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## **Eritrea still standing, still tall!**

*by Andre Vltchek*

*Andre Vltchek is a novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist who has covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries.*

*He visited Eritrea in December 2014, and published two articles on his visit on RT.com and Punchdown.org.*

*Here are excerpts from the two articles.*

### • **Understanding Eritrea**

To understand Eritrea is not easy. But outside Asmara, everything is exposed; nothing can be hidden. Both poverty and the heroic attempts to eradicate it are right here, in my face. Farmers are working hard; many roads and electric grids are under construction.

But Western propaganda against Eritrea is so mighty, that often even I catch myself recalling its slogans, instead of concentrating on observing the reality with my own eyes. And I am professional: I have dedicated my life to uncovering Western indoctrination campaigns!

I film and photograph, in order to capture the truth, through my lenses. After just a few days, a very clear portrait emerges:

Eritrea; the African Cuba – country that stands on its own feet.

Eritrea – a proud and determined nation, which fought for a long 30 years for its independence, and in the process, losing hundreds of thousands of its sons and daughters during the struggle.

Eritrea – a country with its own egalitarian development model, working relentlessly for the welfare of its people.

Eritrea – a nation unwilling to sacrifice its citizens for the whims of the Empire and its corporations.



All this is in direct contrast to the propaganda that is emanating from London and New York, smearing the country, and trying to portray it as an outlaw state which supports terrorist groups in East Africa, oppresses its citizens, and violates all basic 'human rights'.

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#### **Contact Addresses:**

**Tel: +251-116620052**

**Fax: +251-116620011**

**Email: [eritreanaumission@gmail.com](mailto:eritreanaumission@gmail.com)**

**P.o.Box: 5527**

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**



***Eritrean Mission to  
AU & ECA***



***@EritreaAU***

- **A Harmonious Nation with an Independent Development Path**

According to Elias Amare, an Eritrean intellectual:

*“Eritrea registered success, substantial achievements, in what the United Nations defines as ‘Millennium Development Goals’, in particular ensuring free primary education for all; ensuring women’s emancipation and equality of women in all fields. In healthcare, it achieved a dramatic reduction in infant mortality, as well as the reduction of maternal mortality. In this regard, Eritrea is considered exemplary in Africa; few other countries have attained that much. So, despite all the obstacles that the country faces, the picture is positive.”*

*“Eritrea continues on the national independent path. It has a progressive view in building national unity. Eritrea is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. It has nine ethnic groups, and two major religions: Christianity and Islam. The two religions co-exist harmoniously, and this is mainly due to the tolerant culture, that the society has built. There is no conflict or animosity between the ethnic groups or religious groups. The government and the people are keen to maintain this national unity.”*

- **Great hope for the country and for the continent**

In Eritrea I see great hope for the country itself and for the continent; I see education, hard work, meticulous planning for a better future, I see a new and sound development model.

There are brand new schools and colleges, rural medical posts, cancer and heart clinics, roads cutting through the mountains followed by electricity poles. There are dams that are used for irrigation - important elements in the ‘food security’ project.

Eritrea is poor, but it is poor with dignity. And it is clear that it is getting better, its social indicators are improving. Literacy is up from 20 percent right after independence in 1991 (only 10 percent for women),

to the predicted 80 percent in 2015.

We are talking about post-literacy and functional-literacy programs, but above all, about how democratic the system really is. Not ‘democratic’ in terms of the Western perception, but democratic in terms of the participation of the people in decision-making; in developing the curricula, and the blocking of projects that would bring no benefits to the communities.

Life expectancy, according to Dr. Mismay Ghebrehiwet, the Adviser to the Minister of Health, went up from 49 to 63 years, which is very high by African standards. There is a compulsory and free vaccination program, and all Eritreans are enjoying almost free medical care, even medicine.



- **Laying the Foundation for a Better Future**

I stop the car and talk to several girls walking on the new Domhina Road, some hundred kilometers from Asmara. They are all from the 5th and 6th grades; cheerful, laughing, optimistic:

*“In our village we already have an elementary school, and now we are walking to a secondary school, in a bigger village. We are good at school; we love English and math.”*

The girls want to be teachers and doctors, but one resolutely aims at becoming an engineer, in order to build bridges, roads and power grids for her country.

- **Promoting Self-reliance and Regional Integration**

Dr. Mohamed Hassan, a former Ethiopian diplomat in Washington, Beijing and Brussels, as well as an MP representing the militant Belgian Labor Party, explained to me, during our meeting in Asmara:

*“Eritrea is not a neo-colonial state. Eritrea is an independent state. Eritrea does not host any military bases, any external forces. Eritrea has the vision, and not only for Eritrea, but also for the region. It is also promoting self-reliance and regional integration. It is also built on the ideal: ‘let us use our own resources, and let us build our independence. It means elevating the life of Eritrean people, particularly those in the rural areas.’”*

Elias Amare, adds more, along the same lines:

*“Eritrea has been insisting that its independence would be a genuine independence. It insists on self-reliance.” It doesn’t mean that Eritrea rejects direct foreign investment, for example. No. But when direct investment enters, Eritrea wants it to be on equitable terms. For example: Eritrea has huge natural resources. Gold, copper, zinc to name just a few.... It wants an equitable partnership. Many Western countries do not see all this favorably. And that’s the main reason for the hostility Eritrea is facing.”*

- **Equal Opportunity for All**

In Asmara, I sit down for a talk with a senior Eritrean diplomat, Tesfamichael Gerahtu, a former Ambassador to the United Kingdom.

*“Eritrea is peaceful and stable because of the government’s ‘integrated development paradigm’ – equal opportunities for all, with a special concentrated focus on rural areas and areas that were previously particularly disadvantaged. We are improving the general and overall quality of life... we are working on a cultural transformation that would lead to the creation of a ‘knowledge society’, where every person is an owner of the development process. We are trying to build cooperation based*

*on dialogue, respect and ownership of the development programs and the process.”*



- **A Country with a National Project**

Dr. Taisier Ali is a Sudanese who lives in Eritrea for 15 years. He is the director of the Peacebuilding Center for the Horn of Africa (PCHA). We sit down in his office, and try to analyze, why the Eritrean model is so misrepresented abroad, or why it is ignored by the Western mass media:

*“When you talk about Eritrea, to the international community and the outside world, I think it is one of the most misunderstood countries on the whole globe... After coming here, I soon realized that here, they have a sense of purpose, a ‘national project’, conceived and developed during the 30 years of struggle. We don’t have to accept it, but at least they are determined to take their country from the point A to point B. They face many challenges, but they have always stayed on course.”*

- **Crime-free**

Crime is extremely low. I spoke to a Laotian eye surgeon, Dr. Soukhanthamaly Phonekaseumsouk, who has been performing cataract surgeries, for many years, in the deep countryside of Eritrea, where batteries that are charged using the solar system have been mainly powering her equipment. Eritrea is number 2 in the world, per capita, in terms of the use of solar energy. The Doctor explained that she never felt unsafe, living alone, in the countryside or in the city; she was never harassed.

- **A Victim of False Allegations**

The West is also constantly using the accusations that Eritrea is supporting terrorist movements all over the region.

Elias replies vehemently:

*“That is totally baseless and false. First of all, because of the nature of how Eritrea gained its independence, the country is totally against any religious extremism. It has been actually targeted by Islamist extremist groups for many years. Eritrea is a secular state: it does not mix politics with religion. It had been proven by many credible investigative journalists, that there is no support for terrorism, coming from Asmara; no support for Islamic extremist groups, or for Christian extremist groups.”*

*“Big powers do not want the Eritrean example to be replicated in Africa. I say again, Africa has huge natural resources. Big powers are now trying to grab these resources. What will happen if other governments in Africa were to try to follow Eritrea’s example? It would definitely not be beneficial to great powers.”*

***The full texts of the articles can be accessed at:***

***<http://rt.com/op-edge/216831-eritrea-africa-west-conflict-propaganda/>***

***<http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/12/12/african-ideological-ebola-for-imperialists/>***