Looking for Refuge not a new phenomenon

By: Berhane Woldu

Sitting in front of my TV watching the Lampadusa, human tragedy was unbearable. For Eritrea it’s a great lose. In the history of Eritrea, be it during the war for liberation or during the war of aggression, loss of this magnitude in a fraction of a day has never happened.

The BBC Focus on Africa program had asked the Eritrean Ambassador in Italia for the reasons of the refuges leaving the country. The Ambassador answered the question. However the journalist kept insisting that the youth were fleeing the country due to Conscription to the Army. The saddest thing is that BBC as a news entity is so ill informed or unwilling to tell the truth.

The truth of the matter is In Eritrea there is no military conscription. When the youth finish 11th grade they are taken to Warsaye Yekalo High School in Sawa for a one year academic program where they prepare and take the Matriculation. Those who pass the exams will join one of the seven colleges. The rest are to return to the school to do a one to two years vocational training. Once the academicians are finished with their education they are assigned to one of the ministries where they will do a one year and six month national service. Upon completion they will be salaried employees. No there is no military conscription in Eritrea. Contrary to the propagandas and ill will of few; there are many young Eritrean entrepreneurs who are rich and successful.

There are economic problems that emerged after the war of aggression. Adding salt to the wound; the American government is continuously working against the Eritrean people and has been the main advocate in economically sanctioning the people of Eritrea for reasons no other than Eritrea’s refusal for submission to the American World order. In Eritrea unlike other Africa countries does not allow Grand Larceny (to cow their population and rob the National Wealth).There are no money-spinning industry making fortunes disappear from Eritrea to reappear in America and Europe. What little wealth it has it remains in the country.

The loss of life reminded me the refugee programs that were in place in the late 1970s and lasted for about ten years. I worked for United States Associated Catholic Charities Refugee Resettlement Program. We were tasked with bringing refugees from Afghanistan, Cuban, Eritrean and Ethiopian. Most of the refugees from Africa came through Sudan. It is believed that the program was used as a cover for “Operation Mosses” that transported thousands of Ethiopian Jews known as Flasha. Nevertheless, there were real refugees some were former Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party (EPRP) members and others were dispersed Eritrean Liberation Front fighters (ELF).

Americans were very charitable people; they opened their homes to give refuge, donated furniture, food and assisted in locating employment for the refugees. Furthermore they helped the refugees to easily acclimate to their new environment. The help Americans presented was countless.

The refugee programs of the late seventies saved many lives. But why are the Western countries not giving todays refugees the same services. Are these refugees less human than the refugee of the seventies? It does not need a rocket scientist to replicate the refugee programs of the seventies. The truth is the Western countries have neither the political will nor the real commitment to save the life of the black race.

Today we see African youth fleeing their countries to strive and succeed economically. As an African Immigrant, I started to think of mine and many of my friends and relatives experiences that had left their countries as refugees. Immigration of the Black race to developed nations is a lifelong dream for many to live in tranquility and riches. However, the subsequent truth has often been ruthless. Immigrants have crossed the sea of death, deserts and jungles for several years but only little fare well.

The overall picture for the immigrants in Europe and America is not good. Unemployment and poverty is much higher among immigrants. Juvenile delinquency in immigrant communities run higher than the average in the in the host countries. Young Immigrants are much more likely to drop out of school and are vastly underrepresented at the American and European universities. With little or no work, most immigrants could not afford to live in decent neighborhoods rather rent apartments in the country’s most neglected neighborhoods, creating clusters of poverty and segregation.

The schools that they attend are poorly funded and clustered with non-immigrants who are youngsters from troubled homes. These schools instead of preparing them for college, they steer immigrants to manual jobs the very few who go to college do not find jobs in their fields due to resistance and the perception that many Westerner business have of immigrants as underachievers. The reason for failure is the synthesis of many issues - bureaucratic inequity, shifting economic realities in the host country, and racism has all impacted on the real integration. Majority of immigrants have to languish in the slums of London, Paris, Boston, NY and many major Western cities living the life of a second class citizen. Why then are these young souls taking the risk is a question we all need to understand and take to heart.

Memories are short lived; the heroines and heroes of Eritrea brought freedom and are now developing the country. To suggest that the leadership and people of Eritrea that has scarified fifty years of their precious life to develop their country do not care for their youth is utterly absurd. As a nation Eritrea has faced many challenges and has overcome them. Like in the past Eritrea will overcome the hindrances and obstacles brought upon it by the ill-wishers.

Eritrea is a nation built on perseverance with a culture of self-reliance. Eritrean has its own understanding of her realities and whatever challenges put in front of her does not deter her from pursuing the nation’s plans.