



## New Year Awards

*Berhan Hagos*

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One has to find reasons to give awards or, rather, recognition. I could have used September 1 or September 18th for giving out awards, rather recognition. But again, one shouldn't wait for some man-made time calendar to recognize people's efforts. One doesn't, or shouldn't, wait until Valentine's Day to express one's love.

This article is partially prompted by what Mr. Don Yamamoto, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, told the participants of the 'Peace March'; that Eritreans must participate in greater numbers to have their voices heard.

From the outset it should be clear that in criticizing the opposition camp in this article, I don't preclude myself from this criticism. I strongly believe that one can only lead by example. For those who tell others what to do but don't roll up their own sleeves to do the dirty work themselves as if they possess ultimate wisdom, one can only say 'Ab Wigi'e Zeywu'ale Belih'. I am an armchair critic. But again, I would like to think of myself as a pedestrian watching a bus full of passengers heading towards danger. I can say to myself – I am not the driver of the bus nor a passenger - but I can't. I must convey my views, concerns and observations so that we can address those issues if I am correct, or to ignore me if I am wrong.

Before giving out my recognition for best efforts, allow me to offer my humble observations of the past few days [and I suggest you better fasten your political seatbelt],

### *Peace March*

Although a number of opposition rallies have been held throughout the year, this march required stronger personal commitments in terms of time, endurance and effort. The opposition camp's news coverage of this 'peace march' was absolutely dismal – save Asmarino.com, Awate.com and farajat.com [these sites being which I am aware of actively promoting the 'march']. In fact, the coverage was embarrassing. Some websites such as Meskerem.net, deqebat, maihabar and eritreana (which probably missed out because its site hasn't been updated for a while) didn't even find the 'peace march' newsworthy – yet, for instance, Mesekerem.net has bombarded us with Somalia and PFDJ pictures [3 pictures of PIA and none of the 'marchers', is this what is called 'leveling the playing' field?], and deqebat harping about some highly exaggerated, or fictional, enemies. Some other websites gave the 'Peace March' only a passing comment. Even as much as it was a good effort to support the 'Peace March', Eritrean Peoples Democratic Front [Aug 24/06] issued its support through its 'Foreign Office'. This makes the Eritrean cause as if it is a foreign issue. This is 'wurayna'!

What should have been done? One only needs to look at Asmarino.com to understand exactly what should have been done. When one opens one's web browser to Asmarino.com's news site, our attention is first and foremost drawn to the 'Peace March' – not Somalia, or some non-priority issue, but our own cause – the abuse of Human Rights in Eritrea. Hundreds of Eritreans are wondering at this very moment what their fates will be in Libya. Others are losing their precious lives on the Mediterranean Sea. If their stories aren't front and centre, and if Somalia is the focus or if some yesterday's politics is the focus, we have lost the purpose of the current struggle. We shouldn't lose sight that we are engaged in political campaign against the regime for certain cause – not because we have time to waste. Similarly, many of the opposition parties' coverage of the 'peace march'



was inadequate, mentioning the 'Peace March' more out of 'sikifta' or 'qal'alem' rather than a real desire to promote and even participate in this important rally. Other members of the opposition camp are still stuck in old terminologies, to regurgitate old politics – uselessly and wastefully spinning their stuck wheels in the sand, wasting paper and ink on old politics than sharpening their pens in support of the marchers. Is this our idea of campaigning against the regime? Or do we still think in terms of launching our campaigns against the regime within our own limited party affiliations only? Pathetic! The amount of work required to maintain a website is not easy, but each of the opposition websites could have reserved a prominent space on their home page, and link to Asper or Asmarino websites. The message of solidarity would have been clear – our campaign, our focus – *raison d'être* of the opposition camp– would have been unequivocally clear to those within the opposition camp, and to those who are raping our cherished country in broad daylight.

Thanks to the dedications and participations of hundreds of committed Eritreans, the 'Peace March' was highly successful. But it also exposed our continued weaknesses.

Above all, the opposition camp, esp. political parties, remains disjointed. There remains no effort to co-ordinate various activities and campaigns against the regime. It appears each party is more concerned in shielding or isolating its members from 'outside its own party' influences, and thus foregoing high interactions across the various opposition groups, which would have yielded many results. Every party can have its 'vision' of tomorrow and its 'declarations of principles', but they mean squat if we don't get the little things right today.

Beyond post-PFDJ politics, there are many things that can be done today. For instance, EDA has social affairs post in its executive committee. As such, EDA must pull its human and financial resources to help the tens of thousands of precious Eritreans who are fleeing the country. These refugees need two most important things

- Moral support,
- Information support – which requires that EDA or affiliated parties' websites have immigration information and information on contact persons in their newly adopted countries in dealing with immigration and settlement issues. We need to pull together our limited resources. Before we ask for people's confidence in our politics, let us together extend our arm's to them.

#### *Reasons for the uphill struggle of Diaspora Opposition*

Why has the opposition failed to garner open support from the general Eritrean public [in Diaspora] although many quietly complain about and disagree with PFDJ's brutal governance? Unfortunately, many of us want to keep one of our feet in Eritrea. PFDJ has bought our silence by giving us land for our "retirement" houses. The last round of land distribution bought the silence of 20,000+ Eritreans (6,000 plots of lands distributed per husband/wife/kids etc... = 20,000) These 20,000 Eritreans will discourage other 200,000+ relatives, friends, etc... [esp. in Diaspora] from discussing today's burning issues, and even snitching to their political bosses. Ultimately, the land distribution scheme in Eritrea is a form of PFDJ 'giffa' of any potential opposition in Diaspora. Those of us in Diaspora have sold out our vision of 'just society', freedom and compassion for our fellow citizens for measly \$5,000. What we have forgotten is that many have laid down their lives for this freedom and 'just society' – and we are willing to trade it for \$ 5,000.

Unfortunately, many of us don't realize that we are not buying some secluded islands in the Dahalk Archipelago. We are buying land in the middle of Asmara, Massawa, Keren and Mendefera.



We will be living with those young boys and girls abused and butchered by the PFDJ regime. It is naïve to think that we will be able to eventually retire in peace somewhere in Eritrea without being affected by the legacy of the PFDJ regime. We are building our ‘investment’ or ‘retirement’ or ‘vacation’ homes on sand.

In fact, the most important question for the opposition camp remains, ‘how do we attract more members?’ The solution must first assess the impediments; PFDJ’s land distribution tricks, people’s general desire to stay away from politics, their perception towards the opposition camp, and many others factors. In my opinion, it is only simplistic to harp on ‘all oppositions must love each other, forget about their excess baggage, etc...’ As much as we all want ‘hade libi, hade teqawami’, we should formulate practical solutions, not idealistic solutions.

Again, we, in the opposition, aren’t without hope. For instance, the merger of three opposition groups into Eritrean National Salvation Front [ENSF] is a giant step forward. In fact, they delivered real or tangible results. No amount of party declarations stating that they struggle for “future” democratic Eritrea is worth more than what these organizations have done “today”. We put more value to what is done “today” than what people tell us they will do “tomorrow”. The latter can be construed as “mikishash”. Some may speculate that ENSF may breakup tomorrow as some other political organizations have done in the past. But no one should avoid the beauty of marriage just because statistics shows that over 50% end up in divorce. Well done!

#### *EDA’s Yearend Congress*

We have already hit the month of September, and the scheduled Congress is only some four months away. In my view, and as expressed in one of my articles a couple of months ago, EDA should commence public discussions of the various issues before the meeting. The best medium for this discussion is probably the internet. Naturally, the discussion forum will be flooded by ‘zeragitos’ but we shouldn’t be intimidated nor discouraged by their antics.

Otherwise, if participants arrive at the meeting without venting and refining their views through prolonged debates and discussions beforehand, the meeting will be total failure ... with fictitious communiqué announcing the success of the meeting. The process of vetting views and opinions beforehand allows public gatherings to become productive. Unfortunately, “physical meetings” can only last few hours to couple of days maximum. How much discussions can be conducted over the following few hours? It is physically impossible.

No one is getting invited to a wedding where you feel obligated to congratulate in person. Participants’ views don’t need to be addressed in person at the meeting. If the purpose of any activity [such as a meeting] is to reach a consensus, then the only way to achieve that is by maintaining ongoing discussions and debates. Otherwise, it will become like PFDJ Ministerial Meetings ... five Ministers presenting their yearend reports and then for the entire “cabinet, zonal administrators, and military men” engaging in an in-depth discussion over five hours. Get real! It becomes a show, or comedy.

If effort is to be expended, it should be to get ‘real’ results. Some might say that this writer’s suggestions aren’t workable with our people – our culture, our mentality, etc... But we haven’t seen



any workable solution today, and worse, it appears that even efforts to seek workable solutions are waning. Others believe that harping on other people's or opposition political parties mistakes is the sole function of their opposition – yet, have never proposed any innovative solution to our challenges.

*Side Comment*

Awate.com's choice of title "The Obscure & Tragic End of the G-15" in referencing [cross-posting] aiga.com's article on G15 has an inadvertent implication. I hear similar [innocent] comments from many people who express the fate of G-15 in the same manner. All mean well in their choice of title and comments but such characterizations carry the wrong message.

I beg to differ! If the G-15 self-sacrifice for freedom and democracy is considered 'tragic', then we are implying that the current PFDJ officials and military officers are correct by worshipping their boss.

Instead, 'tragic end' is reserved for those who fought Eritrean independence, and then sold out Eritrean people to dictatorship. 'Tragic end' is for those people who have sold their souls – to make money on the backs of the suffering of Warsai-Yikealo and on the backs of all Eritreans, those who have raped our women mentally and physically, those who have made our young to despair about their future, those who have made our youths die of thirst in the Sahara desert, and to drown in the high seas. 'Tragic end' is for those who are the 'living dead' [Bidewom Zimotu].

Instead, 'obscure' is for those history will judge as selling their country and souls to dictatorship. 'Obscure' is for those [esp. tegadelities and former Hafash wudubats] who want to hide their heads in the sand, hoping that they will not be recognized that as still serving a brutal regime. To the contrary, 'G-15' and thousands of other brave Eritreans in jail still loom larger than life – they are symbols of freedom, perseverance, our Eritreanism, our tradition, our struggle for independence, etc... Symbol can never be obscured. The world continues to shun the PFDJ regime because of the G-15, journalists and other political prisoners. We shouldn't forget that if it wasn't for G-15, the world would have appeased the regime.

We shouldn't also forget that PIA is staking his political career on Badme because of the G-15. PFDJ incorrectly believes that it needs the Badme victory to erase the memory and history of G-15 and their efforts to implement the Constitution. For the last 6 years and until its downfall, PFDJ will continue to act in futile efforts to escape from what the G15 have done to it. They are symbols and large shadows PFDJ can't shake off. Symbols of Freedom and Perseverance can't be shaken off, like our struggle for independence. During our struggle for independence, our enemies had bigger sticks, more money, more resources ... but what happened to them? It is only a short walk down memory lane to remember their fates. If the G-15 and the question of Constitution and rule-of-law didn't handcuff PFDJ, PFDJ would have said, 'Ethiopians can't take Badme physically away from where it is, and we are patient enough to wait for it to be demarcated'. Instead of Somalia, it would have concentrated on giving hope to Eritrean youth.'

G-15 continues to cast big shadows forcing PFDJ to play out its cards at faster rate than it would have liked to, leading to its quick demise. Just like the wind, although we can't touch it, we can't see it and we can't taste it – we know its effects. It is there, G-15 are there!



“Top Democrats call for change in Iraq policy” - [<http://www.cnn.com/CNN...>] Sept. 04/2006

The democrat’s letter contains similar call for new direction to solving a complex problem, as the G-15 had done in Eritrean situation five years ago. In America, this is called democracy. In PFDJ’s Eritrea, this is called betrayal and treachery. The continued call for vigilantism against Woyane can only be referred to as “the dog that barks after the hyena had cleaned out house in Gash-Barka’.

*[Julian] New Year Awards [Recognitions]  
‘Tsibuq Nizigebrelka, wey giberelu wey nigerelu’*

***Eritrean Man of the Year:*** Warsai/Yikealos, those who continue refusing to take orders to abuse their fellow citizens and now find themselves in PFDJ Dungeons.

***Eritrean Political Prisoner of the Year:*** Saleh Kekia, who was released from PFDJ dungeon, but refused to be silenced about his belief in freedom and rule-of-law, and who didn’t say that he was too old nor too rich to return to prison, and continued to campaign for his belief thus returning to PFDJ dungeon with his unshakeable belief.

***Eritrean Religious Leader of the Year:*** Abune Antonios, who refused to play PFDJ’s dirty politics of dividing a Holy Institution for PFDJ’s own desperate politics.

***Eritrean Diaspora Man of the Year:*** Tesfalidet Alem Meharena for his tireless efforts, for his innovativeness, and most important for his focus in knowing what the burning issues are.

***Most Insightful Website of the Year:*** Awate.com which continues to inform us with well written and insightful articles.

***Eritrean Manual of the Year [heading for Manual of the Decade]*** – ‘Bidho Antsar Atehasasebana’ – EMDHR’s manual contains excellent analysis and advocates for long-sighted solutions to Eritrean ills.

***Eritrean Interview [in Diaspora] of the Year*** – Yaacob Saleh’s interview with Awate.com. He taught us that we shouldn’t lose our heads when all those around are losing theirs.

***Eritrean Opposition Political Organization of the Year*** - Eritrean National Salvation Front for showing us that political work continues to be done within the opposition camp, and not just sitting idle until the fall of the PFDJ regime.

***Eritrean Inspiration [in Diaspora] of the Year*** – Many Eritrean human rights organizations and rally participants who continue to struggle for freedom and rule-of-law with their heads high.

***Eritrean Music Band of the Year*** - Lula Band

***Eritrean Singer of the Year*** - Ahmed A. A/Rahim