

Political Charter of the National Council for Democratic Change

Introduction:

Eritrea is a sovereign free state located in a strategic area in the Horn of Africa, with an area of 124,320 square kilometers. It has a coastline of more than 1,000 kilometers and includes a number of islands and ports. Eritrea is characterized by ethnic, cultural and religious diversities, and the Eritrean people depend on agriculture, herding and fishing, on business, services, industry and the civil service.

Due to its strategic positioning, Eritrea was a magnet that attracted the colonial powers' political, trade and military interest starting for the middle of the sixteenth century AD until the present time. When the European colonial powers were carving out Africa, like other African countries, Eritrea became part of Italian colonialism and hence defined its current geopolitical borders. After the defeat of Italy in the Second World War, Eritrea fell under the yoke of British colonialism for a few years until the Great Powers decided to meet their interests, including America and its partners. Eritrea, forcibly and without the will of its people was given to Ethiopia to re-establish itself under the clutches of Ethiopian colonialism in the wake of the Second World War. And within those colonial periods, the methods of resistance developed the Eritrean political mind, and expanded the political parties. It is from this source that the armed national resistance emerged triggered by the Eritrean Liberation Front led by the martyr Hamid Idris Awate in the beginning of September 1961, which played an important role in weakening the enemy. As a result of all the struggles fought by the Eritrean people, they culminated in the defeat and withdrawal of the Ethiopian army and secured national independence in May 1991 led by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front.

Eritrean people fought their national struggle during the past decades against colonialism looking forward for freedom, democracy, peace, human dignity, progress and prosperity in all its dimensions. In doing so, they made great sacrifices which resulted in the decisive historic victory of national independence against Derg, which placed our people on the threshold of a new political stage of building a democratic Eritrean state and the promotion of peace, national development and the rule of law.

There is no doubt that our Eritrean people were prepared for the challenge of peaceful national building on the basis of democracy, justice, freedom and social peace based on national unity enshrined in decades of heroic national struggle. However, the emergence of the dictatorship of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) was a shocking blow that our struggling people did not expect. It contradicted Eritrean people's aspirations for freedom and dignity, and is the policy of confiscating the human and democratic rights of the Eritrean people.

By monopolizing power and taking advantage of all the gains of the national struggle, and working against democracy and peace, the totalitarian dictatorial regime of PFDJ excluded all other national political forces and denied their national and democratic role in the building of the Eritrean state, and imposed an authoritarian regime hostile to the democratic and human rights of the Eritrean people.

Since the dawn of independence, the totalitarian dictatorship has been pursuing the integrated exclusionary approach by imposing its political, cultural and social dominance on the Eritrean state, and through the security grip on all aspects of life of the Eritrean people. This has created a deep rift in the Eritrean national unity and has distorted the national identity. Furthermore, this has endangered the peaceful co-existence and social welfare of the Eritrean people, and is pushing our country and our people to the dangers of sliding into disintegration and collapse.

In two decades of Eritrean independence, the absence of the rule of law and constitutional institutions, and the waste of the country's resources in building repressive government, is leading the country to serious danger. The current Eritrean political landscape clearly reflects the magnitude of the threat to the country, which is rapidly leading to the country's collapse, weakening national unity, and serious violations of human rights. The goal of the government is to deprive the Eritrean people the right to express their opinions, to displace the Eritrean people outside their land, to create conditions conducive to human trafficking, to enslave young people in forced labor, and to threaten the security and stability of the region by launching unjustified wars against all neighboring countries. These are vivid examples of the nature of the dictatorship of the totalitarian regime of PFDJ, which is constantly producing crises internally and regionally, and is reluctant to cease its suffocating oppression and its preoccupation with the issues of its adversaries.

Considering these bitter realities, the Eritrean people aspiring for peace, political and civil liberties and dignity has always been struggling for democratic transformation. In order to save the people and the country from the potential of political and social instability and to maintain national unity within the framework of diversity and national partnership, a national congress was held in Hawassa, Ethiopia, in 2011 to bring the Eritrean opposition forces under a united national political umbrella comprising of all Eritrean political and civil forces of various political orientations, intellectual and civil Eritrean.

The establishment of such a united national front, its peaceful administration, and the promotion of confidence-building and the ability to coexist among its various components; is a guarantee to accelerate the desired change by bringing about the necessary impacts on the path of achieving the aspirations of the Eritrean people to bring down the totalitarian dictatorial regime that is unwilling to meet the requirements of a comprehensive political solution; and will help addresses the roots of the Eritrean crisis and provides effective solutions to it by building a civil state capable of containing all within one homeland and establishing a democratic system based on political and party pluralism that meets the aspirations of the Eritrean people for sovereignty and dignity.

As it is known, the international community had continued to issue resolutions condemning the totalitarian dictatorship of Eritrean. However, recently the regime is investing heavily to break its isolation by leasing Eritrean land illegally and trying to end its border crisis with Ethiopia through various internal and external pressures has given the regime temporary respite. But despite this, and because of the nature of this dictatorship, this temporary respite will not last long. To change this reality in favor of the ongoing democratic struggle, we must redouble our efforts to align the Eritrean people at home and abroad, and the international community, along our just struggle.

In order to create the appropriate political climate to achieve the desired democratic transformation in Eritrea, the Second National Congress is an important step in the promotion of unity of the opposition groups and the use of their coordinated efforts on the basis of the minimum program. The democratic

forces in their struggle to create democratic and free Eritrea, have agreed to adhere to the following common political charter.

Chapter I: General Principles

1. The maintenance of Eritrean national sovereignty, enshrined and reinforced by decades of heroic national struggle, and the emphasis on Eritrean unity, land and people, with its internationally recognized geographical boundaries.
2. To recognize the equitable distribution of power and wealth, based on the principles of democracy, peace and human rights, and to achieve justice and equality among all components of Eritrean society.
3. Citizenship is the basis of rights and duties, and citizens are equal before the law.
4. To recognize the cultural, religious and national diversities and to ensure respect for these diversities in order to translate the contents of the fundamental rights enshrined in the international instruments on the ground.
5. Recognition of all the rights stipulated in the international conventions on human rights, including: freedom of belief, worship, opinion, expression, publication, organization, ownership, movement and other public and personal freedoms and inclusion in the Constitution.
6. To consider nationalism, religion and culture as essential components of the Eritrean people's identity, so the rights of those basic components must be guaranteed.
7. Constitutional protection in adopting any Eritrean organization or party, the political program that it deems fit to govern and respect its right to compete in persuading the people.
8. Recognize that the people are the source of authority exercised through a constitutional democratic political process.
9. Recognition that all Eritrean languages are national and equal, including Arabic and Tigrinya are the official languages of Eritrea, and Eritrean nationalities are entitled to use and develop their languages.
10. Struggle and commitment to the establishment of a democratic system based on political pluralism and partisan without exception.
11. Recognize the principle of the peaceful transfer of power through ballot boxes, renounce violence to seize it, and separate the three branches of power: legislative, executive, and judicial. [Tigrigna says four and include news media]
12. Recognition of a decentralized system of government guaranteed by the Constitution
13. Combating ethnic, sectarian, regional, and chauvinistic tendencies.
14. Struggle against all forms of extremism, violence and terrorism.
15. Since the right to decide nationalities is democratic rights, it should be carefully considered, under the one Eritrean State in the next Constitution of Eritrea.

16. Any nation has the right to call itself the name it wishes, and the enforced integration of the regime should be prevented.

17. Land belongs to its own people, and any land and property appropriated unlawfully belongs to its owners in a legal and just manner.

18. To recognize the principle of equality of all social, political, economic and cultural rights of women, as stipulated in international laws and charters.

19. Pursuing a foreign policy based on common interests, recognizing equal relations, respecting the sovereignty of states, maintaining regional and global peace, and abiding by international charters and treaties.

20. Create a ground for the establishment of a national army that will meet the task of defending national sovereignty, respecting Eritrean independence and establishing peace and stability in the country.

Chapter Two: Objectives

1. To change the totalitarian regime and to eliminate the injustice it has committed in all its forms.
2. Building the Eritrean democratic state and achieving security, peace, stability and social justice.
3. Achieving democracy in the exercise of power and the establishment of public and private freedoms and the peaceful transfer of power.
4. To protect and consolidate the unity of the Eritrean people, to seek to build confidence among its components, to spread a culture of peaceful coexistence and to consolidate the values of democracy and freedom.
5. To respect the values of religion and all the constructive cultural heritage from which the state derives the idea of coexistence between different religions and cultures.

Chapter Three: the Means of Struggle

1. To advance the resistance against the PFDJ by following all means of struggle.
2. To expose the totalitarian (PFDJ) regime in regional and international forums.
3. To resolve disputes between Eritrean forces through dialogue.
4. To build friendly relations with neighboring countries and countries of the world to support the cause of the just and legitimate struggle of our people, and to establish regional and international peace.

Chapter Four: Transition Stage

This is the period between the fall or change of the existing dictatorship and the establishment of an elected government through a constitutional democratic political process.

1. Provisional Authority:

This is the power that comes after the fall of the totalitarian regime to fill the political vacuum and consists of the forces of democratic change that contributed to the overthrow of the regime, and its term does not exceed a year.

2. Functions of the Provisional Authority:

- a) Working to establish security and peace in the country.
- b) Release political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.
- c) Repeal all laws restricting freedoms and basic human rights.
- d) Establish a Transitional Government of National Unity through the convening of a National Forum in which all political forces and grass-roots movements fighting for justice and democratic change will participate.
- e) Control the property and funds of the party (PFDJ) in preparation for submission to the transitional parliament to decide.
- f) To act in accordance with international law and standards in the custody of the leadership of the party (PFDJ) and the leaders of its repressive apparatuses and collaborators, in preparation to bring them to justice.

3. The National Forum:

This is a gathering that representatives of all political forces, civic organizations, religious leaders, intellectuals and national figures participate during the provisional period.

4. Functions of the National Forum:

- a) Ratifies the Interim Constitution of the transitional government of national unity.
- b) Elects the Transitional Parliament that service during the transitional period.

5. Transitional Parliament:

This is a legislative council of the transitional period and is composed of all the political forces and important figures elected at the National Forum.

6. Functions of the Transitional Parliament:

- a) Establish a Transitional Government of National Unity form from its members.
- b) Based on the Interim Constitution ratified by the National Forum, the guidelines and general policies of the transitional government set the country's affairs.
- c) Monitor and oversee the functioning of the Transitional Government.

7. Transitional Government of National Unity:

The executive body that leads and manages the affairs of the country in the transitional period is based on the Interim Constitution, as well as the laws, policies and directives issued by the Transitional Parliament.

8. Functions of the Transitional Government of National Unity:

- a) Administers the administrative affairs of the country and provides basic, legal and economic services.
- b) Resolves repressive apparatuses and replaces them with devices that safeguard the security, safety and stability of the country and follow up on them.
- c) Forms a commission for the repatriation and resettlement of refugees.
- d) Formation of a national census commission.
- e) Rebuilding national defense forces to protect democratic change and the sovereignty and borders of the country.
- f) Forms a commission to prepare the political-party law and follows up on its work.
- g) Forms a commission to prepare a national constitution and follows up on its work.
- h) Establishes an independent commission for national elections in accordance with the national constitution and provide the necessary support.
- i) Following the announcement of the election results, the transitional government will hand over its functions to the newly elected government.

9. Transitional Government of National Unity:

The term of the Transitional National Government of Unity shall be determined by the Transitional Parliament, provided that it does not exceed two years.

Chapter Five: General Provisions

- a) Amendments to this Political Charter may only be made by the Conference of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change.
- b) This Charter is valid from the date of its ratification.

Second National Conference of the Eritrean National Council for Democratic Change

16-21 April 2019