



Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change

Presidency of the Council

---

## The National Political Charter of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change

### Introduction:

More than twenty years have passed since Eritrea declared its independence, for which we paid dearly throughout all the phases of our national struggle, with tens of thousands of deaths. The aim of that struggle was to establish a free country, in which the people would enjoy national sovereignty with respect for their human dignity, and lay the foundations of a prosperous future for the coming generations, and where the country would develop and prosper like every other free nation.

The challenges that our people faced during the long struggle were huge, and emanated from the colonial ambitions of the major powers, given the strategic location of our country on the Red Sea coast. This also coincided with the expansionist ambitions of the regional powers. Our people determinedly defied all those challenges, despite the fact that the balance of power was not in their favour.

### THE PERIOD OF SELF-DETERMINATION

During this peaceful struggle, in middle of the last century, (referred to as the period of self determination), most of our people rallied around the goal of achieving independence. Nevertheless, we cannot claim that all Eritreans opted for independence, since there were still some who called for unity with Ethiopia. National unity and peaceful coexistence were preserved in spite of efforts by the hostile powers to exploit secondary disagreements between the various communities within Eritrea. The colonial powers of the time circumvented the findings of the UN fact-finding mission, and ignored the desire of the majority of

Eritreans for national independence rather than merger with the Ethiopian empire.

As John Foster Dulles, then US Secretary of State, later testified, in spite of all the Ethiopian terrorist operations against Eritreans, and the death of numerous national figures, the colonial powers were determined to prevent the establishment of an independent Eritrean state, which they saw as contrary to their own strategic interests. Having failed to annex Eritrea to the Ethiopian Empire, the colonial powers resorted to new tactics and on various flimsy pretexts devised the ill-fated Federal Union, as a first step towards the same end.

After this, the government of Haile Selassie indulged in a race against time to create division within the Eritrean people. It stoked the fires of social strife, by on the one hand exploiting its local surrogates and on the other pursuing a policy of state terrorism against the Eritrean national movements and national political parties. It intimidated the population and embarked on a policy of undermining the structure of the Eritrean economy, which at the time was more advanced than the Ethiopian.

Conditions were heading towards a full onslaught on the so-called Federal Union, and Haile Selassie soon declared the annexation of Eritrea to Ethiopia, with the help of international backers, and the silence of the United Nations on this violation of the terms of the Federal agreement it had sponsored. In September 1961, the Eritrean people reacted to the erosion of whatever rights they had had by declaring an armed struggle to liberate land and people.

## ARMED STRUGGLE

All the diverse communities of Eritrea joined in the popular liberation war, which lasted more than three decades, culminating in the liberation of Eritrea from the Ethiopian occupation. Eritrea's war of liberation overcame various catastrophic junctures and traps contrived by the colonial powers. There were as many of these problems as powers allying themselves with the Ethiopian regime. All this plotting and greed was defeated however, thanks to the steadfastness of the Eritrean people along with their revolutionary forces. At the same time, the successful armed strikes by Eritrean revolutionary forces against Ethiopia's army of occupation inspired the revolutionary forces inside Ethiopia itself, where Ethiopians joined their allies in rising up to face the tyrants. As a result, the Ethiopians succeeded in bringing about radical changes, which have not only

affected the system of governance but also completely changed political thinking in Ethiopia, to the extent of recognizing the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination and independence. The fighters of Ethiopia fought alongside the Eritrean revolutionaries, and both succeeded in creating new realities on the ground, and stronger relationships between the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia.

As well as emphasizing these positive factors, and epic struggle that made the victory of the Eritrean revolution possible, and culminated in the entire liberation of national territory, we must also look objectively at the critical points in that struggle, especially during the war of liberation.

Here we point out the intrinsic factors that led to the emergence of the present dictatorial regime. We see the regime not simply as some diabolical growth, but rather as a consequence of the political and social realities of our revolution. We dwell on this issue as a means of exploring how to strengthen our national unity, and to foster peaceful coexistence between the various communities within the Eritrean people, so that our homeland can accommodate everyone and ensure the rights of all those communities.

The reality of multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious society is not unique to Eritrea; rather it exists in most countries in the world. Our diversity is a blessing rather than a curse. The chronic political crisis that resulted in the divisions and conflicts that caused our failures and hindered our progress can be resolved, if all the political forces and national leaders are willing to engage in serious dialogue – a dialogue aimed at overcoming disagreements and resolving the crisis of confidence between our various communities.

We must admit that the Eritrean Revolution failed to address the political crisis embodied in this lack of confidence. This crisis was part and parcel of the Eritrean Revolution, and led to the division of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) into rival factions which later resorted to the use of arms to resolve their conflicts, competing to monopolize decision-making in the national arena and to gather for themselves the gains of the Revolution. The liberation of the entire territory of Eritrea from Ethiopian occupation occurred when the Eritrean political factions were caught up in a lethal rivalry, racing to maintain control over the land and to monopolize national decision-making. The liberation process was finalized by the Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF), at a time when this political crisis was at its deepest, and had serious social and cultural repercussions for Eritrea.

Rather than resolving the conflicts of the war of liberation and introducing a new era of reconciliation and inclusiveness, with the aim of creating social consensus among all the religious and ethnic groups, the EPLF regime continued to deny the part the other revolutionary forces had played in defeating the forces of occupation. The EPLF imposed a one-sided cultural hegemony and tightened its absolute control over the country's economic resources instead of adopting policies that might have eliminated the social inequalities.

As a result, the differences between the communities that constitute the Eritrean people have taken on deeper social, sectarian and ethnic dimensions, and are posing a serious threat to our unity and our national independence.

Faced with these realities, the Eritrean opposition forces have to shoulder a historic responsibility. The challenge is to release the country and its people from cage into which the Eritrean regime has forced them , and to bring freedom and harmony among the various ethnic, religious and cultural communities, so that our people can begin the process of nation-building and consolidate our national independence, along with all that independence stands for.

This longed-for democratic transformation cannot be achieved until there is both agreement between our various communities, and justice, to overcome the crisis of confidence between them.

We must prevent the concept of democratic transformation becoming no more than a slogan, an expression of aspiration, as happened with the concept of liberation, which resulted in the land being liberated while the suffering of our people continued unabated and has even doubled. Democratic transformation must not disappoint the people as independence did, turning out contrary to their aspirations and expectations.

The democratic forces of the Eritrean opposition must make the transformation process concrete, turning the slogans of independence and freedom into meaningful tangible realities, and embodying the values of fairness and justice for the entire Eritrean people.

The Eritrean opposition forces represented at the inclusive National Congress for Democratic Change, held from 21 to 30 November 2011, hereby declare the

formation of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change, based on the principles stated in this National Political Charter.

## **Chapter I: The definition of this Charter**

This charter represents what we agreed on. It is a contract binding on all the parties that ratified it. It will take into account any regional and international change that may take place in our region and influence our current knowledge, without compromising the essential points agreed on. Any changes will be agreed at the National Council.

## **Chapter II: Principles of this Charter**

1. Maintenance of national sovereignty, preservation of the unity of the people and the territorial integrity of Eritrea, within the internationally recognized geographical boundaries , confirmed by the decades of heroic struggle.
2. Recognition of the equitable distribution of wealth and power based on the principles of democracy, social peace and human rights and freedom, to create justice and equality between all the communities within Eritrean society.
3. Recognition of citizenship as the basis upon which rights and duties are predicated, without discrimination, and of the equality of all citizens before the law.
4. Recognition of the religious, cultural and ethnic plurality of Eritrea and commitment to respecting this diversity and its attendant rights and freedoms, in line with the fundamental rights stipulated by international conventions and law.
5. Affirmation of all the rights stipulated by international conventions on human rights, including freedom of belief, worship, opinion, expression, press, association, ownership, mobility, and other public and private freedoms which will be included in the Constitution.

6. Recognition of religion, culture and ethnicity as essential elements of the Eritrean people's identity and collective ethos; and therefore protection of all religious, political and social rights of all sections of the Eritrean people.
7. Constitutional guarantee of the right of Eritrean organizations and parties to adopt and to seek popular support for any political program that they deem suitable for governance.
8. That political power resides with the Eritrean People and is exercised through their elected representatives.
9. That all Eritrean languages are national and equal, including Arabic and Tigrinya which are both the official languages for Eritrea. Every Eritrean community has the right to use and develop its own language.
10. The struggle for and the establishment of a democratic system based on a completely inclusive multi-party system.
11. The affirmation of the principle of peaceful transfer of power and the separation of powers between the legislature, the executive, the judiciary; and commitment to the independence of the judiciary.
12. The endorsement of a constitutionally decentralized system of governance. Such a system will be guaranteed by the future Constitution of Eritrea.
13. The principle of ownership of land, and that all land illegally confiscated must be returned, through both executive and legal proceedings, to its legitimate owner.
14. Recognition of the principle of gender equality and of the social, political and economic rights of women, as endorsed by international conventions.
15. Recognition of the democratic right to national self-determination which must be enshrined in the future Eritrean constitution, within the context of a united country.
16. Recognition of the right of any nationality to identify itself using any name it chooses, and abolition of the present regime's practice of forced merger.

17. Pursuance of a foreign policy based on mutual interests and recognition of parity in relations between nations, respect of national sovereignty, and the preservation of peace, regionally and internationally, and the endorsement of international agreements and conventions.

### **Chapter III: The general objectives of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change**

1. To remove the dictatorial regime and all forms of injustice that it has perpetrated.
2. To build a democratic Eritrean state and achieve security, peace, stability and social justice.
3. To implement democracy in the exercise of power and to uphold collective and private freedoms and the peaceful exchange of power.
4. To preserve the Eritrean national unity forged through the decades of heroic struggle.
5. To strive to build trust between the constituent communities of the Eritrean people and to promote a culture of peaceful coexistence and consolidate democratic values and freedoms.
6. To instill the lofty and tolerant values of our religions and our positive cultural traditions, from which the state can derive and promote the idea of coexistence between religions and cultures.

### **Chapter IV: Means of struggle**

1. Escalation of the resistance against the PFDJ regime by all possible legitimate means.
2. Adopt an approach of dialogue to resolve internal disputes and conflicts at the Eritrean level.

## **Chapter V: The political programme**

The National Political Charter aims to reach consensus on the following political programme, to be achieved in two phases: the Period of Struggle for Democratic Change and the Transitional Period following the fall of the dictatorial regime:

### **First: the Period of struggle for democratic change:**

Because of its importance and sensitivity , this period requires consensus on the programmes and on the mechanisms for regulating the relations, supervising practice and reflecting the common will and activity in the following areas:

#### ***Political and diplomatic fields:***

1. Consolidation of political intent and coordination of efforts at all levels to harness popular support for the Council and to isolate the regime politically and socially.
2. Remedy the crisis of confidence that has prevailed for a long time within the Eritrean opposition, based on a shared spirit of responsibility.
3. Promote political alliances, so as to narrow differences and minimize fragmentation and focus on convergence and agreement, including the encouragement of merger between organizations that are close in political orientation.
4. Adopt a political discourse that stimulates the various constituent parts of our society to take their rightful place and support the forces for democratic transformation.
5. Instill democratic values, concepts and practices within the larger umbrella organization, as well as within fronts, organizations and political parties.
6. Formulate an action plan for diplomacy, based on the principles of credibility, seriousness and efficiency, and pursue a constructive, fruitful and effective diplomatic approach.

7. Build consensus on the detail of our external political discourse, taking into account common political and economic interests, and based on equality and parity.
8. Support local lobbying by communities, civil organizations and individuals and make use of the opportunities offered by specialized non-governmental organizations.

***Media and Public affairs:***

1. Mobilize the entire population at home and abroad to accelerate the pace of democratic change in Eritrea.
2. Draw attention to the suffering of the Eritrean people in refugee camps as well as in the Diaspora, by providing health and education services and by assisting them in their efforts to regularize their status.
3. Establish broad umbrella organizations for the various professional unions and associations where they can practice their professions.
4. Set a media policy with clear objectives to reflect the magnitude of the challenges facing the Eritrean Opposition.
5. Overcome secondary disagreements and create a unified media message, by focusing on the main objectives and by refraining from being drawn into peripheral issues.
6. Improve the functioning of the various media outlets and seek to establish a satellite TV channel to serve the objectives of the Opposition, draw attention to the suffering of the Eritrean people and expose the practices and human rights violations of the PFDJ regime.
7. Develop a financial plan to support the funding of the National Council. Enhance programmes for collecting membership fees and voluntary contributions, and arrange fund-raising parties and other events in support of the National Council.

***Military and security issues:***

1. Constantly assess and review the use of armed force against the regime, and focus on high-quality operations, targeting the regime's command and control centres, in order to incapacitate the repressive machinery used to terrorize and subjugate our people, and to expedite its downfall.
2. Seek to unify the Opposition's military wings with a view to their integration into the national army once the desired democratic change in our country has been achieved.
3. Continuously appeal to the Eritrean Defense Forces to join the people in their will to change the regime.

***Economic issues:***

1. Put in place creative plans to draw support and to explore funding sources, and work relentlessly to dry up the regime's sources of support and funding.
2. Search for investment projects which can finance the activities of the Opposition.
3. Cooperate with non-governmental organizations in partnerships in pursuit of common goals.
4. Establish a national fund to support the activities of the Eritrean Opposition.
5. Convene a general conference for Eritreans and foreign experts in the field of economics, to produce research aimed at promoting the Eritrean economy.

**Second: the Transitional Period**

The Transitional Period is the stage between the fall of the PFDJ dictatorship and the formation of a democratically elected government. In pursuit of democratic transformation, the establishment of a constitutional state, and the rule of law,

the Eritrean National Transitional Assembly will work, during the Transitional Period, to achieve the following programmes:

***First: At the political and constitutional level***

1. Establish a Transitional National Unity Government (TNUG) consisting of all the forces of change.
2. The Transitional National Unity Government (TNUG) will work to maintain the rule of law and protect the nation from sliding into chaos.
3. The Transitional National Unity Government will work to abolish the laws restricting freedoms, and will release all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. The TNUG will restructure the security forces and the regular army with a view to ensuring their compliance with the principles of professionalism, national ethos, and respect for freedom and human rights. The TNUG will further convene a Conference for National Reconciliation involving all political forces and civil society organizations, with a view to discussing the crucial national issues.
4. The Transitional National Unity Government will address the causes of tensions with neighboring countries, and will work towards resolving all outstanding issues with such countries through peaceful means.
5. The Transitional National Unity Government will establish the necessary mechanisms to ensure transition to constitutional rule by designating the following bodies:
  - A. A commission to draft the laws governing political parties
  - B. A commission to prepare a permanent constitution
  - C. A commission for elections
  - D. A commission for the repatriation of refugees and migrants to their respective areas.
  - E. A commission to administer and conduct a national census

6. The TNUG will hand over power to the political party (or parties) elected in free and fair national elections conducted under the auspices of a national electoral commission and with international supervision.

***Second: At the economic level***

1. TNUG will prepare a comprehensive plan for the development of the national economy, making use of all resources and expertise.
2. Support the Eritrean people through emergency programmes to bridge any economic gaps created by the demise of the regime.
3. Adopt an economic policy capable of achieving just and equitable development.
4. All natural resources, above and below ground, will be considered State property.
5. Promote the establishment, expansion and rehabilitation of various industries.
6. Promote the establishment of a modern and diverse banking system.
7. Ensure and encourage national and foreign investment, with preference given to national investment.

***Third: On the social level***

1. Enact laws that protect and support the family, motherhood and childhood.
2. Empower women to exercise their role and to participate in political and civic activities, and ensure women's access to property and to work.
3. Develop an educational policy and devise a national curriculum that takes into account the cultural, religious and ethnic diversity of Eritrean society.
4. Determine the level to which education will be compulsory for both genders.

5. Establish federations and trade unions to allow diverse social groups to manage their affairs and look after their respective interests.
6. Restore mutual trust among the people in different regions through well-considered programmes that remedy the damage to national unity caused by the PFDJ regime.

#### ***Fourth: On the military level***

1. Work to make the military, security and police institutions into a national and professional apparatus that reflect the diversity of Eritrean society.
2. Military, security and police institutions will refrain from taking part in political activity. The initial task for the military institutions will be the defence of national sovereignty, protecting and securing the constitutional institutions, and contributing to national development. Military institutions will be accountable and subject to investigation and scrutiny.
3. Regulate and organize a National Military Service with a clearly specified and limited period, in line with the interests of the nation.

#### **Chapter VI: General Topics**

1. Maintaining, safeguarding and developing the performance of the inclusive umbrella organization of the Eritrean opposition and improving its charter, so that it can become the foundation of the future constitution.
3. Rectifications and/or amendments in the contents of this charter are proscribed; the only authority that has the right to make rectifications and/or amendments is the general organizational congress of the National Council, with the endorsement of two-thirds of its members.

Approved at the Eritrean National Conference for Democratic Change

November 2011