

**Searching for an Effective Strategy to End the Eritrean Nightmare:
Global Initiative to Empower Eritrean Grassroots Movement.**

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A. Introduction

First and foremost, I would like to thank Meron for inviting me to this Eritrean Forum and for giving me the opportunity to meet with many Eritrean activists and those non-Eritreans who sympathize with the predicament of the Eritrean people. I would also like to thank the University of San Francisco for hosting this Forum on Eritrea, and the panelists for their informative presentations. I would like to thank the audience for taking the time to attend the program.

We have heard from the previous panelists various aspects of the plight of the Eritrean people. There is no question that the condition in the country is deplorable and intolerable.

Anyone can judge how desperate the situation in the country is when one hears of the thousands of young Eritrean men, women and children risking their lives fleeing the country, knowing very well that they could be shot on sight as they flee. And those who are lucky enough to cross the border safely, still run the risk of being victims of Bedouins who mercilessly kill them to harvest their organs for lucrative markets. And if they are lucky enough to evade the Bedouins and Rashaida, they still run the risk of perishing in the deserts of Sinai or drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. Yet, many continue to take the risk. That should tell us how bad and intolerable the condition in the country is. The UN Inquiry Commission on Human Rights abuses has extensively documented the atrocities being committed by the regime in Eritrea that amount to crimes against humanity.

It is indisputable to state that there is no Eritrean who does not feel pained to see Eritrea the way it is. When one's country is being referred to as the North Korea of Africa (without nuclear arsenal), when Eritrea is listed as the number one producer of refugees in the world, relative to its size; when the country is being emptied of its productive force who are perishing in the thousands fleeing the intolerable conditions in the country, when many of its heroes who gallantly fought in the struggle for independence and who served as members of the cabinet are languishing in jails for years without ever being charged of any wrong doing; when members of the press, and members of minority religious groups are imprisoned without any due process; when basic necessities such as water and electricity are proving to be rare commodities, who would not be pained by these atrocities and dismal conditions. Eritreans in the Diaspora have also been victims of the atrocities of the Isaias government indirectly when they have to face the agony of having to empty their life time savings to spare the lives of their relatives who call them in the middle of the night screaming for financial help to appease those who threaten to cut off

their throats for ransom money. I am sure there are some fellow Eritreans here who may have faced that agonizing dilemma.

The question is, so what are we doing as Eritreans in the Diaspora in light of this horrific situation facing our people? My topic is **searching for an Effective Strategy to End the Eritrean Nightmare**. In my presentation I will talk about the Eritrean political parties, the role of Eritreans in the Diaspora, the need for and the role of global leadership, and the process of how to elect legitimate global leaders and will conclude by an appeal to all Eritreans attending the conference and others beyond.

B. The Eritrean Political Parties

We have several political parties, in fact too many for a small country like Eritrea. Unfortunately, our opposition political parties have not been able to unite and speak with one voice. This has helped the regime to continue its repressive and destructive policies unchallenged. No doubt, leaders of the political parties and their members deserve to be respected and admired for the many years of sacrifice they have made for the sake of their people. However, as it stands now, it is unrealistic to expect much from our fragmented political parties unless they resolve to unite. I applaud the effort Dr. Assefaw and his colleagues at Medrik are doing to unite our political parties. I wish them success.

C. The Role of Eritreans in the Diaspora

When one considers the number of Eritreans who participate in demonstrations in Geneva, Israel, Ethiopia, New York City and other places, in support of the UN Enquiry Commission Report, some traveling across a continent despite their meager financial resources; and when one observes the large number of Eritreans who spend hours in Paltalk rooms on a daily basis, discussing the conditions in the country, one is left with the unmistakable impression that Eritreans in the Diaspora are indeed deeply troubled with what is going on in their country. Unfortunately, despite such deep interest, we have not yet found an effective strategy to channel this tremendous energy into meaningful action that can save our people.

D. We need to elect legitimate global leaders.

The need for Global Leaders is obvious. So far the major reason why Eritreans in the Diaspora have not been an effective catalyst for democratic change in our country is because, we are too fragmented and we lacked the leadership that can coordinate our activities. We need leaders who can unleash the tremendous energy and resources that we have as Eritreans in the Diaspora.

E. The Role of Global Leaders

The primary role of the Global Leadership is to chart an effective strategy to remove the dictatorial regime and prepare the ground work for transitioning the country to democracy. They need to prepare a blue print for a smooth transition to democracy. This strategy and blue print or road map has to be developed in consultation and with the collaboration of the Eritrean political

opposition groups and agents of change inside the country. We understand change will come from within the country, and we believe that those agents of change inside the country will be more encouraged and emboldened if the Eritrean Diaspora becomes a formidable united force.

The responsibility of the Global Leadership Group will be to gain the recognition and support of the International Community and the Eritrean people both at home and in the Diaspora. Given that the Global Leadership Group is elected to represent Eritreans in the Diaspora, they will have the legitimacy to speak, to act and to represent Eritreans in the Diaspora in any forum: at the United Nations, African Union, European Union and the countries that are being flooded by Eritrean refugees. Through an effective and intensive diplomacy and lobbying, this leadership group should be able to persuade the International Community to apply intensive pressure that will cripple the dictatorial regime and give moral and logistical support to elements inside the country to bring fundamental changes.

Many nations and the International Community as a whole could not support our cause up to now and the main reason for their reluctance is the fact that we are too fragmented and they do not know whom to deal with and whom to trust and support. And that is the reason why recently the European Union and others countries are unfortunately trying to make a deal with Isaias to stem the flow of refugees. With the election of the Global Leadership, a body that will have the legitimacy and the mandate given to it by every Eritrean in the Diaspora, our Global leaders will get the attention of the International Community and will be able to comfortably appear in any forum to speak effectively on behalf of the Eritreans in the Diaspora and on behalf the voiceless at home.

F. The Process of Electing Legitimate Global Leaders

For the global leaders to be truly legitimate leaders with the mandate to represent Diaspora Eritreans, it is critically important that all Eritreans in every part of the globe participate in the election process. And this can be done using the bottom-up/grassroots approach that will give every Eritrean a say in the election process which will ensure the elected will have the support of the Eritreans in the Diaspora.

The process of electing legitimate Global Leaders should start at the grassroots level. This will require an intensive campaign to mobilize and reach out to **ALL** Eritreans in every locality. The success of the effort will depend on the participation and involvement of each and every Eritrean citizen irrespective of their gender, religion, ethnicity, region and political affiliation. A serious effort should be made to invite **ALL** Eritreans particularly those from minority groups who may not have access to the Internet or Eritrean radio programs. The call for a general meeting of all Eritreans in a given locality should be written in Arabic, English and Tigrigna or any other appropriate language widely used in the local Eritrean communities. The announcement should be disseminated in written form through phone messages, websites, radio programs, seminars and workshops and widely distributed in places frequented by Eritreans, such as churches,

mosques, community centers, restaurants and bars. It is not enough to call a general meeting; people should understand why their participation is important to save our country.

Once Eritreans in every corner of the world elect their local leaders, the next step for these elected leaders is to meet and elect their country representatives. This process should take place in every country and every continent. Electing national leaders in a given country will help in coordinating the lobbying and other activities in the given country

The final step is to conduct a global conference of Eritreans representatives from every corner of the world: Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, Middle-East, North America, South America and other places to elect the Eritrean Global Assembly or *Hagerawi Baito* that will appoint an executive body, the Global Leadership.

This process requires a body that will facilitate local, regional, and global conferences which will require raising funds and logistical arrangements.

For your information, the Global Initiative to Empower Eritrean Grassroots Movement was started in February 2016, by a group that have been independently advocating the need for global leadership.

The mission of the Global Initiative is to function as a facilitating body to enable Eritreans in the Diaspora to establish local, regional and global Assemblies/Baitos and elect their legitimate Global Leaders using the bottom-up grassroots approach. Global Initiative is a temporary body and does not have any intention to duplicate the efforts of others who are already mobilizing the grassroots nor do the members of Global Initiative have any desire to assume leadership positions.

I am pleased to inform you that the Global Initiative is gathering steam and is gaining a great deal of support from Eritreans in different parts of the world, and from those who participate in the various Paltalk rooms. Already there are localities in Europe, Israel and the US who are in the process of electing their local leadership.

The Global Initiative has over 200 individuals who have expressed their support as signatories and this number is continuing to grow. But more work needs to be for the success of the Global Initiative. We are therefore seeking the support of all of you in the Hall and will need the support and full participation of all sectors of the Eritrean society, namely:

1. Eritrean Opposition Political Parties
2. The Eritrean Youth – What Meron Semedar, founder and President of LEAD ERITREA urging Eritrean youth to start leading, and others are doing is encouraging.
3. The Eritrean Women – I am encouraged to hear the presentations by Adiam Haile Raphael and Almaz Yihdego. I expect them to play an active role in organizing Eritreans in the Bay Area along with other activists.
4. Eritrean Artists and Musicians
5. Eritrean Minority Ethnic Groups

6. Eritrean Religious Leaders
7. Members of Eritrean Civic Organizations
8. Eritrean Web Sites, Radio Programs and Pal Talk Admins
9. Eritrean Intellectuals, and
10. Those Eritreans who seem to be disengaged from Eritrean affairs.

G. Summary and Conclusion

Eritreans in the Diaspora have amply demonstrated their interest in ending the suffering of their people, as has been repeatedly demonstrated by their active participation in demonstrations and the endless hours they spend in Paltalk Rooms. What we are missing is leadership that will coordinate our activities. For such leadership to have the legitimacy to represent, speak and act on behalf of Diaspora Eritreans, the process of electing such global leadership should start at the grassroots level. Wherever there are critical mass of Eritreans, they should form local assemblies and elect their representatives.

These elected global leaders in collaboration with the opposition parties and change agents inside the country will be expected to develop an effective strategy for transition to democracy thereby ending dictatorship in our country and saving our people from further suffering.

In conclusion, I would like to urge and appeal to every Eritreans in this hall and to Eritreans following the conference to play an active role in organizing elections in your respective localities. As I stated earlier, the role of the Global Initiative to Empower Eritrean Grassroots Movement is to facilitate the election process at the local, regional/country and global stages. Please do not hesitate to contact members of the Global Initiative for any assistance you might need. You can contact them find their email address shown below.

My earnest wish and hope is that each one of us will consider it as our individual responsibility and indeed our national duty and obligation to initiate, along with other activists in our respective local area, the process of electing our local leaders.

The ball is in each and every one of us' court, let's not fail our people. Our country has lost thousands of its sons and daughters to gain its independence. Let's make sure the sacrifices they have made is not in vain.

The Global Initiative to Empower Eritrean Grassroots Movement is a movement whose time has come. It is the most viable, expedient, all-inclusive and democratic process to ending the Eritrean Nightmare.

Thank you for your attention. I will be happy to answer any question.

Global Initiative's email address: gieegm@googlegroups.com

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