

Eritrea at 24: Celebrating Genuine Independence by Focusing on Development Through Resilience

By Elias Amare

As Eritrea gears up to celebrate its 24th independence anniversary on May 24, the emerging contrasts between two countries of the Horn of Africa could never be starker.

On May 24, Eritreans inside the country as well as all over the world will be celebrating the 24th anniversary of their independence. After 30 years of tenacious national liberation struggle, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) totally defeated the Ethiopian army of the Dergue -- the largest and strongest army in Black Africa -- and triumphantly entered the capital of Asmara on May 24, 1991. Having concluded the national liberation phase of the struggle successfully, the EPLF held its 3rd congress in the historically symbolic town of Nakfa in 1994, and changed its name to the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) to reflect the next phase of the struggle of the post-independence period, with nation-building and development as the top priorities. Though the past 24 years have not been easy and smooth-sailing, the Eritrean people have scored significant achievements that they ought to be justly proud about.

Eritrea's independence is not of the neocolonial type. It is genuine and meaningful. The Eritrean people have proven themselves to be steadfast and resilient against all types of conspiracies and hostilities of Western imperialists, and their African stooges. In short, the Eritrean people have a lot to celebrate, as they have truly become owners and masters of their destiny, and no force on earth can take that sense of genuine independence and sovereignty away from them. The late patriotic Eritrean scholar, Prof Tekie Fessehazion said it best 15 years ago: "In defiance Eritrea was born; and in defiance Eritrea will forever live free!"

In sharp contrast, the minority regime in Ethiopia under the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), will also be marking its 24 years in power. During the past 24 years, it has proven itself to be one of the most corrupt, tyrannical and subservient regimes in Africa. It has been waging genocidal wars against the Ethiopian peoples in all corners of the country, as well as wars of aggression against its neighboring countries. Its ruling elite have been looting and plundering the resources of the country like the barbaric horde they are. Ethiopia has never witnessed such sheer level of repression and brutality in its modern history during the past century as it has under the TPLF. After 24 years in power, the TPLF minority regime is still a "liberation front". Liberate whom from what? On May 24, the regime will be conveniently holding its charade of national elections. It's a foregone conclusion that these fake elections will be once again stolen from the Ethiopian people -- with the blessing of the usual suspects of the West -- to perpetuate the tyranny of a very narrow and frightened minority group over the majority of the Ethiopian peoples. The minority Ethiopian regime has also been illegally occupying sovereign Eritrean territories for the past 17 years, and perpetuating a *de facto* state of war against Eritrea.

The contrasts of these two divergent paths between Eritrea and Ethiopia will come into sharp focus on May 24. Eritreans will be celebrating their 24th independence anniversary and commit themselves to "development through resilience", while at the same time exercising maximum restraint not to be dragged into war and be side-tracked from their developmental project. Looking beyond the current historical glitch of the TPLF regime of tyranny and terror, the Eritrean people will also be extending their hand for peace and solidarity to the struggling peoples of Ethiopia towards a common goal of durable peace and good-neighborly cooperation.

Eternal glory to the martyrs of Eritrea, who through their heroic sacrifice brought about Eritrea's independence!

Happy 24th Anniversary, Eritrea!