# Surely Mr. Cohen!

By: Berhane Andeberhan

Surely Mr. Cohen would like to see a quick end to the famine in Ethiopia! Surely he

would love to see the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia live in harmony as good

neighbors peacefully interacting with each other and even helping each other and

sharing their natural resources. Eritrea, and the whole world should come to the aid

of Ethiopia and rally to forestall famine and hopefully prevent its recurrence.

Mr. Cohen states that the “Ethiopian famine that is just over the horizon will

require the use of Eritrean ports”. The seemingly condescending tone of his

“recommendations” appears to go beyond a humanitarian concern and exhibits

glaring omissions and glosses over some significant issues. His suggestions raise

many questions that one cannot easily overlook when considering what he must

clearly be aware of; namely, the unfortunately complicated situation between the

two countries.

Granted, this would be one of the ways of getting relief supplies to Ethiopia.

Why is it a requirement that Eritrean ports be used, given that one can think of

other options? Obviously other avenues were used during the previous

Ethiopian famine when the Ethiopian government rejected Eritrea’s willingness

to allow the use of its ports on humanitarian grounds. Using Eritrean ports

might conceivably be the most ideal method, in which case Eritrea should be

consulted. Surely Mr. Cohen must have other thoughts that he is not sharing!

Has he already consulted with the Eritrean government?

As noted above, Mr. Cohen must be aware of Eritrea’s willingness to allow its ports

to be used during the previous major famine in Ethiopia. He must recall that the

offer was rejected by the Government of Ethiopia. Why should one expect things to

be different now? Has he obtained assurances that the Ethiopian government will

accept the offer this time if it is given? Is he planning to request or has he already

obtained Eritrean cooperation? And why does he assume that the Eritrean

government would not have misgivings about this matter given the past experience?

It would make sense that Eritrean cooperation would be requested before such

declarations are made.

Mr. Cohen’s motivation is no doubt a humanitarian one. Does his humanitarian

concern extend to the displaced Eritrean peasants whose land and homes are still

occupied by Ethiopia more than a decade after the border dispute was supposedly

resolved? The plight of the internally displaced Eritrean peasants is not outright

famine, thanks to the efforts of the Eritrean government, but it is still a disaster.

Where is the balance?

Surely Mr. Cohen is aware of the often repeated and loudly disseminated bluster by

the Ethiopian regime against Eritrea. He must know of the repeated threats to

“Invade, Attack, Change the Regime, Capture Assab etc.” ad nauseam. The Ethiopian

government has recently been amassing its troops in the Eritrean border seemingly

to distract its own people by claiming that the protests in Oromia are directed by

Eritrea. It seems there need to be some steps to dampen the hostility before Mr.

Cohen’s suggestion can warrant serious consideration.

So when suggesting that Eritrean ports be available to Ethiopia, some steps must be

taken to create assurances to guard against Ethiopia’s admitted hostile goals against

Eritrea. That is still problematic because, were assurances to be made to Eritrea,

who would be willing to guarantee those assurances? Not the same entities that

were the guarantors of the Algiers Binding Resolution and have abdicated their

responsibilities?

Most Eritreans dream of the day when they will live in harmony and cooperation

with their Ethiopian neighbors! This will require resolution of existing differences

between the two countries and respect for each other’s sovereignty and territorial

integrity. From there should follow cooperation that will hopefully benefit both

countries through mutually agreed upon principles and practical steps. However,

Mr. Cohen’s suggestions, which seem to indicate that Eritrea forget its security

interests and give access to Eritrean ports without even mentioning some of the

obvious obstacles, strike a discordant chord and threaten to insult our collective

intelligence!

Apparently Eritrea is to blindly enter into some discussions after allowing its ports

to be used without any guarantees of security. Mr. Cohen needs to be reminded that

the suggestion to “engage in discussions” is a refrain straight out of the Woyane’s

hymnal. It is the excuse they continue to use to avoid implementing the Final and

Binding Algiers Agreement even though they signed it.

Surely Mr. Cohen does not want Eritrea to risk compromising its security in the

hope of subsequently engaging in “discussions” with an adversary that has used the

ruse of asking for “dialogue” to impose on it the current state of “no peace no war.”

Discussions are indispensible, but the conditions under which they should be

conducted require serious consideration of the existing realities and, hopefully, the

involvement of unbiased mediators.

***The writer is an ERITREAN-AMERICAN who attended UCLA on an academic scholarship where he earned his BA degree in Zoology and was a member of the first ever Bruin varsity team and he served as captain of the team in 1971 when the team was an NCAA finalist. He holds an MS in Microbiology from Loma Linda University and got his Ph. D. in Food Science at Cornell University. In addition to coaching college soccer he has taught collegiate Microbiology at Cal State Los Angeles and was a Research Specialist at Cornell University.***