**Voice of Eritrea DC, the Voice of the People**

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Just after the war with the TPLF started in 1998, Eritreans in the Metro DC found it imperative to have a communication vessel in order to combat the propaganda schemes of the TPLF, to provide correct information and to empower the Eritrean community. The effort of few concerned Eritreans helped establish the Voice of Eritrea. Since then, the Voice of Eritrea has done a marvelous job and has been the only voice of the people of Eritrea in the Metro DC area and beyond. On the 15th of February the Voice of Eritrea (VoE) will mark its 16 year anniversary.

This article will try to look at what the VoE meant its accomplishments and hopefully look on how the VoE can move-on to benefit Eritrean communities not only in DC but around the globe. It will try to highlight its needs, implications and the possibilities.

Since the start, the VoE served the people of Eritrea in many ways. In this-age of social media, internet emails and sophisticated-PR-designed to manipulate opinion; the VoE became the voice of the people particularly to those that cannot exploit these modern technologies and those that cannot understand English. These are mothers, fathers, new comers and the like that need the service, need to hear about their country and community from a source they can rely on.

Every Saturday afternoon Eritreans are glued to listen to VoE with anticipation. They are glued because the VoE serves most of their needs. The VoE informs Eritreans about what is taking place in their communities and in Eritrea. It introduces businesses and services owned by Eritreans and advertise their businesses in the process. It promotes Eritrean related activities be it fundraising for their interests or Mekete dinners.

It serves as a vessel for promoting important activities such as the language education given to Eritrean children in the area by volunteers. Weekly commentaries and poems by dedicated Eritreans give moral boost, entertainment and education. The VoE teaches Eritrean history. Every Saturday there are surprises because one week there is a book reading-program and the next a doctor will give health education. Eritreans are exposed to many creative programs. The programming lineup varies weekly depending on the season, what the current situation calls for, based on relevance and current events.

The VoE compiles, disseminates, analyzes and distributes news relevant to the people of Eritrea in the Diaspora. The VoE brings Eritrean government officials to brief and experts to analyze current developments that can affect the lives of Eritreans in and out of the country.

Gebremeskel Ghebregziabiher delivers current news from inside Eritrea directly. The weekly coverage from Eritrea by Mr. Gebremeskel is news that all Eritreans await eagerly. It is fiery, timely, precise and professional. He is embodiment and reflection of the values the VoE is based upon.

In short, the VoE is the spokesperson, the voice and expression of the people of Eritrea in the Diaspora based on the metro DC area. What makes VoE super special however is the listener; the people that funded and sustained it to-date. Voice of Eritrea is the real public radio-station funded and supported by Eritreans of the area for the most part. Over the years, Eritreans from other areas of the US, Canada, EU and other places have made modest contributions making it the real representative of the people, by the people and for the people.

As a result, Eritreans gather every year to raise funds and to express appreciation for the volunteers that have sustained it with unmatched selflessness and hard work. These volunteers write, edit and record the programs that we have learned to enjoy and benefit from.

**Moving Forward**

The Voice of Eritrea has done what it can up-to now with the support of volunteers and generosity of Eritreans. VoE sustained Eritrean communities by filling a need. However, there are many questions that we need to address regarding the future of the VoE.

To mention some: Is what we have done thus far enough to continue on the same path? Can we improve? What does improvement mean? What should we improve upon? Do we have a vision or, we are satisfied with what we have and continue without change?

These are questions and thoughts that have-been percolating for a while. And if there is any time to address these questions, now is the time. It is time to asses and re-asses the direction of VoE now. It is incumbent upon all stake holders to take the time and think, what should the future of VoE look like? What does it mean to all? What do we need from it in the future? What needs do we need to meet? And how can we move forward and fulfill those needs?

For starters, the name Voice of Eritrea is a powerful representation of who you are. Unambiguously, as Eritrean, it is your voice. In fact, one of the best attributes of the program is that it is truly funded and supported by you. It is yours. No one government or establishment supports the VoE. It is public radio publicly funded by you to serve you. It is engineered by volunteers that are part of the community. It is a community radio in the truest of forms. Great job!

Over the last 16 years, Eritrea faced many challenges; withstood these challenges and is knocking on doorsteps of a bright and successful future. The VoE traveled this journey with the nation for the nation and became the backbone of Eritrea in the Diaspora. That said however, as Eritrea progresses, it is time for the progress to be reflected in the Diaspora.

The needs of the Voice of Eritrea have been great all along. There were many challenges along the way. Particularly when one considers the amount of time the volunteers have to put in to present the programs every Saturday.

To move forward we need a vision and pursue the vision. In the process we can meet the needs of our communities and beyond. We can be the Voice of Eritrea at the highest of levels. We can empower Eritreans and be another source of Eritrean pride. The question, what should the vision be? Are there any examples we can glean-on that can serve as a trajectory for the vision?

The simple answer is yes, WE CAN DO IT. If the people in Eritrea can pave roads on hills with minimum resources; if the people can build dams; bridges and highways with minimal resources under tremendous duress, no reason why we cannot match their determination and reciprocate their success in some way. We need to for our own reasons.

Establishing the Voice of Eritrea at the level it deserves therefore is the least we can do. It is the least we can do in the Diaspora to continue the legacy of Ghedli and those that sacrificed the nation. It is the least we can do to give their visions the voice that it deserves; in their honor.

It is therefore high-time for the VoE to grow to meet the needs. It needs to grow by incorporating all the resources and technologies available. It needs to grow by creating the space necessary that can serve as an anchor. It must grow by incorporating print, web, TV and not be limited to radio. It needs to grow to compete in these fast paced dynamic world that we live in. It needs to grow in order to unite Eritreans from every corner of the globe. It needs to grow so it can reach to all Eritreans around the world.

The resources and expertise are available. There are many Eritreans that are journalist and PR experts who love their country to be able to sustain it at very high levels. If anything, the challenges of the last 16 years have brought Eritreans closer and united them on these endeavors. The social media presents a good example of this. Eritreans have been working hard to present the Voice of Eritrea in their communities in a fragmented way. It is time to bring these resources together, marry them and make it a success.

As Eritrean communities grow, the needs of the communities have grown exponentially. The programs need to reflect the demographic picture accurately. The youth need to play a huge part in this. Their love for Eritrea can be expressed through the work.

Concluding Remark

Eritreans in the Diaspora need the Voice of Eritrea to operate at the highest level. It needs to be able to serve all needs. In Oakland California, Eritreans have set a great example of what can be done by purchasing a huge Community Center that reflects their needs and physically transformed it with voluntary contributions and their hard work. That great success is example that we can and must come together to make these endeavors successful. The VoE needs that moment. It needs the drive and determination now. We have tremendous resources including expertise to make it a success. Hence, we must all make efforts understand and participate. For starters here is a link to the site to initiate contact.

http://www.voiceoferitrea.com

Congratulations Voice of Eritrea on your 16 year anniversary and many thanks to the selfless volunteers for their dedication. Please come and thank the volunteers on ECCC this Saturday.

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