

Local Media Interview with President Isaias Afwerki: Full Excerpts

Written by shabait Administrator |   

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The four-hour long interviews were broadcast live by Eri-TV/Radio last week. Profile will serialize a condensed

version of these Interviews starting from this issue.

Q:-Mr. President, best wishes to you and to our readers on the occasion of the New Year. What are the key GOE development plans for this year?

President Isaias Afwerki: First and foremost I would like to convey my best wishes, even if somewhat belated, for the New Year to the Eritrean people at home and abroad.

Energy has for long remained a priority development program for the government. Indeed, electricity supply constituted the biggest challenge facing the nation's development plans from the outset. The Hircigo power plant was thus constructed almost immediately after independence early in the 1990s to catalyze sectoral developmental plans. For a variety of reasons, including timely maintenance failures, the status of the energy sector and electricity supply in the past few years have been dismal.

The main priority now is to embark on sustainable expansion of energy services. This will require both the development of new supplies and more efficient utilization of current energy resources.

Efficiency must be a core objective. The first measure taken to promote efficiency is to charge the real cost of energy. Secondly, major investments are being made to restructure the national electric power supply system. New, higher voltage lines are being installed in the electrical grid in order to increase transmission and distribution efficiency. The challenges of distributing electricity on a nationwide scale through a single interconnected system are massive of course. The notion of expecting the Hirgigo Power plant to provide electricity to far off areas such as Tesseney, Omhajer, Sel'a, Assab, Qarura, cannot be cost-effective and feasible.

The Hirgigo power plant was initially supposed to produce 120 megawatt of energy; output decreased overtime due to maintenance bottlenecks over the years. Now, installation works are underway for the 50 Megawatt generators that will be added to the system pursuant to purchase agreements signed with a Chinese company in the past. There is also a new, additional, project in the pipeline for 120 Megawatt diesel power generation. Electricity outages and shortages – the cement factory in Massawa could not, for instance, operate at full capacity - that affected our development plans in the past have thus been removed.

The cluster of agricultural and food processing factories in the Western Development Zone - notably in Gerset and Fanco, Kerekebet, Tessenei, Ali-ghider – other developmental programmes, Sawa.. etc, are currently receiving continuous electricity supply. This has been secured through stand-alone

power plants in the region. Haikota, Akordat and Sel'a will be connected to this network shortly.

Eritrea's energy strategy is also anchored on diversification. The options and prospects for renewable energy -i.e wind, solar and geothermal – are good. The renewable energy projects underway are expected to bolster existing power generation by some 80 Megawatts. Solar energy is economical and utility scale wind and geothermal resources may provide a cheaper alternative to the current diesel-generated electricity. Recognizing this, we are investing substantially in solar energy development and in wind and geothermal energy studies. Geothermal energy development in Eritrea will have an important input in alleviating expenditure on foreign currency while safeguarding the environment from adverse impact of fossil fuels. The project will advance work beyond the survey stage toward eventual project development in the future. Given the key role energy has in maintaining and increasing the quality of life, these efforts need to be supported by all those involved in Eritrea's national development process.

In summary, for an emerging, developing country such as Eritrea, alternative, renewable sources of energy represent an extremely effective component within broader national development goals, and they directly and positively impact the lives of our citizens. Our development plans are in place to support new projects while augmenting existing ones, in doing so we are hoping to raise the current 70-80 megawatt of energy produced nation-wide to 200 megawatts; 80 from renewable energy and 120 from the existing ones.

Investment in water infrastructure is another government undertaking of high priority. Initially, we have to secure the national demand for potable water, and then we need to have water for industrial purpose as well as livestock and agriculture.

This is a scheme that has been in the works for a long while. Recently built Gergera and the Teqera dams (including Mai Nefhi) are located within the environs of Asmara. Good rainfall in 2016 has contributed in these dams amassing substantial amounts of water. But the crucial point of reservoirs is not amassing water; the issue is how to utilize it. We have also collected a lot in Kerkebet Dam. Over-all, in the years 2015-2016, these new reservoirs have harvested a total of 250 million cubic meters of water. But the challenge of the optimal utilization of the water harvested has not so far been fully addressed. There is another big project of dam building underway in Gahtelay. When this is finalized sometime in 2017, the aggregate volume of water collected will be around 300 million cubic meters. Our water infrastructure building scheme is intertwined with our approach of the three development zones; the West, the East and the Highlands. The water structures we build must ensure meeting the demands – potable, industrial and agriculture – in all the three development zones respectively. The issue of water is seized, by dividing it into three developmental zones. The West, the Highland and the East, and each of these zones are envisaged to be self-reliant. The Gergera Dam can for instance be partially diverted and utilized to supply Hazemo in view of the huge potential of agriculture and demand for water in that area. Simultaneously, we can build water pipelines eastwards to supply Korbarya and Dekemhare; westwards to cater for Mendefera as well as Tsilma. Asmara's water needs can also be supplanted by similar network of water pipelines. In 2017 these reservoirs are expected to supply not only Asmara but also other urban areas. The Gahtelay project which is already in the pipeline is expected to be finished this year. This will distribute water, all the way to the Northern Border with Sudan to small reservoirs in the region, and is highly expected to provide secure water to the inhabitants of the region.

All in all, these three developmental regions have to secure water and continuous energy supply. Efforts to realize these goals will continue in this current year. We can confidently say we have the necessary projects already implemented or near completion that ensure the fruition of the aforementioned goals.

The building and maintenance of road infrastructure plays a paramount role in enhancing socio-economic development, commerce and greater interaction between the different national constituent groups. At the moment, road transportation is largely in reasonable shape, and it is the dominant mode of transportation for moving goods and passengers. However, there are acute limitations in air and marine transportation facilities which remain incongruent with the country's locational advantages and endowments.

What we are endowed with and what has been put in place need to go side by side. This makes the rehabilitation and expansion of airports and ports imperative. In view of the stiff competition in the airlines industry, our focus initially will remain in developing the domestic and regional routes. Our developmental plans in the eastern and western zones must be bolstered by putting in place vital air transport infrastructure; notably through building/upgrading airports in Massawa, Sawa and Tesseney.

In terms of maritime transportation, the location of our two ports makes them well positioned to render services to a wide range of potential partners. Government policy in this regard is to increase the use of the two ports for the transit of goods, and to create, in the long-term, a transportation hub involving all modes of transport: liner transport: roads and railways infrastructures.

In general, our development efforts in energy, water, and transportation are closely correlated with the necessity to further improve our health and education sectors. In 2017, programs will be introduced that will provide better health and education opportunities to our citizens. It should be mentioned that Eritrea has witnessed commendable success in its health sector services over the years but, such success should not be a recipe for inertia or complacency; the need to continuously renovate and improve should be in place as well.



Q:-“A consumption-only society that does not save and invest earnings in production cannot promote economic growth and development”

Q:-2016 began with the changing of the Nakfa currency to maintain macro-economic stability. How do you analyze the implementation of these policies and how is our status in the economically decisive sectors?

President Isaias Afwerki: Various details including fiscal constancy and budget issues could be raised in addition to the three basic economic steps we consider in directing our strategies and drafting our programs. Production is the first factor that defines the economy. The status of production and output in various domains is the collective indicator for economic growth. This could comprise mining, agriculture, industrial manufacturing and tourism, among others. The first indicator to evaluate our economic growth or downturn is what we are producing.

As I have mentioned earlier, energy, water, transportation, communications, education, and health are the fundamental domains. There is no way of promoting economic production

without putting in place and reinforcing these sectors. We have a favorable climate, vast arable land and a hard-working society. To evaluate the sum of all these factors, comes the issue of food security. However, food security by itself is not the final result. We have to be able to see beyond combatting food deficiency and toil for introducing massive programs that would lead to sustainable development. How far could our agricultural development programs, including fisheries and livestock, take us in our development endeavors?

Taking the 2017 agricultural development programs, for instance, we should not be misdirected by the sufficient rainfall in 2015 and 2016, which may have led to a bountiful harvest. What if the rainfall for this year is not generous enough as the previous years? Our agricultural programs should be reinforced at every stage and phase. We can also look at the statistical data pertaining to the agricultural development programs we introduced in Kerkebet, Teseney, Fanco, Gerset, all the way to Omhajer, including programs at hand for the highlands from Tsorona to Tsilima, Asmara and its environs, and cultivable lands to the north from Karneshm to Keren. Besides, programs have been charted out and worked upon, including dairy products. Installation of processing factories also goes parallel with the growth of livestock, particularly dairy farming.

The Eastern Development Zone should be enhanced in line with the Gahtelay and other dam projects. Indeed, they should go beyond the parameters of local consumption and aim for export purposes. If we are to ensure maximally efficient use of land, we should consider other cash crops in addition to the customary sorghum, maize, wheat, barley, teff and others. Coffee farms have been assessed at large and the revitalization of the tannery industry is considered greatly in line with the agricultural development programs. Hence, considering the importance of exporting agricultural output to maintain a better

financial reward, the volume of supply is important, and to ensure that level, installation of the said facilities is pertinent.

In regards to manufacturing produce, we have new networks which have started at a small scale. We have refrigeration companies put in place in Adi Guedad, Alebu and Massawa, to preserve food products for export purposes. We have initiated a long term plastic tube and pipeline factory to support the outlined water and sewage programs. This factory we have established in Massawa should be able to meet the basic demands, although it is not our final frontier in similar programs, metal works of similar production is also another thing we will be working on. Maritime and air transportation in the port city of Massawa should also be boosted to enhance the free zone area. We can bring about industrial development from the water and energy facilities in the area.

Not only that, but the western development zone also has its own choices. We have plans to boost the Alebu, Tesseney, Gerset agro-industrial projects. These are related to production and wealth distribution, which is a basic growth indicator. We have to know the basic gauging instruments to ensure equal distribution of wealth, infrastructure and services to the general public. Distribution of wealth simply means equitable allocation of national resources. If a particular locality or region of a country is to be productive, the available facilities, including electricity, water, education, health, infrastructure, transportation, communication and others should be put in place. National wealth should be distributed equitably among citizens. Besides, it is the second indicator of economic development in addition to production.

On the third level, there is consumption, starting from the family level all the way to regional and national level. Economics is not only about production but also about

consumption. In this regard, one must save earnings. A consumption-only society that does not save and invest earnings in production cannot promote economic growth and development. Especially those who live in the primary level of economic growth should be keen in saving.

Q:-Mr. President, one of the significant achievements in 2016 was the salary raises for those in the civil service. However, there are some in the civil service who did not get the raise. When will it be implemented? And the parameter for the salary raise seems to be based on education level. Don't you think competence, productivity and seniority should have been taken into account? In line with the salary increment there comes also workplace discipline and productivity. What would you say to this effect?

President Isaias Afwerki: Salary raises have been made and are ongoing to include all government employees. The main concern here is not the salary raise but what can be done with the money once you are paid. Could it satisfy your daily needs in terms of buying foodstuffs? Can it pay house rent and other necessities? You have to know the power of one Nakfa vis-à-vis the day-to-day market. At the end of the day, rigorous measures should be taken to stabilize the market and ensure macro-economic stability.

We should ask how much is the country's economy growing in terms of impacting the lives of citizens. When we talk about salary raises, we should also understand the currency's buying power. Inflation in different forms could occur. Hence, appropriate measures should sustainably be taken to ensure the quality of life of citizens. All necessary elements for living have to be available.



There have been many distortions in our economy. Speculation was one factor that has been affecting our economy. The pressure it caused on the living standards of the society is not to be viewed lightly. The main victims were those in the civil service. That is why the salary raise was introduced. It is part of the equitable distribution of resources. And salary is one means of ensuring equal distribution of resources.

The process of raising salary is ongoing, stage by stage, until all those in the civil service have fully benefited. Priority will be given to those in the army, police and the security services. All those in the lowest rung of the civil service should be given priority. Records of seniority, job complexity and other necessary parameters will be also taken into account in subsequent stages of the salary adjustments process.

When we consider the military, the salary for lower ranking personnel is 1,800 Nakfa. It doesn't stop there. Training programs must be organized in different skills so that those in the profession can work towards attaining a higher salary. The same will be applied to those in the civil service.

Finally, salary should be aligned with productivity. It should be based on where the individual works and what the individual is working on. The profession in which one is engaged should be looked at thoroughly.

We could also talk about the power of the Nakfa. One of our greatest challenges has been the shortage of residential houses. The provision of social services, especially for those in the civil service, has also been challenging. Immediately after

independence, the housing projects in Asmara and Massawa were initiated. Those projects made a small contribution in solving the problem of residential houses. However, the problem still remains and is still affecting the lives of citizens. And that is not something to be left unnoticed, it should be solved. In order to solve the problem, we will have to introduce modern technology and machineries for manufacturing building materials. This must be accompanied with human resource development.

Before we talk about salary raises, all concerned government institutions should work towards solving the acute housing shortage. In order to solve the problem there should be equitable distribution of social services among the cities, semi-urban centers and villages. This includes provisions of electrical power supply, potable water, education, health, transportation and other services.

The other issue of concern is the price of consumer goods. The price of consumer goods is being manipulated by middle men. There is no direct relationship between the producer and the consumer. The distortion we are witnessing in the living standard of the society is caused by the middle men who have no sense of responsibility. All the distortions should be corrected and necessary measures should be taken.

One of the main problems is also the speculation surrounding remittances. We have reached a stage where we are witnessing forged currency in circulation. We know where the money sent by Eritrean nationals residing abroad is ending up. It falls in hands of criminals and is exchanged illegally irrespective of the legal exchange rate. In even worse cases, some of the hard currency, meant to stay in the domestic economy, is being exchanged in foreign lands. And that is the main cause for inflation. This scenario should be immediately corrected. If the

living standard of citizens is to improve, a conducive atmosphere should be created. The government institutions should shoulder the responsibility of creating the conducive atmosphere. Salary raises alone are not enough. We should not tolerate the problems that have arisen over the past years, creating a burden on the lives of citizens.



Q:-“2017 will be a year when we test our capacity” President Isaias Afwerki

Q: -Mr. President how do you assess the

productivity and work discipline in Eritrea?

President Isaias Afwerki: Sometimes when you observe a culture there is tendency to exaggerate actual performance or achievements. As knowledge and skills are promoted once they are applied, one has to assess whether he or she is able to apply the knowledge and skills he or she has acquired. There must also be a system for achieving this goal and for enhancing the work culture. These are the sorts of factors that determine the level of productivity.

Take the energy sector as an example. The level of knowledge and technology requirements is considerably huge. A significantly large amount has been invested in this sector. Hence, it needs to be managed and maintained properly. The effect of such efforts on the provision of services and service users is very important. With regard to the Hirgigo Power Plant, for example, one must consider whether the workers there monitor the operations properly or not; whether they maintain what has to be maintained timely or not; whether the supervisors there are discharging their responsibilities properly

or not; and whether there are operationally effective work manuals. These considerations are critical.

It is not possible to repair large machines unless they are maintained on a timely basis. We can claim that we do have large infrastructural programs. For this purpose, we can also claim that we do have a large number of tractors, bulldozers, graders, loaders, etc. If these machines are not maintained on a timely basis then we need to think in terms of the costs incurred and time wasted until when they have to be repaired.

Assessing our productivity should not be limited to the aforementioned physical infrastructural investment. The intellectual and professional performance of civil servants should also be appraised properly on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. In relation to this issue, the effect of work discipline on productivity is very significant. We may boast of the resources we have at our disposal. However, there are instances of a culture of laxity and unproductivity that should bother us. This challenge is particularly associated with the youngsters living in the cities. Hence, we need to remedy such a phenomenon.

We can talk in terms of the organizational culture and discipline we had during the liberation struggle and what we have inherited from that experience. But this is a different story. When we look at our present situation, we may talk about how we are performing and utilizing given technologies, raw materials and other resources we have at the level of a sector, a region, an industry or an enterprise. However, the most important factor in this case is how productively we use our human resources.

With regard to the productivity of those who are already employed, we are currently introducing a system for measuring

the performance and productivity of individual workers and the organizations employing them in relation to all government organs. To this end, if this policy is to be fruitful, it needs to strengthen productivity and address work culture. This is our number one priority.

Q:-In the last few years, there has been considerable investment in producing skilled human resources. Annually, a large number of young graduates have been joining the civil service. Given their number, how is our policy of making these civil servants effective and productive? On the other hand, how can we prevent the brain drain depleting Eritrea's skilled human resources?

President Isaias Afwerki: If we are to talk in terms of our experiences in the last three years, there has been an issue we had noted earlier but we were not able to address it until two years ago. This issue is related to the youth who are not able to join a college after the matriculation exam. Annually, there are over 15,000 young people who participate in the matriculation exam. Only 15-20% of these people are able to join the colleges and are accordingly admitted for degree and diploma programs. To upgrade the knowledge and skills of those citizens who are not able to join a college, the Vocational Training Center has been established. The Vocational Training Center was not effective enough to address this problem and accordingly achieve the required objectives. For the training opportunities provided to these individuals to be effective, the training areas need to be aligned with national human resources development strategy. Of course, the Vocational Training Center (VTC) has contributed a lot. However, it has solved the problem only partly.

For such programs to be further effective, we must upgrade the qualifications acquired through the VTC. Training areas need

to be further expanded or diversified given the increase in the number of people targeted by VTC. Furthermore, the center needs to be equipped with the required facilities such as workshops, laboratories, computers as well as competent instructors, trainers and technicians. There must also be more practice-oriented fields of study. For this reason, the fields of study need to be selected carefully. The design of curriculums also has to be aligned with the national demand.

About 10,000 young people are being annually trained and equipped with vocational knowledge and skills in VTC. Yet there are some additional things to be done in order to ultimately provide the VTC graduates with an enabling environment to apply the skills they are equipped with and to subsequently improve their lives effectively. Actually, there are many VTC graduates who are working as operators of bulldozers, graders, loaders and etcetera. Annual admittance of 10,000 young nationals to VTC will be continued as a target. It is also possible to upgrade their qualifications to degree level and above since there are quantitative and qualitative improvements experienced annually. So far the achievements are commendable, but we should not be relaxed.

Q:-Certain entities have promoted brain drain and depletion of Eritrea's human resources. Are there policy measures or plans to overcome this challenge?

President Isaias Afwerki: This has been a war against Eritrea. In the last 25 years, there were untold actions aimed at frustrating Eritrea—to make Eritrea surrender. These actions target our human resources. These efforts are actually reactions or consequences of past failed policies, leading them to carry out these last ditch efforts aimed at brain drain.

There are many factors associated with this issue, which center on undermining Eritrea. The sanctions are aimed at preventing Eritrea from strengthening its military capacity yet the goal isn't necessarily designed to prevent Eritrea from potentially liberating its occupied territories. Instead, the ultimate goal is to destabilize Eritrea and no stone is left unturned towards this aim. These efforts have culminated to the attempts to deprive Eritrea of its youngsters.

The Ethiopian government is a major policy instrument and proxy in carrying out plans to move young people out of Eritrea. It is surprising that the European Union provided 500 million Euros to Ethiopia in 2016. This fund is intended to create jobs for Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. This cannot be fruitful apart from its effect on destabilizing the human resources of Eritrea. This is a very "ideal" situation. In their mindset it's okay to create jobs for Eritrea so long as they aren't in Eritrea but are instead in Europe, Canada, the United States, Africa and the Middle East. If the concern is to create job opportunities for Eritrean youth, is it sensible to create such opportunities outside Eritrea? Likewise, 170 million Euros has been provided to host young people from Eritrea in the camps in eastern Sudan. All these efforts cannot frustrate and make Eritrea surrender.

The process of moving young people out of Eritrea is a highly organized one. Various known foreign entities and networks are engaged in organizing the activities for emigrating young people from Eritrea. A large amount of money has been earmarked for this purpose.

It is surprising how such naïve attempts for depleting the Eritrean people originate. For example, the French president said that the Eritrean people will be depleted entirely soon. What the chancellor of Germany did in Addis Ababa and what others are doing in Egypt and Sudan are all part of these ill-

advised and futile attempts. The problem is they do not know the reality when it comes to Eritrea and it will take time until they realize the reality. Conspiring to destabilize and undermine such a small country as Eritrea by attempting to deplete its people is insanity. Even the victims themselves can easily realize this once they arrive in the destination areas. On our part, we have been doing our best to tackle this challenge and now we are in a better position.

Q:-Your Excellency, for 2017 and beyond, are there any plans at hand that bring about tangible solutions to alleviate housing problems?

President Isaias Afwerki: Housing problems have tremendously affected the livelihood of our people. This is a key issue. If we go back, we can talk about major works done right after independence. Big housing projects such as the Sembel Complex in Asmara and that of Massawa where many households could inhabit were implemented. These projects had the necessary facilities and were planned well with necessary infrastructure for sewerage, water, asphalted roads with entrances and exits. With that kind of spirit, we have also tried to augment our capacity by providing cement, steel and other building materials. For example, Project Musa Ali around Massawa and the project at May- Hutsa, which is still not completed, are just examples. In order to equip ourselves with better technology, we have also introduced the precast project which has started the now incomplete housing projects around Asmara. The biggest housing problem is that of Asmara. Thus, this has its own effect on other projects. The four companies which were involved in such projects have put on hold other projects elsewhere and have come to Asmara with a different restructuring to play their roles in alleviating the housing problem. They would be engaged in this precast project after completing the May- Hutsa one.

As a consequence of many challenges, the companies were not able to materialize their plans in 2016. Starting from 2017, it has been planned for the companies to complete their precast projects as quickly as possible. However, it should be noted that it is only a very small portion of the housing problem that could be lessened with this kind of project. The biggest problem in Asmara and its environs is that of infrastructure. The sewer hasn't been developed as desired and thus is overloaded.

The water pipe is old, rusted, blocked and not functional. Water is accessed through such line. In addition, in order to align electrical line installations with current demands, work on foundational infrastructure aimed at each housing project should primarily be fulfilled inside Asmara.

A plan has been set for a project that concerns the neighboring villages around Asmara or open spaces within 10 kilometers distance. These places are envisaged to develop on their own as subordinates to Asmara. This plan is what we aim for. However, it all depends on our capacity. What is our capacity? How many houses can we build? There are some practical questions that need answering. It was witnessed during the last two or three years that some people had tried to build houses on their own. However, this kind of option simply leads to illegal practices. If you build a house on unplanned land, at the expense of others, it disregards a plan for where the sewers, pipe lines and roads are going to be placed.

As such, it was headed in the direction of becoming a slum. Since this could lead us to a situation that we cannot control, it was made to stop. Let's first finish the precast project in 2017 and see our capacity. You can promise what to achieve but it should be after careful considerations of what you can do within your capacity. Our plan for 2017 is to augment the human resource which can participate in construction works, to train

the youth, to put the necessary machineries and materials in place, to prepare items needed for buildings such as sand, cement, iron, electrical materials and others.

Only then we can say this is what we can do. Instead of promising the public very ambitious plans, let's wait until the project begins and everyone can see for themselves. Even though there is good will and you are ready to accomplish all this, priority must be given to fulfilling the needs of those who are working with little government salary, those without a house and those living in rental houses. For the problem to be alleviated in its entirety, however, setting the infrastructure is a priority. Similar construction projects should be in place in other cities and towns as well. After witnessing its momentum then you can say how much of the housing problems you can solve and how much you can do this year and next year. 2017 will be a year when we test our capacity.



Q:-“We will always remain vigilant to protect our national security and interest against any actsof provocation”

Q:-Mr. President, let's talk about political issues. One of the biggest plans for 2017 has been strengthening the PFDJ. What about plans to strengthen the capacity of the youth? Last year you stated that the constitution was under revision. So which ones are set for short term action?

President Isaias Afwerki: How we handle these things should be very clear. As regards to the constitution, I'd rather call it a system of governance. It is simply a means for a government to achieve its objectives. It is fundamental to have a structure to achieve it. There must be a very detailed study to evaluate

where we started, where we are now and where we are heading to within those 25 years.

It cannot be concluded that all the political processes and developments were disrupted in those years. We have passed through countless obstacles and relentless antagonisms that have threatened the country's progress and existence. Thus, when one asks the question, "How did we get here?" we should carry out a detailed evaluation. As part of this evaluation we have compiled a detailed record that examines what we have attempted, what we have achieved and what obstacles we have faced for the past 25 years. Next, we must ask, "Where we are now?" in order to evaluate those obstacles that have challenged us and those that we were able to tackle—knowing where we are going is imperative.

In this regard, we have prepared a national road map that gives us the broad contours of where we plan to go from 2017 and onwards.

Detailing the system of governance, including its form, content, chapters and themes, is not an easy task. The bottom line is that PFDJ is responsible for leading and directing the political process. Throughout the 25 years, it was the Front which was the target of antagonism. Since the ownership of the road map belongs to the masses, political questions of where we direct it for the future or how it should be organized should be discussed and evaluated. Programs covering development, security, safety and other fields have been sufficiently outlined in the road map. The road map also outlines an overall evaluation of the past 25 years, the present moment and the future. It assesses not only our domestic affairs but also those developments that can materialize around our region and worldwide and how we engage ourselves with them and how we make use of the major issues that we experienced in the past.

In order to ensure the exchange of ideas and significant public participation, the road map has been drafted to answer the question of how we work in more organized and concerted fashion. It has been structured into geographic zones, which include our economic, safety and security dimensions and other dimensions. Taking into consideration matters of our border issue and other persistent antagonisms, this kind of arrangement has been prepared in a way that allows us to do our homework for future development as we tackle our challenges.

The road map puts into consideration four Development Zones. Three are inside Eritrea and the last is international. First, we have the Eastern Development Zone. This area includes the Central, Northern Red Sea and Southern Red Sea Regions. Involved institutions include all ministries, police, security, civic associations and the PFDJ. Second, there is the Central Development Zone, which includes the Central and Southern Regions as well as part of the Anseba Region. It brings together various bodies under its umbrella, including all the ministries, defense forces, police, security, civic associations and administrations. Third, there is the Western Development Zone, which encompasses the Gash Barka Region and some of the Anseba Region. Like in the other zones, this also includes the aforementioned bodies. This kind of organization allows a platform for common points of discussion that isn't merely concerned with the system of governance and political activities but other national affairs; for more robust national discussion.

Fourth and last, there is the International Development Zone, which covers diaspora affairs for Eritreans abroad. Based on our history—as well as future expectations—this zone, in concert with the ones inside the country, needs a new, way of organizing to play its part in invigorating and revamping the people's broad participation in the national political process. A higher coordinating body, which oversees this broad effort has

been formed under the Central Office of PFDJ. Each development zone will have coordinators from the bodies it comprises. This kind of organization is needed because without such a measure you cannot undertake political activities and campaigns that are fruitful. At the same time, we also need to have it as a document that checks where we started, where we are now and where we are heading.

Therefore, in order to have a popular discussion over all the matters raised—including the mode of governance—and reach the next national stage of our political system, the PFDJ will be responsible for directing this political process. So when we close a chapter of 25 years and open a new one in the year 2017, the 25 years could be said to have been time for lessons in all kinds of measurement. The lessons we've encountered have made us strong and resilient and taught us many things. Therefore this strategy has been set in order for us and our political process to march forward more vigorously.

There is no doubt that its momentum will be quickened beginning from the year 2017. It has been taken as a better option. There is, however, a room for discussion and improvement with popular participation. The details on the implementation of these efforts will be seen in the coming months. In order to ensure the practicality of the programs—given that they are huge—organization is necessary. Being able to assess the past, the present and the future is by itself a sign of consciousness. Since organization and being armed are fundamental in the basic principles of the PFDJ and in the popular fight, they would be part and parcel of the political process. They will be assessed in light of their progress.

Q:-The year 2016 saw the foiling of efforts to diplomatically isolate Eritrea from the international community. What opportunities might this positive

development create for investment and economic relations?

President Isaias Afwerki: The question we need to ask is, “Why have we been confronted with diplomatic hostility for 25 years?” The fundamental issue we should always remember is that we have not been chosen to serve the interests of the powerful. It so happened that we earned our liberation at a time when the cold war ended, making way for a new world order. Attempts to make this new world order and bring all countries into one camp were made by the forces that came out winners in the cold war just one camp, as opposed to the two camps that had existed during the cold war era.

The victors, like Washington, claimed the world as exclusively theirs predicting that they would control its resources for some fifty years undeterred by any rival powers. To this end, they divided the globe into regions, or “spheres of influence”, and elected a government in every region that could advance their interests. The Ethiopian regime has been selected for the job in our region.

Following Eritrea’s independence, there was a feeling that our liberation coupled with the end of the cold war era would provide us with a new opportunity to collaborate with peoples of our region including Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda to create conditions for bilateral and multilateral cooperation. But that was not to be since the big powers had their own designs. Our region’s proximity to the Middle East and its natural endowments subjected it to fall within a ‘sphere of influence’ and, therefore, the need for the recruitment of a regime that would implement the agenda of the powers that be. The problem begins right there.

Ethiopia was selected to be the agent in our region and we were condemned to be cornered. This is the current world order—one regime assigned by the big powers leads the region and other countries are supposed to fall in line. Any attempt to disobey or challenge the new order is viewed as a behavior that should be “neutralized.” Eritrea was accused of not complying with the order, and a policy was designed that has aimed at destabilizing our country through diplomatic, political, economic and military machinations for the last 25 years.

Soon after Eritrea’s independence, border issues with Yemen regarding the Hanish Islands, which had never been raised with Ethiopia when Eritrea was under its rule, began to surface. Why was the border issue with Yemen raised? This was done to bring about instability in Eritrea and put its people and its government in an ongoing quagmire.

But the problem was resolved at the court. When you look at the court ruling and all the proceedings, however, you realize that it was all a ploy. In any case, we went past this and the Badme “dispute” ensued. How did this come up? It wasn’t because there was a border dispute, a political problem or a conflict between the Eritrean and the Ethiopian people. It was meant to be used as a pretext for intervention by creating a crisis in the region. By creating a crisis the big powers find an excuse to “manage” the crisis in a way that serves their ulterior motives. And their biggest achievement is that they were able to create a conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia, which allowed them to pursue their agenda of managing the crisis. The border conflict was settled by international arbitration but the verdict did not apparently satisfy them. Had the decision of the court been implemented there would have been stability in our region. All kinds of excuses have been used to prevent the implementation of the decision. The aim is to keep Eritrea, its people and its government hostage and in constant unrest.

Then came the Djibouti case. Where did it come from? Had there ever been any border dispute with Djibouti? When this failed to satisfy them, they brought sanctions against us. Since then, the economic pressure put on our country is unbelievable. Attempts were made to destabilize Eritrea's economy through speculation, by setting hurdles to deter Eritreans in the diaspora from sending remittances to their families and by encouraging young Eritreans to flee their country and migrate to the West.

When the sanctions imposed on us in 2009 did not meet its designers' goals, human rights was used in 2016 to condemn Eritrea. Meetings were organized in Geneva and later in New York with an attempt to pass on resolutions to denounce Eritrea. In short, the border issues and the economic challenges we have been encountering as well as all the attempts to alienate us demonstrate the provocation we have had to withstand in the past 25 years.

Although the utter desire to dominate and create spheres of influence has made Eritrea a victim, the design itself did not necessarily target Eritrea. The sphere extends from Afghanistan to Somalia and includes Libya and Yemen. We might have become victims because we happen to be located within the region. But did the design to dominate through diplomatic, economic and political provocations and by imposing psychological and security pressures work?

The crisis in our region is the direct result of the misguided policy. For 25 years, attempts have been made to create a unipolar world with one dominant ideology, a design rooted in the writings of intellectuals like Fukuyama, but it didn't work in our region or in the world. For the plan to work, the ruling powers of our world have been trying to "contain" anyone who challenges them. Their efforts to contain Russia and China in terms of diplomacy, politics and security did not bear any

results. And the regime elected to serve as an anchor in our region is now in “intensive care,” struggling to survive.

All kinds of provocations can be said to have failed. Of course, this doesn't mean it is over. We will always remain vigilant to protect our national security and interest against any acts of provocation.

Q:-Mr. President, how do we assess the investment potential in Eritrea and the experiences associated with promoting the investment opportunities in the country?

President Isaias Afwerki: There are a number of factors associated with investment. Fabricating hurdles that are designed to discourage investment in Eritrea was part of the conspiracy masterminded to undermine our economy. The World Bank, the IMF, the European Union and the like were supposed to play a positive role in facilitating investment and economic development in Eritrea. However, there were serious fabricated investment barriers related to many sectors of our economy.

Fortunately, what has been achieved with the available resources is commendable. Besides, it is not sensible to be unnecessarily dependent on external support and foreign investment in the course of realizing development goals. From our experience in the last 25 years, the resources required for recovering a devastated national economy are undeniably huge. More importantly, the psychological pressure of the conspiracies targeting our economy cannot be underestimated. With regard to the process of demonizing Eritrea, the country was being depicted as a patch of hell on earth in order to instill a negative image of the nation not only in the minds of investors but also in the minds of lay persons who want to know

something about Eritrea. The conspiracies against Eritrea are inseparable from the broader global and regional changes that different societies are experiencing. Of course, when compared to what has happened to other societies in our region, the conspiracies against our economy are futile.

However, the conspiracy targeting our economy is not the single factor that negatively affects investment opportunities in the country. Hence, it is important to assess the efforts, particularly our infrastructural projects, aimed at creating an enabling environment for investment. Sustainable water supply systems, sustainable power supply systems and the like are prerequisite conditions to successful investment. Such critical investment factors are the most important determinants of investment decisions. Compared to the aforesaid infrastructural concerns, even having favorable investment proclamations and guidelines is only secondarily important.

In our attempt to promote investment, we are not concerned about hiring promotion agents to conduct campaigns and subsequently glorify the opportunities available in the country. We believe what matters more is what we do to improve our infrastructural situation, which is critically important in the course of promoting investment opportunities. When judged in terms of peace and security as well as lack of corruption, there are favorable conditions for investment in Eritrea.

While the demonization campaigns may take time to fade away, eventually truth prevails. For this reason, now many are aware of the reality in Eritrea. We invite everybody to come and see, and then make a judgment about the situation in the country. Otherwise, we will not hire at all any agent for promoting in order to glorify our investment opportunities. While we believe that we have a long way to go, we have created a stepping stone

with respect to promoting investment opportunities that can attract investors.



Q:-On the occasion of New Year (2017), you sent letters to different heads of states concerning the need to lift the

sanction against Eritrea and about the need to end the occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories. In relation to the diplomatic developments that you have been talking about, what are we going to expect in 2017 about these issues?

President Isaias Afwerki: One of the major issues raised in relation to what I have been talking about previously is related to human rights. In 2016 in particular, there were untold campaigns about human rights. This is not the real issue of concern. Rather, it is just a cover-up. This issue is not an Eritrea-specific issue. Hence, it has to be dealt with taking into account the broader context. We are not the only victims and our case is subset of a larger picture. Therefore, what I sent to different leaders reflects such major concerns.

While the agenda of the Ethiopian government may be looked at separately, when it comes to such issues, the people of Ethiopia have been the main victims in the last 25 years. Consider what the people of Somalia suffered within the last 25 years. In the last 26-27 years, Sudan has also been divided into two and still there are serious problems that have not been so

far solved. Our problem is just a subset of this bigger picture. Consider what is happening around the Red Sea in general, that is, in areas such as Libya, Egypt, and other areas. All these are important issues that need to be addressed properly.

As stated earlier, the border issue and the sanction against Eritrea has to be dealt with within a broader context. For this purpose, whenever there are political forums or in the interactions with political actors such as the permanent and the rotating members of the Security Council, we need to assertively indicate how harmful such injustice is and the need to address such concerns collectively. If these issues in general are addressed, the problems we experience in Eritrea will also be solved as they are not separable. We often talk about these issues because they are useful reminder that take into account the fact that the events may fade away from the memory of some people. There is also a possibility that some may be influenced by the cover-ups, such as fabricated human rights charges, intended to cover up real motives of those who masterminded sanctions and human rights-related conspiracies. Therefore, we need to continuously remind the UN General Assembly, members of the Security Council, heads of states and other actors about the nature of the problems we face.

Further, there may also be new leaders who need to be informed about the real facts behind the issue so that they cannot be misled by the cover-ups characterizing the conspiratorial campaigns which place more emphasis or negatively capitalize on fabricated human rights charges as a pretext. Moreover, heads of states have to play a significant role in addressing the aforementioned challenges. We should collectively fight the rule of the jungle. These problems cannot be addressed separately. A collective approach is necessary to tackle these challenges.



Q:- “The primary doctrine of our foreign policy is to create an enabling environment characterized by stability, cooperation, mutual respect and

partnership in our region at large”

Q:-With regard to regional issues, there have been popular protests that broke out in Ethiopia in 2016. The Ethiopian government has declared a state of emergency to undo or control such protests and command posts have been established for this purpose. How effective are these measures when judged in terms of their effect to restore stability in the country? Where is the situation in general heading to? Further, whenever there is such a crisis in Ethiopia, it has been a norm to blame and defame Eritrea and use such an excuse to demonize Eritrea. How do you assess these issues?

President Isaias Afwerki: The root cause of this problem is basically linked to the motives of creating and sustaining a hegemonic and unipolar world order. We need to be aware of the untold damage that has been caused because of hegemonic motives in the last 25 years. It is very unfortunate that the Ethiopian people have been considerably victimized due to hegemonic motives and policies. It is good for such issues to be retrospectively analyzed as the problems raised in the question are the symptoms of some other basic problems. For example, nobody should be too naïve to believe the claim or allegation that Eritrea is behind the protests in Ethiopia or that Egypt has contributed in fueling such a crisis.

The claim against Eritrea has been used by the decision-makers in Washington to substantiate or cover-up their intentions to

discipline Eritrea so that it can eventually be a subservient state that serves their presumed interests. Tremendous support has been provided to the Ethiopian regime to coddle and overprotect Ethiopia such that it serves as an anchor state fulfilling hegemonic motives and interests. If we also take the case of Iraq, Libya and other similar cases, the Washington policy makers manipulate the internal situations of such states in order to eventually make them subservient of their interests; creating cleavages along ethnic and religious lines such that the states may be manipulated into serving hegemonic motives.

For instance, if we look at the substance of the 1994-1995 constitution of Ethiopia, it is not primarily meant to make Ethiopia a federally democratic state. Instead, it was a divide-and-rule policy instrument used to manipulate the Ethiopian people. The problem in this case, or rationale, was that the Woyane regime [Tigray People's Liberation Front] was not confident enough about its capacity to effectively govern Ethiopia. According to such a mindset, the divide-and-rule governance policy instrument was regarded as the most viable option. At the beginning, such issues were discussed overtly. To add insult to an injury, the motive was also shared by the patrons of the Woyane regime. Consequently, the fact that Ethiopia would be a model of federal democracy was being outwardly complimented in a manner that was not real and genuine.

I can say that I was among the first individuals who were able to look at the constitution of Ethiopia. What came to my mind when I came across article 39 of the constitution was that such a situation could not be helpful at all for building a state. How sensible is it to include a provision granting the right to self-determination to the various regions in the country? It was clear that such a situation would certainly lead to cleavages and disintegration within the society. We voiced our concerns—on

the record—about these issues at that time, but the Woyane regime was heedless and claimed that this strategy was the only option available to them for ruling Ethiopia. The primary victim of such a policy is the people of Tigray. As a reaction of the said policy applied over the last 25 years, untold hatred has been harbored in different parts of Ethiopia against the people of Tigray. While the people of Tigray are innocent, the misguided policy was implemented in their name, instilling historical hostility against them.

In 1992, there was a conference organized before the constitution was drafted and all the discussions and concerns I am talking about have been documented. The process of “federal democracy” was a charade as it was not intended to be genuinely representative. Just one to two were included in the Woyane leadership from the other nationalities of Ethiopia. This was done to mislead the general public. As a consequence of such misguided historical background, the Woyane regime has been severely threatened.

There are three areas that have been targeted by the Woyane regime and its patrons to control the resources of Ethiopia and the citizenry. The first is ruling Ethiopia through a strategy of divide and rule. Hence, all the problems prevailing in Ethiopia are not caused by either Eritrea or Egypt. They were initially engineered by the Woyane regime. As a consequence, the Ethiopian people are experiencing a situation that is worse than what they experienced during the previous two regimes of the country.

The second target is the Ethiopian economy. Many may tend to think that the people of Tigray were economically favored and advantaged within the last 25 years of the Woyane rule. A lot is also propagated about a double digit economic growth in Ethiopia. However, if we inquire about who is enjoying the

benefits associated with the economic growth in Ethiopia, where the money has been deposited and by which company, we can easily realize that the Ethiopian economy is controlled by the Woyane clique and its external patrons and partners. The Woyane regime along with its patrons and partners has been looting the resources of Ethiopia in the name of “investment.” The serious popular protests of the Ethiopian people are just a natural reaction to such manipulative political and economic policies experienced by the citizens in the last 25 years. The fact that various companies and investment areas are being targeted by the protesters also indicates the furious popular reactions to manipulative economic policies.

The third target area is security. Threatening and terrorizing the people militarily is also considered an important policy instrument. Nevertheless, such a strategy is likely to be futile in the long term and that is why the army has not been able to stop the popular protests. This situation has threatened not only the Woyane regime but also—and to a greater degree—has threatened the patrons of the regime. That is why there has been considerable efforts exerted in the last few months by the patrons of the regime, located in the US and Europe, so as to protect the regime from eventual collapse.

Such endeavors, military and foreign interventions, are unlikely to solve the problem prevailing in Ethiopia. Coddling Ethiopia militarily, economically and politically is unlikely to bear fruit. To ultimately address this challenge, the basic strategy needs to be reformed first. Instead of attributing their own problems to either Eritrea or Egypt, the regime should pay attention to the historical lessons associated with its policy choices. Cover-ups need to be avoided.

It is also claimed that opposition groups that are supported by Eritrea played a role in organizing the protests. However, if we

carefully look into the nature of the protests, it is purely publicly initiated and sustained by individual citizens. It is spontaneous in nature and no one is behind it apart from the ordinary citizens.

Similarly, the Woyane regime is also serving as an agent of external intervention in Somalia. This situation has seriously victimized the Somali people. Primarily, it is not the Woyane regime that has victimized the Somali people. The Somali people have become victims mainly due to the motives of the patrons of the Woyane regime. Creating cleavages and polarization—for example, consider the widened divisions among Somalis who speak the same language and belong to the same religion—is a major doctrine or policy instrument of the Woyane regime and its patrons.

Q:-You talked about the role of Eritrea in the anti-terrorism alliance that is led by Saudi Arabia in our previous interview. What new developments are there in relation to this issue? What is the prospect of this relationship in the foreseeable future?

President Isaias Afwerki: We need to look at this issue from the perspective of a broader context. The primary doctrine of our foreign policy is to create an enabling environment characterized by stability, cooperation, mutual respect and partnership in our region at large. This is our established and unchangeable policy.

It is good to look at the developments in our region during the last 25 years—the Red Sea region, the Horn of Africa, the Nile region and the Gulf region. In the last 25 years, there have been serious problems affecting our region that are basically associated with the attempts of creating and sustaining hegemonic and unipolar world order. To create stability, mutual

respect and partnerships in our region, first and foremost, we need to overcome the challenges we are experiencing.

With regard to the developments during the last 25 years, let us start with the case of Afghanistan. Consider the emergence of Taliban. This issue is linked to the demise of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union. There were considerable policy shortcomings that caused this problem and subsequently serious blowback emerged in Afghanistan and the world. While it can be claimed that Afghanistan is far away from our region, the problems in Afghanistan do influence the situation in our region.

If we consider Iraq, one can hardly claim that Iraq as a state exists at this moment. It has been divided into different polities among Sunni, Shia and Kurds. While it has among the world's largest oil reserves, Iraq has not been able to experience peace and stability within the last 25 years. Foreign intervention has created turmoil in the country. Regardless of the distance away from Eritrea, the effects our region cannot be underestimated.

For the last 30 years—during the Mubarak era—Egypt was inactive and failed to play the roles it was expected to play in our region. Egypt's lack of action had a negative effect on our region. It was being claimed that Egypt, as the largest and strongest state in the region, had to play its respective role. Fortunately, now it has started to play its appropriate role.

The situation of Somalia has also had a major negative effect on the region. The crisis in the nation is ongoing. The unceasing crisis that was being experienced in Sudan in the last 25 years and the partition of Sudan into the North and South has also caused negative effects on the region. The Arab Spring also brought with it new challenges. For example, Libya has been seriously destabilized.

The countries that are experiencing relative peace and stability are the Gulf States. In general terms, however, the effect of the polarizations created within the aforementioned states in our region cannot be underestimated. All these problems have created fertile grounds for ISIS and other terrorist groups. And this is fundamentally linked to the hegemonic and unipolar system. Consider how and by whom Al-Qaida were created in Afghanistan. Who initially equipped it to be a strong group? Those recently emerged groups such as ISIS and other fundamentalist groups have nothing to do with the Muslims. These groups may be associated with other religious fundamentalists. The central point is that fundamentalism has become a policy instrument. Creating fundamentalist groups started in Afghanistan as it was believed that doing so would be a useful policy instrument for attacking the Soviet-led block. The same is also true with the case of Al-Qaida and Boko Haram.

Given this background, the role of Gulf States and particularly that of Saudi Arabia is very important and their roles should not be confined only to addressing the problems caused by Arab Spring. It is for this reason, we have been aware about the roles of Saudi Arabia and we used to insist on the fact that Saudi Arabia, as an important actor the region, is capable of playing tremendous roles in addressing the aforesaid concerns taking into account its relatively better resources. With respect to the roles of Saudi Arabia, we can say that it was passive until King Salman became a leader. He scaled-up the role of Saudi Arabia in the region. We had been talking about this issue Saudi Arabia by sending delegations. In this case, we are not requesting Saudi Arabia favor and protect Eritrea to achieve expedient goals. Rather the concern is that Saudi Arabia should constructively play the roles it is expected to play in the region as it has

relatively better resources and capacity. The same applies to Egypt and other states in the region.

All actors in the region should play their respective roles—constructively. This is basically associated with the doctrine of our foreign policy. For our efforts to ultimately promote stability and for the cooperation in the region to be fruitful, every actor in the region should shoulder its respective responsibility. Achieving these goals should be looked at from different dimensions such as economic, security, political and diplomatic dimensions. To create an enabling environment for the achievement of the collaborative goals, first we need to create a common understanding. All such issues were raised in our first meeting with King Salman and we agreed about the aforementioned concerns. The concerns of making our region a peaceful and stable one characterized by cooperation cannot be dealt with separately and independently. Rather, it is our collective endeavors and investment that will make our region a safe, prosperous and peaceful one.

We cannot look at various issues in our neighborhood in isolation of others. We should create mechanism in which we could be able to contribute our share. Obviously, we do not have common views on all regional issues. However, at the end of the day we have same objective: peace and stability of our neighborhood. We have to strengthen cooperation in order to bring about development and equitable distribution of our resources.

We hold the same approach with Egypt, the Sudan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. The situation in Yemen is different. There are complicated problems there. That is the reality in our neighborhood. There are forces responsible for complicating the situation in our region for the past 25 years. We could mention them by name and location. They are not alone. There

are some that are dreaming to become regional powers that are further complicating the situation. We could not take correctional measures without understanding the damage they could create. There are also internal elements who entertain their misguided agendas in creating chaos in the region.



We should have to correlate our reading and understanding in order to properly address the issues. Then we generate cooperation based on that, which would be a win-win situation. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Egypt should have their right place in the region. We also contribute our due responsibility in accordance with our capacity. Our region is sensitive and the contribution and cooperation we create will have significant effects beyond our region. The type of security, economic and diplomatic cooperation we aspire to create is based on this thinking. The regular dialogue and understanding we began from 2015-2016 with Saudi Arabia and others are the only way out for the peace and stability in our region and we need to strengthen these efforts.

Q:-According to news reports, a surprising result was witnessed in the US presidential elections: Donald Trump came to power. Is there the possibility of policy change with the coming of Donald Trump vis-à-vis the global developments? In connection with that, with Britain leaving the EU and with conservative elements coming to power in Europe, what influence that could have on Eritrea?

President Isaias Afwerki: We should not be governed by emotional and hysterical readings into the outcome of the US

election. There is a strong media campaign there. We should carefully follow the situation so that we do not err in our actions, policies and programs. The issue here is not the coming of Mr. Trump to power. Instead, the more relevant issue is the failure of the US initiative to create a unipolar world system. Hence, the coming of Mr. Trump to power was the result of that policy in the past 25 years.

The containment policy the successive US administrations pursued in the last 25 years on developed countries and especially on Russia and China failed. The scenario we are witnessing to date is the result of that failed policy that was in place for the last 25 years. The new US president's rhetoric to strengthen the American economy and to "Make America Great Again" is not his individual viewpoint. The unipolar world system they tried to create was counterproductive and what change the new president will bring remains to be seen and will require careful following.

Q:-Mr. President, could you elaborate on our future prospect and the opportunities it holds?

President Isaias Afwerki: The drawn out road map under the PFDJ will address all pertinent national issues. The international development could also influence us. However, the deciding factor is our internal situation. The basic foundation is our internal integration, commitment and development. We should also carefully read the international situation and the situation in our region to refine our action plans. In the past 25 years we have passed through many challenges and conspiracies. And we are entering a new phase. The road map that I mentioned will help us strengthen our internal situation and reinforce our relation with our neighborhood in terms of mutual cooperation, economic development and capacity of implementation. We have also

charted out strategy of engagement that will enable us due role in the regional and international issues. We also know that we need to be cautious, alert and ready in all our engagements. We have accumulated a wealth of experience over the years and we have auspicious prospects ahead of us.

Q:-Mr. President, do you have any message you want to convey to the Eritrean people in general and to the youth in particular?

President Isaias Afwerki: I would like to say we should develop the culture of work. We should give utmost priority to education and reinforce commitment. All the development programs we are talking about mainly target the youth. Frankly, we have strong youth. If you question the future of Eritrea, it will be decided by the diligence, commitment, knowledge and skill, culture of work and discipline of the youth. Families, associations and the different PFDJ organizations should also work to that end. Naturally, it is normal and expected to commit some mistakes along the way. There nothing that cannot be corrected and improved. At the end of the day, the youth have to develop themselves through education and work for the better future of themselves and their country.

➤ **-Thank you very much Mr. President**
