**Putting Eritrea’s 2019 Independence Day Celebration in its Unique Context**

By Haile H.Gaber

Come next May, Eritrea will be gearing to celebrate its 26th year of Independence. And all during these past years a lot has been written and by many people, some in defence of and some to destroy Eritrea. And to put it in the least mild terms, it has been an extremely arduous and costly journey for the people of this decently proud nation. The burden and pain stomached has been beyond words. But the victory is also that much immense which, as always, this great people take with magnanimity. And thanks to its peoples’ stoic mind set and able leadership, the country has prevailed and secured its longevity.

This note is being written when almost a seismic shift in the geopolitics of the horn of Africa is in emergence. This dramatic development has caught almost everybody by surprise above all the self-anointed experts of the region and to the detriment of those who had made bashing Eritrea a means of their sustenance. It is therefore appropriate to reflect even in a modest way what Eritrea’s lot had been and how much we should cherish and appreciate the celebration of Independence Day. Let me therefore briefly walk, you the reader, through my narrative on this momentous event.

Many counties celebrate independence days. A number of these eventful days have come into reality in the wake of decolonization while some have been achieved through armed struggle. Invariably each of these armed struggle movements had its own trajectory and inherent quintessence. Many depended on external assistance for the realization of their objectives, some had shorter time horizon or had been shouldered mainly by the male section of their populations. Yet others have had the misfortune to go it alone and endure extraordinary helplessness, isolation and travel an arduous long journey up to fruition. In some instances the enemy was of moderate measure while in others it was overwhelming and bolstered by one or the other most powerful nation on earth.

Needless to say, Eritrea’s Independence Day Celebration must be seen against the backdrop of all the scenarios with the minuses stated above never mind the innumerable ones too many to mention here. The rationality of Eritrea’s Independence Day Celebration does not require sophisticated analysis for it is simple and we may have been used to take it for granted. But often times it is putting the simple in its proper context that I must confess I find even more demanding. Below I shall briefly try to highlight the unique considerations that ought to be held in the highest possible regard when defining Eritrea’s Independence Day Celebration.

First and foremost, I consider it an extreme privilege to have lived long enough to not only witness but also enjoy the essence of being a citizen of a sovereign country which like all Eritreans have been yearning for since our early age of life. In my view this privilege is bestowed to each and every Eritrean regardless of position, ethnic, creed and social background. This day is the core birth of our nationhood and has been given to us by the most precious souls that the country of Eritrea has given birth to. Those souls passed away with the full knowledge that they will neither live to see nor feel as we do in a liberated Eritrea. We hear stunning and incredible stories of selflessness where ***Tegadelti*** would put themselves on the firing line in place of their comrades so that they can live to carry on the torch of liberation to fruition. If one assents to the idea of Eritrean citizenship and sovereignty, then this is it! All the rest is inconsequential without the precedence of this day.

This day is nothing and is void without dedicating and acknowledging the valuable price paid by our martyrs. And in point of fact, all what we do in respect of this unique day is for us and for the generations of the future. For me without the recognition of the absolute precedence and significance of this day, all the talk of fads counts for nothing. What use is in those fads without an independent and sovereign country? I admit democracy can be damaged when the liberty of the individual is somewhat compromised for the sake of the liberty of the country. But to be concerned about the liberty of the individual, a liberated country should exist in the first place. Individual liberty can only be exercised on liberated geographical entity if we are talking in respect of free a citizen and country. Ideally the two should not be separated, but at times, this symbiotic bond is dictated by practical circumstances that necessitate giving qualified precedence of country liberation within the context of national consolidation. That is why people ‘pay with their liberty to live’ for the liberation of a country. Else, all makes no sense.

However it is very sad that there are ‘among us’ who could not rise above their misguided self-interest who attempt to denigrate and ignore this day and our flag. But this is irrelevant as no power on earth or even GOD can take this away from our martyrs.

Secondly the exceptionality of this Eritrean Independence Day is the fact that, unlike other conventional wars of liberations, the role of the female gender of our population was most probably unprecedented contributor to its realization. This proved that the forward looking vision of the EPLF leadership to confer upon them equal responsibility as their male compatriots was second to none. With can do and inspirational leadership heroic achievements are possible. Independence Day is the base upon which all subsequent pinnacles could be seeded and flourish. The highest gratitude to our heroines.

Thirdly this Independence Celebration was achieved on the basis of self-reliance and ownership. Thanks to its visionary leadership, Eritrea was able to achieve its independence against all odds. It had neither powerful military ally nor one with a heavy weight with diplomatic clout to promote its just cause. On the contrary Eritrea had to face an enemy hundreds of folds bigger than her and supported by limitless material assets, diplomatic and other resources. It was left to its own means and devices. Nevertheless it proved that justice can win when it is managed with just hands!

Lastly we celebrate this year’s Independence Day at a time when new geopolitical conditions are evolving in the Horn of Africa in general and the real rapprochement between Eritrea and Ethiopia in particular. Subsequent to Ethiopia’s unequivocal acceptance of the Algiers Peace Agreement in letter and spirit, a fresh wind of hope and peace has engulfed the Horn region. An era of peace, cooperation and inclusive détente anchored on the recognition and respect of each and every country’s sacrosanct sovereignty and territorial integrity is budding. Eritrea’s constructive role on this non-conventional and independent, indigenous strategic vision in pursuit of owned cooperative development roadmap for the countries of Horn region free from external interference is there to see in the making.

On the other hand despite this encouraging and positive development, what this writer finds extremely astounding is the crocodile tears of some gone astray souls proclaiming that Eritrea’s sovereignty and territorial integrity is being compromised and that the president is single -handedly handing the country over to Ethiopia on a silver plate! What a travesty! Mind you many of these folks have been actively advocating for the continuation and strengthening of the illegal and concocted sanctions and supplied falsified information as a tool kit components to isolate and denigrate Eritrea and its people. Some of these folks may have done this out of vindictiveness and the desire to revenge for their past failures and some in pursuit self-interest in the form of pecuniary remunerations. But many of them may also lack the intellectual grounding and sagacity to realize that in so doing, they would inadvertently seriously undermine Eritrea’s statehood. Furthermore the easy and cheap access to social media has also empowered everyone including those not so able individuals to appear through devices’ screen windows to dish out whatever fallacious information resides in their grey matter. Amazingly, almost every one claims to know better than the rest. ***WELCOME TO THE ERA OF FAKE NEWS AND DISINFORMATION***!

Now, can someone find a word to describe this spiteful behaviour? This is really contemptuous and unbecoming of an Eritrean blood. I would have thought that we Eritreans spurn insincerity and falsehood and usually regarded each other as friends. Unfortunately and to a certain extent, such collective virtue has been seriously eroded during the past years. We know what many of those who are now pretending to be more patriotic than the rest of us, were doing in Eritrea’s hour of need. Shamelessly, they were on the wrong side of history as far as Eritrea was concerned. Pathetically for some of them participating in the anti-Eritrean organized conferences was an achievement and they were amused that ‘the food served was good!’. Such was their appraisal of the futile conferences aimed to promote’’ Eritrea’s cause’’!

However, I would concede that every patriotic Eritrean should have the right to air his/her opinion to promote the national interest of the country. And if genuinely patriotic Eritreans who hitherto have been following routes detrimental to the country’s interests make amends and come to the realisation of their mistakes and turn over a new leaf, I say welcome and a good thing is never too late. Go ahead. Carry on and air your genuine and legitimate concerns in a constructive and mature fashion while fulfilling your national obligation in whatever form. Eritrea belongs to all of us and by equal measure demands from all of us.

But it is an insult, extremely obscene, and vulgar denigration of the cause our beloved heroines and heroes died for to suggest that the on-going Eri-Ethio rapprochement is geared towards the sale of Eritrea’s statehood. Equally incomprehensible and abhorrent is the accusation that the Eritrean leaders who have sacrificed their entire lives and who have lead the Eritrean independence struggle to its logical conclusion, are after all ready to undo its sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is beyond bordering insanity. I am short of suitable words to describe this except to say that this is egregious but at the same time irrelevant and laughable narration.

If the actuality of the Eritrean deliverance was that much cheap and meaningless, what was then the essence of the several decades’ long war of independence? Why did the Eritrean people endure so much pain and paid immeasurably? Are the people of Eritrea headless torsos and stupid to that extent? Are they telling us that with a stroke of one man’s pen, the country will disappear and sold like an Easter feast sheep? This is extreme ridicule and malice incognito. Once more some of them showed themselves in their true colours with their clock-and-bull story as they say in classical English (absurd and unbelievable). What an insult to the people of Eritrea! They say thinking is hard and it seems some of our folks are deficient in this cognitive faculty. One may disagree with the government of the day. That is fine – governments come and go but it is accepted that countries with their people are eternal.

Furthermore don’t they comprehend that this is music to the ears of some of the mischievous elites of Ethiopia? And speaking about these red-sea syndrome afflicted Ethiopian elites, I just want to remind them that Eritrea did not secede from Ethiopia. Eritrea was liberated by the blood of its people. Eritrea has never been a part of Ethiopia and only an integral part or region of a country be can be said to have seceded. Eritrea was contemptuously annexed and brought under brutal Ethiopian occupation against the will of its people. This is the true history and forget your deliberately distorted versions. It took decades of painful struggle to rectify this historical anomaly and secure the country’s rightful independence and sovereign status. This is the stark reality. Once and for all, these groups must come to this realization, and contribute to the success of the evolving rapprochement envisioned to deliver on mutual prosperity for the peoples of the two sovereign countries. Such is this writer’s take on ***medemer and not the figment of your imagination!***

Now, in all conscience, I cannot bring myself to deny that domestically, Eritrea faces many challenges and difficulties and that there are numerous issues to be addressed and deficiencies to be made up. It is this writer’s belief that as we confidently move forward, all the good things we aspire for our common good will be put in place and delivered appropriately and in congruence with the practical situation obtaining in the country. And I have not seen any country that is free from criticism. But whatever we do in pursuit of our cherished goals, should not blind us from foreseeing the conceivable negative consequence of our idiosyncratic thinking. I say let us celebrate our Independence Day as the country embarks on a new trajectory for a better prosperous future with Eritrea’s secured inalienable sovereignty and intact territorial integrity.

Lastly, as I conclude my story, I want to state that we should be aware of the not inevitable but potential existential threats from all sorts of sources. Eritrea has frustrated all past futile attempts, not because these forces were weak, but because the Eritrean people have seen what subjugation entails. They had faced and will continue to face any threat affront with resolute determination and unflinching self-reliance united for their collective destiny. The enemies know this Eritrean phenomenon and the Eritreans also recognise the price they are ready to pay for their independence and freedom. Neither superficial fads nor fatalistic narration will deter the Eritrean people from pursuing their own roadmap and celebrate their Independence Day as they know how.

Long Live Eritrea Libre!