

A little over a week ago, I got a UN document via email. It was a document submitted to the UN Human Rights Council by a group called Jubilee Campaign. As someone who has closely followed anti-Eritrea campaigns by “Christian” groups such as Strategic World Impact, Voice of the Martyrs, Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Jubilee Campaign, Release International and the many Eritrean surrogates that have mushroomed in cyber space since 2000, I was familiar with it’s agendas. Within days of that Jubilee Campaign submission to the UN, the mercenary minority regime in Ethiopia was shedding crocodile tears and making statements on behalf of the Eritrean people. Eritreans have become accustomed to the minority regime’s wailings and it only further undermines the credibility and integrity of the UN to have non-descript NGOs with absolutely no constituents (outside of the US State Department) to purport to speak on behalf of the Eritrean people, because they don’t.

Wey gud!

The dying, mercenary, minority regime can also dry its crocodile tears. A bigoted and racist regime that deported over 80,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin because it “didn’t like the color of their eyes”, and a regime that has committed genocides against its own people in the Gambela, Ogaden and Oromia regions of Ethiopia, and a regime that has massacred innocent Ethiopians on the streets of Addis Ababa for voting it out of office, and a regime that has engulfed Ethiopia in religious and ethnic conflicts, a regime that has violated international human rights laws, muzzled the voice of the Ethiopian people and slaughtered thousands of innocent Somalis in its war of aggression and invasion of Somalia, and a regime that is financing, harboring and sponsoring terrorist groups that are committing terrorist acts against the people of Eritrea, does not have the legal or moral authority to talk about Eritrea, its leadership and its people!

The “cut and paste” contents of the 5-page report to the UN is a continuation of the Us State Department sponsored Jubilee Campaign’s 6-year long campaign against the people and government of Eritrea. Notwithstanding the fact that Jubilee Campaign (JC) is in violation of the UN’s own rules and JC has repeatedly abused its “consultative status”, there is nothing in the report that we haven’t seen or heard before. In May 1968, ECOSOC Resolution 1296 (XLIV) specified that NGOs:

“...should have a general international concern with this matter, not restricted to the interests of a particular group of persons, a single nationality or the situation in a single State...”

The underhandedness and attempt to corrupt the UN process is evident in its futile attempt to conceal the status of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW). For those who do not know, CSW lost its "consultative status" for its campaign of vilification and defamation against the Government and people of Sudan in 1999 and it has yet to be re-instated. More on CSW and the Jubilee Campaign on another day...

"Wey gud" is an expression used by Eritreans to express their bewilderment and it is one that is being heard more and more often these days as... and not all the events relate to Eritrea. Let us briefly take a look at some of the events that have compromised the credibility, integrity and neutrality of the UN Security Council. While we are at it, we will also take a look at how the US has manipulated the UN to advance its own agendas and the detrimental role the UN has played Eritrea's history.

While the world was fixated on the turbulent events of the last few months, the "revolutions" and "uprisings" that began in Tunisia and then Egypt rocked the Middle East and North, and while the Tsunami, earthquakes and nuclear scares engulfed Japan, the duplicity and hypocrisy of the US led "international community" and the political corruption and bullying of UN member states by the "powerful" was being exposed for all the peoples of the world to see.

A "Christian" anti Eritrea NGO with no constituents in Eritrea was allowed to present a damning report on Eritrea, while Ms. Luul Gebreab, President of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW), an organization that boasts of over 200000 members in Eritrea and the Diaspora was denied a visa to enter the United States and attend the 55th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and present her statement in person. The US claimed that it had run out of "visa stamps"...yet it grants landing visas to runaway defectors and disgruntled diplomats who abandon their countries and people. By the way, it is the same tactic that the minority regime in Ethiopia used to keep Eritrea's voice out of the African Union. Wey gud...

We also got to see how the "international community" works at the United Nations. It was 19 February 2011, when Susan E. Rice, the US Ambassador to the United Nations cast the lone vote at the UN Security Council to veto a resolution that would have condemned Israeli settlements as "illegal" and called for an immediate halt to all settlement building. All 14 other Security Council members voted in favor of the resolution which had the backing of over 100

countries in the General Assembly. Yet, the US was able to kill the resolution and deny the will of the “international community”. Wey gud...

As if that was not enough, hubris reared its ugly face at the Security Council once again. Rice together with her French and English counterparts at the UN Security Council managed to arm twist and cajole “Arabs” and other members of the Security Council to pass a resolution that has given these “allies” a green light to invade and destroy Libya and remove the country’s leadership to “stop the massacre of Libyans”, while nations such as Brazil, China, India, Russia and Germany who could have stopped this madness, decided instead to abstain. What cowardice and shamefulness. This is yet another inexcusable and shameful abrogation of their responsibilities by members of the Security Council. No matter the statements they make for public consumption, and no matter what excuses they make to their people, this illegal action in no way absolves them of responsibilities for the carnage and destruction that will inevitably ensue in Libya ... Wey gud indeed!

It is April and even though there is not a single month that does not have significance in the history of Eritrea, it is an important one to Eritreans. April is the month in which the world wide Eritrean Referendum for independence was conducted and the voice of the Eritrean people was heard loud and clear after being distorted, muffled and silenced for over 50 years. I decided to write today for two reasons; the first reason is because the people of Eritrea are preparing to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of Eritrea’s independence and as they conduct symposiums to showcase Eritrea’s extraordinary achievements in the last 20 years, it is yet another opportunity to share with Eritrean youth and the wider public, information about the Eritrean people and the Eritrean Referendum for Independence.

The second reason is to tell the US led international community, western NGOs, US and UK media outlets and the minority regime in Ethiopia that have for the last 12 years orchestrated an elaborate campaign to muzzle Eritrea’s voice in the international arena, and for those who insist on speaking on behalf of the Eritrean people, that we, Eritreans, have our own voice and are intellectually capable of presenting our case in any forum and in any country. We do not need mercenary surrogates, “professional dissidents” and self serving western NGOs to speak on our behalf, nor will we allow them to use our names, in political campaigns against the State of Eritrea and its people.

Let us begin with a bit of Eritrean history...

After the Second World War, European colonialists left Africa and granted their colonies their “independence”. Italy lost the war and also lost its African colonies- Eritrea, Somalia and Libya. While Somalia and Libya were granted their independence, Eritrea was put under British Administration for another 10 years. The United Nations established a Commission which conducted a lengthy inquiry regarding the status of Eritrea. The superpowers also had a stake in Eritrea's future. Britain suggested the partition Eritrea along religious lines, between Sudan and Ethiopia, separating Christians and Muslims. The idea was instantly rejected by the people of Eritrea. The United States point of view was expressed John Foster Dulles, US Secretary of State who in 1952 said:

“...From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless, the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea Basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country [Eritrea] be linked with our ally, Ethiopia...”

At the behest of the US and its allies, the UN general Assembly adopted Resolution 390 (V) on 2 December 1950. On 11 September 1952, Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia. Ethiopia, with tacit approval of the US and its allies violated the terms of the federation and annexed Eritrea, and in 1962 declared Eritrea the fourteenth province of Ethiopia, triggering the armed struggle for independence. The voice of the Eritrean people would be silenced for over 40 years.

In his 1997 book, “The United States and the Horn of Africa: An Analytical Study of Pattern and Process”, Ogbazghi Yohannes wrote about the US-led “international community and its attitude on Eritrea and how Eritrea’s voice was muzzled. Yohannes wrote:

“...Nowhere has the adverse impact of American foreign policy on the fate of a nation been more apparent than in Eritrea. First by blocking the emergence of Eritrea as a distinct political entity and later by furnishing massive quantities of lethal weapons to Ethiopia, the United States contributed heavily to the tragic situation in which Eritrea had found itself for nearly half a century. The unqualified American support for Ethiopia had also received the ideological backing of Western scholarship;

academic Ethiophiles had invoked the presumed political nonviability, ethnic diversity, and "artificiality" of Eritrea--as if nations have preordained destinies--as sufficient reasons to justify its incorporation into Ethiopia... By controlling the fields both of diplomacy and of analysis, American policy makers and other Western scholars had transformed Eritrea into the "untouchable" of world politics and the backwater of international scholarship..."

Unfortunately, US policy for Eritrea has remained unchanged and the US has continued with its unprovoked hostility against Eritrea and its people.

On 24 May 1991, after a bitter 30-year armed struggle led by the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), Eritrea was finally liberated. The people of Eritrea paid a high price for the liberation of their beloved nation. Over 65000 Eritreans sacrificed their lives and thousands more were injured, maimed, orphaned and widowed. Eritrea's infrastructures were devastated and destroyed. Over 750,000 were displaced over the years had taken refuge in neighboring states and beyond. In Sudan alone, there were about 500,000 Eritrean refugees.

On 29 May 1991 in a Press Conference in London, H.E. President Isaias Afwerki, then the Secretary General of the EPLF, announced the formation of the Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) with its primary objective being to lay the foundation for a national referendum-to allow the Eritrean people to determine their own destiny and the future of Eritrea as a political entity. President Isaias also called upon the United Nations to "shoulder its moral responsibilities [to conduct a free and fair referendum on Eritrean self-determination] without further delay". Eritreans around the world would finally have a chance to speak on their own behalf.

The Referendum Commission was established on 7 April 1992 with a mandate to organize, conduct and supervise the Eritrean referendum. It is evident from the letters exchanged between President Isaias and the then UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali that the UN was once again prevaricating on the Eritrean issue and no doubt that there were powerful states yanking the Secretary General's chain. In his 3 July 1992 letter addressed to the UN Secretary General, President Isaias said:

“...As you may be aware, we have, throughout the years, been repeatedly calling on the United Nations to take up the Eritrean case and to play an active role in accordance with its responsibilities. It would not be an exaggeration to state that the repeated calls of the Eritrean people for forty long years have been literally ignored by the UN and the international community. That notwithstanding, the Eritrean people have finally succeeded in achieving full liberation in May 1991, without any assistance and by paying heavy sacrifices to ensure the exercise of their right to self determination and independence...”

Let us take a look at more of what he said back then in the 3 July 1992 letter:

“...It is regrettable, however, that no meaningful steps have been taken by the UN in spite of our goodwill and initiatives. On the contrary, it is to be noted that unnecessary, unjustifiable and inexplicable reasons which can only serve to complicate and delay action by the UN have been periodically given on implausible, “constitutional, “legal” and “technical” grounds. This attitude on Eritrea raises several justifiable questions especially in view of the involvement of, and positions assumed by, the UN on a wide range of international issues and events...”

In a letter dated 22 September 1992, President Isaias, then the Secretary General of the PGE to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali wrote another letter. In it he warned:

“...The reasons that have impelled me to do so are the intensive campaigns underway to create obstacles at this juncture when the Eritrean people are preparing to conduct the referendum in order to assert their right to self determination through a legal and fair process and when the United Nation’s has signaled its willingness to participate in the undertaking as an observer... That elements bent on expansion and war are, and have been doing their utmost to impede the constructive participation of

the United Nations, obstruct its adoption of a judicious resolution, and , create loopholes that could be exploited in the future is a well known fact... I urge the United Nations to take stock of the situations and not adopt a resolution that carries the seeds for potential conflict, and, humbly point out that historical responsibility for such an undesirable outcome would not rest on us...”

Finally, in its 89th plenary meeting on 16 December 1992 and just 4 months before the Eritrean Referendum, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution to approve a request to the United Nations to observe the referendum process in Eritrea. It decided to:

“...authorize the Secretary General to establish the United Nations Observer Mission to verify the Referendum on Eritrea... and to appoint, as a matter of urgency, a Special Representative for the referendum, who will lead the Observer Mission...”

The Eritrean Referendum would have taken place with or without the UN's participation. Unlike the billions of dollars that were spent by the US and its allies and the UN, on the recently held referendum in Sudan, their contribution to the Eritrean Referendum was negligible. The people of Eritrea relied on their own resources to conduct workshops, on ballots, on polling stations, and on registration and issuing of identification cards to Eritreans around the world. It should be recalled that Eritrea was still not eligible for loans or grants from international institutions because it was not recognized by the UN as sovereign state until 27 April 1993.

Those of us who participated in the Eritrean Referendum do not need the qualifications of foreign observers to tell us about the people of Eritrea, but for those who do not know us, allow me to mention the documented comments made by various observers at the conclusion of the voting process in Eritrea:

- **“...1,173,706 registered voters out of an estimated population of 3.5 million reflects about a third of the population. Given the demographics of the number of people under 18 in this region of the world, the registration seems to have probably**

captured most of the eligible voters...striking aspect of the observing process was the participation of Eritrean citizens within the Citizen's Referendum Committee and elders and religious leaders in the local communities. This type and level of participation is not found elsewhere and is an excellent method of expanding both participation and responsibility as well as constituting an important educative vehicle..."-

(Canadian Mission in its 27 April 1993 Press Statement)

- **"...the Referendum Commission schooled everyone so well in the democratic process that it would be difficult for anyone to hold fraudulent elections in the future..."** – (Joseph O'Neill, U.S. consul to Eritrea)
- **"...The observer team was particularly impressed with the high degree of enthusiasm, discipline and maturity exhibited by the Eritrean electorate and people..."**-(Papa Louis Fall who led the 18-man OAU observer mission)
- **"...The birth of the State of Eritrea was not a miracle but rather the product of "wisdom and foresight" by patriots who abided by a transition process that led to a non-violent process of Eritrea's independence..."**- (US diplomat Mark Baas)
- **"...There is a big difference here compared with the rest of Africa..."** –(Herbert M'Cleod, representative of the UNDP)

Tim Wise, Director of Grassroots International in his article "ERITREA'S REFERENDUM ON INDEPENDENCE-the meaning of a free vote" sums it up succinctly. Wise wrote:

"...If I hadn't seen the process with my own eyes, such a result would have been hard to believe. But traveling the countryside as an official non-governmental observer from Grassroots International, I observed the voting at several different polling stations. Everywhere, the story was the same. Despite having

three days to vote, virtually every able-bodied voter in the country's 1.1 million electorate braved long lines and a searing desert sun to vote on the first day of balloting. Overall turnout was estimated to be about 98%, including over 90% on the first day....It may have been the most elaborate process in history every carried out to achieve a foregone conclusion. The independent Referendum Commission of Eritrea could easily have gone through the motions of democratic process. In a country arguably born as the poorest on earth, few could have faulted them. Instead, they made the referendum a national rite of passage, a sacred right for each Eritrean voter to tell the world -- peacefully and democratically -- their answer to the question no one asked for forty years...One U.S. observer from the U.N. told me afterward, he never would have believed such a result if he hadn't witnessed the process himself. Another U.N. observer told me she had never seen such a meticulous process

There were 1010 polling stations and the results of 99.8% vote for independence dispelled any doubts about the wishes of the population. There is no dispute to assertions by the Eritrean Constitutional Commission that the turn out for the referendum that was held on April 23-25, 1993 was over 98 per cent.

As one of the thousands of Eritrean Americans and Eritreans who participated in the Eritrean Referendum, I remember the excitement and anxiety during the voting in Washington, DC. I remember the long lines at the American University and casting my ballot into the voting box. I can't describe the feeling as it is unlike any other kind of voting. To have a say in your national identity, to have a say in the establishment of your own country, to never be "stateless" again, is an emotion that is indescribable and the handful of Eritreans in the Diaspora who chose not to partake in that historical event today find themselves suffering from eternal remorse and self hate.

When the Eritrean flag was hoisted at the United Nations, busloads of Eritreans traveled to New York to witness the historic moment. That too is an indescribable moment. After being denied the right to exist and denying the Eritrean people their right to self determination, the world body was forced to accept Eritrea's

independence and sovereignty and Eritrea was to become a full fledged member of the United Nations.

H. E. President Isaias Afwerki summed up what every Eritrean felt in his speech to the opening of the 48th session of the UN in September 1993. The President of Eritrea said:

“...I cannot help but remember the appeals that we sent year in and year out to this Assembly and the member countries of the United Nations, describing the plight of our people. We appealed to the UN not only in its capacity as a representative of the international community, but also because of its special responsibility to Eritrea. For it was the UN that decided in 1950, at the beginning of the Cold War, to deny the colonized people of Eritrea their right to self determination, thereby sacrificing their national and human rights on the altar of the strategic interests of the superpowers...despite the repeated appeals of the Eritrean people, the UN refused to raise its voice in defense of a people whose future it had unjustly decided and whom it has pledged to protect. Not once in 41 years did Eritrea figure on the agenda of the UN...”

Today, another generation of Eritreans is witnessing the US and UN's injustices against the people of Eritrea.

When the US pushed through the illegal, unfair and unjust Resolution 1907 (2009) that imposed sanctions against the State of Eritrea and its people on 23 December 2009, Eritreans from all walks of life conducted a historic worldwide demonstration on 22 February 2010. The coordinated protests were held in Washington, DC, San Francisco, CA, Geneva, Switzerland and in Melbourne, Australia and hundreds of thousands participated.

Hundreds of thousands of letters and a petition with 107000 signatures were presented to the United Nations and the US State Department. A month later on 23 March 2010, Eritrean youth across the United States organized an “Action Day”, to once again call for the unconditional annulment of the illegal, unfair and unjust sanctions against Eritrea. They mobilized the entire community to send

postcards, letters, make phone calls and send faxes to US lawmakers, the US State Department and the White House.

On the occasion of the one year anniversary of the UN Security Council's adoption of the illegal, unfair and unjust Resolution 1907 (2009) of 23 December 2009 which imposed sanctions against Eritrea, a world wide "Action Month" was organized and on 15 December 2010, a worldwide "Action Day" was organized. Once again, hundreds of thousands of Eritreans from all over the world participated in the campaign. Eritrean communities in the Diaspora sent over 180,000 emails, faxes and made telephone calls to the White House and to the office of the UN Secretary General Ban-Ki moon. In less than one month 59,953 faxes and emails were sent from US cities alone. In a span of just one week, more than 23,700 faxes and emails were sent-out through an Eritrean website. This clearly shows that Eritreans are capable of expressing themselves and do not need self serving proxies to speak on their behalf.

After 60 years, the US State Department ought to know a thing or two about Eritreans. The groups and individuals that are being given audiences at the UN and other international forums do not represent the people of Eritrea and no matter how many documents and news items, or childish Embassy cables are written to try to vilify and defame Eritrea, as in the past, the truth and the facts on the ground will prove them otherwise. It may take some time as neither Eritrea, nor its people have the financial resources to battle against western monopoly on the media... but in the end, the people of Eritrea will prevail.

Today, with the advent of the internet and the many social networking sites available to Eritreans, they are able to connect to people around the world and tell their own story, in our own way. Eritrea's youth are intelligent, educated, bright, motivated and most of all, they understand the history of Eritrea, the sacrifices made by their parents and will not allow the illicit campaigns against the State of Eritrea, its people and government to go unchallenged...and they are doing that, without stipends from the US State Department or its surrogate Astro turf NGOs.

Congratulations to the people of Eritrea, the hard working members of Eritrea's Defense Forces and the incorruptible government of Eritrea as they celebrate the 20th Anniversary of their hard won independence.