedingly careful not to fall into the trap of the people and organizations that routinely shed crocodile tears – lamenting the death of our people when in fact their finger prints are all over the coffins of our dead. There is nobody that cares more of the fate of the Eritrean youth at home and abroad than the government and people of Eritrea. When everything is said and done, my fellow Eritreans, it is only Eritreans that will make Eritrea – the promised land of plenty, peace, tranquility and progress, lest we don't betray our fighters dead and alive the country that they gave us by their blood and sweat.

May the Lampedusa victims rest in peace and
May this unnecessary tragic death serve as a reminder and a wakeup call not to be repeated!
Awet nHafash!

Berhane Alazar