



ERI-NEWS



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Prepared by the Press Section of the
Permanent Mission of the State of Eritrea to AU
and UNECA*

‘Regional Cooperation not a Matter of Choice but Necessity’: President Isaias Afwerki

President Isaias Afwerki, on 7th October 2017, gave an interview to national media outlets focusing on domestic and regional developments.

The following are excerpts from the part of the interview on enhancing regional cooperation and the reform of the African Union.



Question: Mr. President, the world appears to be morphing from a uni-polar to bi-polar international order. What is your take on the role of Africa in the unfolding international order?

President Isaias Afwerki: There is broad consensus that in the 50 years since its foundation, the African Union has not lived up to the expectations of the African people. The founding principles have not been crystallized. In view of these realities, the AU recently established a task force, led by Rwandan President Paul Kagame to revitalize the African Union. The task force enumerated eight points that amplify the shortcomings of the Union.

Before we talk about the impending restructuring of the AU, we need to examine the overall international context.

We are not living in the middle ages or in the 19th century. We are living in the 21st century. If we depend on our individual resources only instead of developing mutual cooperation with our neighborhood, we will not be able to achieve the envisaged goals. The argument here is that regional cooperation is not a matter of choice but necessity. After 1991, IGAD, COMESA and the African Union embarked on promising transformations. However, the ultimate outcomes fell short of expectations.

In the 21st century, the only continent that remains marginalized is Africa. European, North American, Latin American and Asian countries are progressing while Africa remains in a perplexing situation. Without focusing at the continental level alone, if we could enhance cooperation at the regional level, we could have managed many of our challenges. The assessment so far is that Africa is in a dire situation.

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A conducive environment should be created for concerted action and for common benefits. We cannot forever live on managing crises and problems. We cannot be spectators only and expect solutions from others. We should do our homework.

When many African countries gained their independence in the 20th century, there was an African euphoria and profound aspirations. These were embodied in the initiative of the Founding Fathers. As a result, Pan Africanism was enunciated and later the Organization of African Unity established. But the OAU did not live up to the expectations. Africa was in fact sliding back to neo-colonialism.

We were convinced from the outset that the OAU should be reformed to be a better organization. The restructuring initiative was led by the then Libyan President, Muammar Qaddafi. Unfortunately, the approach taken to restructure the OAU was not appropriate. Qaddafi had his own vested interest and ambitions. The thinking was that if there is a European Commission, why not an African Commission? He wanted the AU to be a carbon copy of the EU. In reality that was not viable. The comparison was not realistic or practical.

What should be the role and place of Africa? We should first and foremost profoundly understand the unfolding world order; the economic, social, cultural and infrastructural transformations. Then we can identify the goals we want to achieve.

Africa should be transformed. We should develop our industries and export processed items instead of raw materials. We should introduce technology; and develop our human resources, education, and health facilities. These should be the main goals that we need to achieve.

There were counterarguments that focused on short cuts as this process would take a long time. The transformation of the OAU to the African Union was indeed heavily influenced by these considerations. This approach in turn entailed enormous problems in terms of budget allocations, the charting out development programs, and financial management.

Different studies indicate that Africa possesses 60% of the world’s resources. And the question is why is it that a continent that possesses so much resources remains marginalized in the 21st century? Africa has the potential to help others instead of depending on external assistance. There is China-Africa Cooperation, Japan-Africa Cooperation, India- Africa Cooperation, etc. Various forums have also been convened under different themes and labels; but they have generally failed to produce meaningful and tangible results. Maintenance of neo-colonial ties under different labels, such as Anglophone, Francophone and others, is only meant to exploit the resources of the continent. The migration of African youth to Europe and to other countries emanates from this state of affairs.

We cannot forever live on managing crises and problems. We cannot be spectators only and expect solutions from others. We should do our homework.

African Union Summits are convened regularly and they adopt numerous resolutions. But who are the architects, masterminds of these resolutions? Security agencies from Europe and the US often meddle in these internal continental affairs. This cannot be beneficial to Africa.

The corruption that permeates the system is unimaginable. Instead of Africans exploiting their own resources, others are taking advantage of it. Hence Africa can only extricate itself from these trends that are fraught with breeding neo-colonial realities if the African Union and other regional institutions on the continent assume appropriate structures and mandates that promote the real aspirations of the African population.

We cannot, however, blame the external forces for the malaise that is besetting the continent. The problems are solely ours and we are responsible for solving them. This will transpire when we conduct a thorough assessment and map out tangible and viable programs. This is not emotional or floated for PR consumption.

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The challenges are not, of course, easy. When IGAD was reformed, these issues were raised and thoroughly discussed. We proposed developing cooperation at the regional level. What happened to IGAD? IGAD which initially gave us a sense of hope for robust regional cooperation became counterproductive; inciting conflict and misunderstanding among Member States. It became an instrument for advancing the sinister agenda of foreign forces.

Africa has the potential to help others instead of depending on external assistance.

Still, we cannot live in isolation; we have to make our modest contribution for stability and peace in our neighborhood. We need to demonstrate active engagement.

Question: How do you think Eritrea benefits from the AU restructuring?

President Isaias Afwerki: Without going far, had we established strong cooperation in our neighborhood - with Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and Djibouti - the negative developments that have transpired in these past years could have been avoided. We could have developed common programs in different sectors for the common benefit to our peoples. Above all we could have secured peace and tranquility in the entire region.

We are interested in policy harmonization with our neighbors. If the policies of individual countries are not in harmony with others in the neighborhood, we will not realize the cooperation we aspire for. In the past 25 years, the opportunity lost due to unnecessary conflicts is immeasurable.

In this 21st century, no one can claim to have a strong economy while living in isolation. This applies equally to developed nations too. We need to create a conducive environment for mutual economic cooperation. And that is not an option but a necessity.

President Isaias Afwerki Sent Message of Condolence to Somali President

President Isaias Afwerki sent a message of condolence and solidarity to the President of Somalia, H.E. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, following the terrorist attack in Mogadishu on 14 October 2017 which claimed the lives of hundreds of people. The full text of the message is as follows:

Asmara, 17 October 2017

*H.E. Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed
President of the Federal Republic of Somalia
Mogadiscio*

Dear Mr. President,

In these harrowing days where the people of Somalia have yet again suffered a pernicious terrorist attack of huge proportions, allow me to extend – on

behalf of the Government and people of Eritrea and on my own behalf – our heartfelt condolences to the Government and people of Somalia.

In these trying times, we are confident that the people of Somalia will summon the necessary resolve and strength to vanquish the cowardly forces of darkness and mayhem.

The Government and people of Eritrea stand firmly on the side of the Somali Government as it strives to restore, under Your Excellency’s steadfast leadership, enduring peace and normalcy to the country by defeating Al Shebaab and all forms and manifestations of terrorism.

*Sincerely
Isaias Afwerki*

The Politics of Religion

The scourge of terrorism perpetrated under the mantle of religion; the upheavals, huge loss of life and destruction of property that it entails are not, indeed, new in the annals of the political history of mankind. But it has assumed new dimensions in this century. As such, it is breeding instability in various parts of our world; posing as it does a serious threat to international peace and security and causing increasing consternation among powerful and weak nations alike. The phenomenon accordingly warrants a profound appraisal and serious approach that is commensurate to its gravity.



Christianity was introduced in Eritrea (the Land of Habesha then), in 329 A.D. Islam also came to this land while Prophet Mohammed was still alive (between 570-632 A.D); when his followers, the “Sahaba”, sought sanctuary in the Land of Habesha from persecution in their homeland. The Bahre Negestat at the time refused to repatriate the “Sahab” to whom they had given refuge when they were expressly requested to do so. From that time onwards, the Christian and Islamic faiths in the county have co-existed in harmony and unity. The overarching lesson of the story is not the historical details (indeed as this is “claimed” by those who really own the history and others who pretend to); but the value-system that it projects. This value-system has ever since become woven into the socio-econom-

ic and cultural lifestyle of the society; and constitutes the distinct heritage of the civilization of the subsequent generations. The people of Eritrea are fortunate and proud to be the inheritors of this value-system.

Even during the second half of the 19th Century, during the expansion of colonialism, the entrenched faiths and value-systems could not be indented in spite of strenuous external efforts to introduce “new faiths”. The “religious” ploy that was invoked to weaken and polarize Eritrea’s national political movement was likewise thwarted in the 1940s after the end of the Second World War. The story was the same during the national liberation struggle. Nothing new can emerge now; in this post-independence phase of nation building. The unflinching resistance of the Eritrean people, before and shortly after independence, when Bin Laden was frantically working to wreck havoc in the region by using the Sudan as a springboard and by recruiting, organizing and arming Jihadists in Afghanistan, is indeed well known to merit elaboration here.

The value-system of the Eritrean people remains intact in these times in which mercenaries hired by intelligence agencies or deluded elements are resorting to similar ploys to foment chaos and advance their selfish interests. Their varied and deceitful approaches that include: “we have a new bible” ... “We wish to preach to you the Words of God” , “We can purify you” , “We can give you a ticket to Heaven”... “Mahdi will be coming soon; so we have to prepare the ground etc” continue to be seen and rejected, as ever, as alien and subversive agendas.

Indeed, any activity that aims to foment turmoil and terrorism, through overt or covert subversion in the name of religion – whether in its Christian or Islamic variant; fundamentalist or “moderate” façade, is not tolerated by the Eritrean people as it constitutes a serious matter of national security.