**Eritrea: Every Day is Women’s Day**

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One of the hallmarks of the Eritrean struggle is the determination to ensure social justice. In Eritrea, one of the most intriguing ways the struggle adopted to changes has been its ability to incorporate those changes by embracing the traditions, cultural, regional, political and religious values of a given society en route to social justice. Women’s Day is an international observance of the valuable role women play; a day that acknowledges the hardship endured by women throughout the history of mankind; to rejoice the progress women have made; to assess directions and ultimately, to celebrate womanhood. As the famous quote states, “All politics is local.” Given the vast diversity of cultures, regions, traditions and religious values in Eritrea, how the people of Eritrea interpret and implement equal-social-justice is truly a window into the maturity of the Eritrean way of life.

To quote Shabait editorial of March 3, 2012,

“Women’s Right in Eritrea is not a theoretical move in which human rights is referred in the country’s political program for aesthetic values, but rather, it is a constituent of national security that has unequivocally been in effect. Gender equality-cultural legacy that has been handed down since days of liberation struggle-is a characteristic political treasure of which the Eritrean people takes due pride. Based on this historical milieu, the question of women remains in effect amongst the building blocks of national percepts.”

The quote above clearly articulates the weight attached to women’s rights in Eritrea. Women’s rights are a matter of national security and an integral foundation in the life of the country. Eritrea can afford to boast with confidence because history attests to the integral role women played in the struggle for liberation and thereafter at all levels and in all fields. However, while the successes are pronounced and, the ideals of gender equalities are generally accepted principles, there remain pockets of inequalities that linger. Regardless, Eritrean women are far and above their counterpart, based on their achievements and the roles they have ensured within the Eritrean social fabric for decades consistently.

There are many fascinating facets to the life of Eritrean women. The first being, how the people of Eritrea view their roles and rights and secondly, how Eritrean women view their place, roles and rights.

Eritrea has unique history on how it has viewed and dealt with the issue of gender equality. Compared to the US for example, Eritrea has done much better. The US has long history of denying rights to minorities and women. There were American women that served in major wars and were denied recognition until very-recently as in the case of Vietnam War and World War II. The Vietnam Women's Memorial is a great reminder since it is the first time, in 1993, that a memorial was dedicated honoring women in military service.

In Eritrea’s revolutionary struggle, women earned their roles and, as a result, were accepted as equal partners from the beginning. Hence, Eritrea was founded on a solid foundation regarding the ideals of gender equality. Eritrean women were not, accorded special privileges or, handed favors in order to fill quotas and statistical data. They earned their rightful place in society with blood, guts and hard work. They earned it with sacrifices unmatched by any. Eritrean women in the struggle, sacrificed more than any Eritrean because they gave-up so much including their lives to ensure the freedom of Eritrea. They gave up their youth and ability to wed and raise family amongst other things.

Hence, the role women play in Eritrea today is rooted in the struggle. The struggle was incapable to discriminate women since they were playing a pivotal role. They worked hand and glove with their male counterpart in every field including combat. They earned their stripes and the role they are in today, in glory. Therefore, the roles they play and the positions they have at all levels dates back to the days of the struggle. This history was repeated in 1998-2000 during the Ethiopian invasion that took the lives of thousands of Eritreans.

Today in Eritrea, women are notably visible in all sectors at high levels. Eritrean women hold major positions of power and run them effectively. They are in the Air Force and in all aspects of the national defense forces protecting Eritrea. They are in Medicine as doctors, nurses’ practitioners and as teachers. They are in TV and media as anchors, producers; in the agricultural sector as owners, in community farming co-ops producing and selling agricultural products; they participate in all of Eritrea’s retail outlets as owners and, they are in construction operating heavy machinery. In short, there is no area out of reach to Eritrean women.

**Eritrean Women are Masters of their Destiny**

Eritrean women have earned their rightful place in Eritrea. But that in itself is not enough to sustain what they earned with blood. To ensure continuity, to build on their successes and develop mechanism for equal access, opportunities and choice for women; there needs to be organized and powerful women’s organizations in Eritrea.

Here again, Eritrea and by extension Eritrean women can boast major achievements. Women in Eritrea have more penetration into every facet of the society by default. For example, a young Eritrean women can be a member of a national co-ed youth organization and still be a member of women’s organization. These types of penetrations cut through the entire spectrum of Eritrean societies. Generally, women that are members of women’s organizations in Eritrea are members of other national organizations. This accords them additional advantages since there exists no gender-based organization for men.

Women in Eritrea are organized, informed and powerful. They have the capacity to influence opinions, to introduce and enact laws and to enforce it. It is also worth noting that they have resources and means to help empower women throughout. Eritrean women’s organizations are in the forefront building facilities; assisting women in need; developing skills; equipping women with life-skills training and tending to women’s needs in every way everywhere in Eritrea. The Diaspora communities are important part of the web by contributing equally. This foundation and the like have enabled Eritrea to minimize the need for international NGO’s.

However, what I find intriguing is how Eritrean women approach their issues, positions and roles. Surprisingly, women in Eritrea have remained very close to their traditional roles while embracing opportunities the independence of Eritrea brought to bear. Obviously, the nation is going through constant transformation. Tremendous adjustments are required to stay with the fast-paced change Eritrea is going through. Yet, the customs, traditions and core beliefs remain the same as they have for decades. The women remain the center of their families and the nation while embracing the core values that make Eritrea work.

**Conclusion**

Women will always thrive in Eritrea and attain successes beyond levels that African nations will not be able to attain. The reason, Eritrean women have established deep roots. Above all, the attitude about women is conducive to create an environment that nurtures success. Most importantly, Eritrea’s commitment to gender equality is real and unquestionable. Laws that empower women back this commitment. For example, Eritrean women are accorded every right to land ownership. Traditionally land was given to males and that is not the case in Eritrea today. While there are enforceable laws that can foster change in attitudes legally, the people and government have opted to encourage change by educating the public and, empowering women. This is due to the sensitivities that surround the issues and it is helping deter harmful traditional practices

I had a conversation about this matter with an Eritrean mother who was involved with the UN in Eritrea and dealt with these matters on a daily basis. After I asked her, how she assessed Eritrea’s approaches? She said, “For the first time, we have government that is concerned about the issues of women. We have government that wants to ensure the health of pregnant mothers, children and the like. We have been accorded the means and access to reach even remote areas that we were never able to access in the past…”

Whilst, much has been attained, more is required to ensure lasting satisfactory success. There needs to be focus to ensure educational opportunities are availed, hardships minimized and hurdles removed. We need to keep in mind, those that are being wed prematurely in early ages and the like. Hence, our focus ought to make “Every-day women’s day” since they are the catalyst and the engine of the Eritrean life.

In a personal note, I feel honored and remain humbled when I engage Eritrean women. Over the years, I had the opportunity to deal with great women. And I know that gender equality is not an issue because they run the show. I am proud of all the women that have tirelessly kept our communities together in focus and in action. They are doing fantastic job. Their commitment and tenacity is what keeps us glued as one. For this special women’s day, I like to congratulate Eritrean women for their brilliance, tenacity and for seeing Eritrea through many difficult phases onto the current stage.

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