**Eritrea’s Veterans Day**

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One of the key goals of the anti-Eritrean campaign is to divert Eritreans from focusing on their nations affairs. It is to overwhelm Eritrean news, stories, agendas, direction and replace it with their narrative. It is to make Eritreans talk about what they want to talk about at the expense of Eritrea. It is to say and do anything that establishes Eritrea’s legacy in a bad light. Lies, fabrications, distortions, misleading information and defamation are preferred methods of appeal in an effort geared at nullifying Eritrea from existence as nation.

I have recently read articles by the anti-Eritrean camp that want to infuse the idea that Eritrea’s national struggle for independence was in vein. The ideas behind the articles are at best, to minimize the patriotic pride of Eritreans and in the least, to create doubt.

That being the case, whose responsibility is it to stand for the legacy that established the foundation of a nation from certain death?

Of course, it is the responsibility of every Eritrean to highlight the true picture of Eritrea’s Heroes and Sheroes by telling stories that accentuate the unparalleled legacy of bravery and valor that Eritreans are known for before, during and after the struggle for independence.

On the 11th of November, as I watched American Veterans honored in Arlington National Cemetery, It dawned on me that Eritrea does not have a dedicated day to honor and celebrate Eritrean Veterans. That triggered thoughts to why Eritrea has not dedicated a Veterans Day to honor Eritrea’s veterans. The question is not whether Eritrean veterans should or, why they should be honored. It is more of whom, when, and how to honor Eritrea’s veterans.

Eritrea honors Eritrean Martyrs with pride. However, there is a difference between Martyrs Day and Veterans Day. Memorial Day honors those who died in battle or, on duty to free and defend Eritrea. Veterans Day on the other hand is a day dedicated to honor those that are actively serving and those that have already served including those that gave their life in the process.

Considering Eritrea’s long history of struggle for independence, and considering the nonconventional nature of the struggle, at least in the beginning before the full-fledged armed struggle started, it is extremely involved process to break down Eritrea’s Veterans and decipher who is considered a veteran and why.

According to various dictionaries, a Veteran is, “A person who is long experienced or practiced in an activity or capacity; a person who has served in the armed forces; or, an old soldier who has seen long service.”

The people of Eritrea struggled at various levels and in many capacities throughout the history of this young nation. There are living men and women that struggled for the independence of Eritrea after WWII. These are individuals that became catalyst to the armed struggle through campaigns they conducted all over. These include high school and university students, teachers that enlightened and lawyers that defended those that were wrongfully detained for Eritrea.

But what makes the idea of honoring Eritrean veterans special and urgent, by dedicating a day, a week, a month or, however Eritrea chooses to honor them, is the fact that many of these veterans are alive and still contributing to the wellbeing and future of Eritrea with unparalleled dedication.

Dedicating a day for veterans is not limited to the honor of the current generation of Eritreans; it is a legacy to be followed by future generations. And establishing that legacy with some urgency prudence and organization makes a great deal of sense because the current pool of Eritrean veterans ranges from the ages of 20s to the 90s. Meaning, many of those that have struggled for the independence of Eritrea since the Italian occupation and are living, will have opportunity to be honored for their commitment and service.

To underscore the urgency of honoring Eritrea’s veterans while living, it is best to take example from the US.

On May 29th, 2004, The National World War II Memorial was dedicated in Washington, D.C. The memorial honors over sixteen million service men and women. And, it is dedicated to honor over 400,000 martyrs of the war. It was a long process that required the dedication of many. But from the day of the dedication and the proceeding years since, the memorial saw influx of WWII veterans that flocked to visit the memorial dedicated to honor them. Washington DC witnessed millions WWII veterans in their 60, 70s, 80s and 90s visiting the memorial on a daily basis to date with their families in unprecedented numbers. Some are disabled and sick.

The memorial delivered tremendous boost to the pride of these worthy veterans by glorifying their life and sacrifices. It is gratifying to see these veterans tell stories of the war to their children and grandchildren leaving legacies of bravery, valor and honor in defense of a nation. In short, it is the best way to honor and thank these heroes while living.

Eritrea is destined for greatness because of the brave souls that dedicated their lives to her. It is only when Eritreans recognize, understand and appreciate that Eritrean veterans having served, and are serving Eritreans everywhere and at many levels, that Eritrea could achieve higher levels of national victory. Since, dedication to each other through service is what keeps propelling Eritrea to the unprecedented level of victories Eritrea is achieving to date.

In Eritrea, veterans are not limited to the armed forces; they are farmers, doctors, educators, in maintenance, infrastructure development in business and every field imaginable. That means, in some capacity, every Eritrean is a veteran. And it is only when we recognize the services already rendered and appreciate one another for the sacrifices that we can lift the level and quality of the life of our nation.

A veteran is a servant of the people. But what separates Eritrean veteran from the rest is the fact that their contribution to the history of Eritrea was strictly voluntary at least until independence. These contributions are what ensured the independence of Eritrea and helped establish a new nation based on the principles that ensured freedom.

Whilst it is difficult to impose principles and values on publics, the people of Eritrea, having been a part of the fight for independence, embraced these legacies and made it integral part of the life of the nation and, nation-building. This selfless acts where reaffirmed by the gallantry during the war in 1998-2000 against Ethiopian aggression.

**Moving Forward**

As Eritrea transitions in phases, it becomes critical to recognize, understand the changes and translate to action the meaning of serving a nation, and in turn each other. Eritrea by default is a nation made up of veterans and it will remain so by necessity.

The initial stages represented the fights for the freedom of and defense of the nation. Currently Eritreans are engaged in nation building and all that entails. That means building roads, schools, hospitals and the building of necessary social and physical infrastructures and in the process, develop human resource capacities. These programs developed on a national level, are carried out accordingly.

The challenge that remains to be seen therefore is the rendering of service to one another willingly for the betterment and future success of Eritrea in all areas that are not mandated because absent of that commitment there is no nation. Only a nation that is willing to serve each other can thrive as a nation. To start, we have to recognize the service already rendered by Eritreans for Eritreans, appreciate and allow it to manifest through the service that we provide each other.

Eritrea is at a new stage positioned to shift to a “new gear” and, the recent investment conference is an indication of the transitional point Eritrea finds herself.

In the US, the government has set up a veteran’s administration represented by a cabinet level position to tend to Veteran Affairs (VA). This administration tends to nearly all the needs of veterans. But more than what the government could mandate, it is the participation of all businesses and individuals that makes serving rewarding and as such, makes veterans special. It is breathtaking to see veterans honored in all major sports activities. There is no major organization that fails to recognize veterans. Nearly every organization makes considerations to provide advantages for veterans. Whether it is restaurants, hotels or insurers, they all provide special rates and packages to accommodate veterans. Eritrea must do the same by embracing the values of the veterans that got us here.

**Conclusion**

Eritreans are naturally well-meaning, dedicated and humble servants of each other. However, over time and when faced with persistent personal and national challenges, glorious national values could be glossed over or undermined. To remedy, we need to always be wrapped by Eritrean flag. Since, that is the reason Eritrea sacrificed thousands and spent countless years in agonizing hardships. Since, it is the purpose, the mission and a way of life for every Eritrean that loves his or her country. For, it is incumbent upon every Eritrean to honor those that served and died for her.

We can achieve success is by nurturing a nation worthy of their sacrifices, by providing veterans and each other service at the highest level, with love, and by respecting each other and the flag. For, that is the only way that we can nurture a successful and prosperous Eritrea. Therefore, we need to honor veterans nationally, in a process, with an organization and dignity worthy of their sacrifices.

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