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## **Eritrean Peoples Liberation Forces**

# **OUR STRUGGLE AND ITS GOALS**

We have for a long time been making an effort to publicize our revolutionary stand and our views on the political conditions of our country. We do realize, however, that our statements have not been reaching all appropriate audiences due to the shortage of funds and other means necessary for the task.

We are thus taking advantage of the favourable conditions and the convenient time at our disposal to present this historical exposition entitled "Our Struggle And Its Goals." Whereas what we have to say is most directly concerned with our country, Eritrea, and our Eritrean people, it is of utmost importance to our supporters in particular and the people of the world in general. We would like to firmly remind all concerned not to take this position paper lightly, since it goes beyond an exposition of our revolutionary struggle; we assure the genuinely interested that our country Eritrea, its people and their struggle can be explained clearly and adequately.

We, who are expressing our views through this exposition, are Eritrean liberation fighters who separated from the administration of the -"Kiada el Ama", "General Command", in March 1969. It is true that almost all of us or a majority of us are Christians by birth, cultural and historical background. Those who view our makeup superficially may regard our struggle as religiously motivated, an assessment that we do not desire to overlook even if it may be the result of a lack of insight into our objectives. Instead, we urge anyone who seeks to understand our position and ideology to read all our publications.

Further, we hereby state our readiness to meet with and openly clarify our stand to those who might entertain doubts as to what the nature of our struggle is.

Although we deeply understand the complexity of the reasons which caused us to take our stand, that is, to separate, we are fully cognizant of the fact that some of those who look at us with interest or concern ask themselves questions such as: "Why did the Christian elements separate? How did they separate? When did they separate? What is their goal? What do they seek? Are they religiously or nationally motivated?

Are they revolutionary fighters or Christian crusaders? Are they reactionary or progressive? Etc...". We also know that they may not find satisfactory answers within themselves. On the contrary, they may get distorted information and blame or even oppose us.

Thus, it is not only questions that are asked about us, opinions are also voiced. Many have pretended to be on our side and have been known to applaud our supposed "separation from Moslems". Others may similarly applaud our separation on the ground that it "has been long overdue". Others still merely declare that we are "religiously" inclined, and so on. All such opinions are illusory. It seems that there are more opinions addressed to us for the purposes of deception, praise, threat, defamation, criticism, bribery and the giving of different goals to our struggle than we

can constructively use.

We fully recognize the fact that it is our duty and ours alone to give a satisfactory answer to those who seek to know, to discourage those who seek to deceive us, to thank those who praise us, to assure those that are bent on bribing us that we do not compromise our aims to accept comradely constructive criticism and to remind those who attempt to buy us that we are neither commodities nor animals. The nature of our struggle and its objectives are better known to us than anyone else, especially the news-shoppers and gossip-mongers. Based on this awareness and hoping that our position will be clearly stated, we have embarked upon this exposition.

## **A Brief Description of Our Country Eritrea and Its People**

It is a matter of common knowledge that we Eritreans are the nationals of a country with distinct boundary economy, political evolution, history, culture and traditions. It is equally well known that, for the past several decades we have been subjugated by foreign conquerors and pro-imperialist African expansionists. These very oppressors have erased our boundary lines, confiscated our economic wealth, and arrested the high level of political awareness our society had reached, distorted our history, obscured our languages, replaced our culture and traditions by alien ones and totally robbed us of our human rights and dignity.

Our present struggle against Ethiopian oppressors is nothing more than an extension of our militant Eritrean struggle against foreign oppression. We are sacrificing our lives to free our people from the shackles of Haile Selassie and his masters, to attain independence for our country and to realize the self-reliant progress of the Eritrean people.

Oppression does not come from foreigners alone. Neither should it be associated with foreigners alone. There is also oppression and struggle within a society. The rich versus the poor, the master versus the slave, the powerful versus the weak, the chief versus the village, and the old versus the new ...etc., are types of political and economic oppression found within class societies. But in time, oppression is invariably met with resistance. The impoverished and the workers rise against the rich, as do the slaves against the masters. The village militates against the chief, the weak unite against the powerful and the new erupts over the old. This is a historical truth. It is evident that when contradictions in society reach a breaking point, the forces of the oppressed rise up to destroy the various forms of oppression. Thus, so long as freedom is not equally and universally extended to all members of society, i.e., so long as there is oppression, there is struggle.

The above holds true for Eritrea. Inasmuch as we constitute a society, we have various contradictory characteristics. This is so in spite of the fact that Eritreans as a whole share a common history, economy, political tradition, culture, and similar or related languages or folklore. One may erroneously see the religious differences as the major contradiction in Eritrean society.

For example, our separation may be understood as having been based on religious differences. Similarly, one may be tempted to look at Eritrean society primarily in

terms of division between Moslems and Christians. In any event, let us first carefully investigate and analyze the nature at the Eritrean society and its people.

## **A. Geographical Location**

Eritrea is bordered by Ethiopia, the Sudan and the Red Sea. Geographically, it is generally divided into highland and lowland areas. Whereas the lowlands consist of the plains along the Red Sea coast and those along the Sudanese border on the west, the highlands consist of the plateaus bordering Ethiopia. Religious affiliation in Eritrea roughly corresponds with the geographic characteristics of the country. Thus, Eritreans who inhabit the lowlands (Metahit) are mostly or almost wholly of the Moslem faith.

Following the demarcation drawn by the Italian colonialists, Eritrea is divided into eight provinces. The highlands consist of Hamasien, Seraye and Akele-Guzai. The lowlands along the coastal plains are called Semhar, Sahel and Denkel, whereas those in the western plains are known as Senhit and Barka. The lowlands constitute about three fourths of the land surface of Eritrea, with the highlands making up the remaining one-fourth. It is well known that because of the strategic importance of its geographic location, Eritrea has been the focus of the greedy eyes of foreign colonialists.

## **B. Economic Conditions**

Although Eritrea is rich in natural resources and has enough agricultural, mineral and animal resources to make it economically self-sufficient, its people are still in the early stages of development. They live as farmers and nomads. Since our country's wealth is stolen by foreigners and exported abroad, the Eritrean people are forced to live in poverty, deprived of their country's economic wealth. Those who live in the highlands lead a relatively better life due to their settled farming occupation, whereas those from the coastal plains and the lowland areas live the roaming life of nomads. The basis of all social oppression is economic. Thus, foreign oppressors motivated by the greedy desire to rob Eritrea of its wealth, have used and are using our people's religious, ethnic and regional diversity in order to divide and continue to exploit it. This is a historical fact.

## **C. Population**

The people of Eritrea are about three million. Their distribution, however, does not correspond to the country's geographical divisions. Though the highlands constitute a smaller part of Eritrea's land surface, they contain more than half of the Eritrean population. The lowlands in the western areas are predominantly arid and, therefore, are sparsely populated. Although no recent census has been taken, a 1957 census gives the following provincial population distribution:

Hamasien	24.7%	Senhit	8.3%
Serae	15.7%	Sahel	7.9%
Akele Guzai	15.3%	Denkel	5.4%
Barka	17.5%	Semhar	5.2%

## D. Political Development

A close look at our country's political development shows that foreign colonialists and their puppets have used religion as the weapon through which they achieved their goal of easy access to economic gain. From 1940 onwards and in response to foreign oppression, the centuries-old struggle of the people of Eritrea started to divide into two political groupings. Most Christians demanded "Union" with Ethiopia, while most Moslems wanted "Union" with the Sudan. It fell on the United Nations to make the final decision that has thrown the people of Eritrea into an ocean of suffering, another fact of the history of our political development.

## E. Language

Although more than nine languages are spoken in Eritrea, the main languages are Tigrigna and Tigre. These are Semitic in origin and are the offerings of the Geez language. Other languages which do not descend from Geez are Bilen, Beja. Baza, Saho and Denkel. In general, highland Eritreans speak Tigrigna and those of the lowlands speak Tigré, but they are more specifically distributed on linguistic lines as follows:

Tigrigna: - Mostly spoken by the inhabitants of the highlands (Kebessa) of Eritrea, the majority of whom adhere to the Christian faith. But it is also spoken by some Eritreans of Moslem faith, such as the Jeberti. Tigrigna is not spoken only in Eritrea. It is also the language of the people of Ethiopia's northernmost province known as Tigray.

Saho - The language of Eritreans living in eastern Akele Guzai and northern Semhar, most of whom profess the Moslem faith. But a few Christian Eritreans also speak Saho. Like the other languages, Saho is also spoken by some ethnic groups in the northern border areas of Ethiopia.

Tigre: - Spoken by Eritreans inhabiting the north-eastern plains and the western lowlands, the majority of whom have adopted the Moslem faith. But it is also the language of Christian Eritreans, such as the Mensa of eastern Senhit. Tigre is also spoken by many Sudanese in Eastern Sudan.

Afar: - Spoken by the people of eastern Eritrea, the province of Denkel. They practice Islam and share their language with those ethnic groups in Ethiopia and French Somaliland that border them.

Bilen: Spoken by Eritreans of the Bogos tribes in the province of Senhit. They are approximately equally divided between Moslems and Christians. This language originates from Agau and similar languages are spoken in Ethiopia by Agau peoples.

Beja: - Spoken by Eritreans in northern Sahel and the western lowlands. These are

known as the Beja, are few in number and adhere to the Moslem faith. Beja is spoken by a large number of people in eastern Sudan.

Baza: - Spoken by the Bazen of the western lowlands, between the Gash and the Setit. Although a few Bazen practice the Moslem and Christian faiths, most of them do not belong to any religious denomination.

Barya: - Spoken by the Barya of the western lowlands, east of the Gash. Like the Bazen, a few Barya practice the Moslem and Christian faiths but are mostly without any religious affiliation.

Apart from the above linguistic divisions, there are a very small number of communities called the 'Rashaida' around the peripheries of Sahel, who speak Arabic and who have not mixed with any other ethnic communities. Despite the numerousness of the languages and the ethnic origins the Eritrean people are one people and, wherever they might be, they can use one or more languages to communicate with understand each other. Of the languages that we have listed, only Tigrigna and Tigre are written. Since these are the offsprings of the Geez language, they are written in the Geez script. Geez was the language in use centuries ago. After giving birth to Tigrigna and Tigre, today Geez finds itself only in Churches and holy books - it has become archaic. That is, Geez is used solely by the clergy and the Church and no one speaks or in any way uses it in daily parlance. However, it is of great importance both for religious and historical reasons. When the United Nations was attempting to solve the linguistic problem in Eritrea, it resorted to religious differences. Thus, in order to bind the Christians together through Tigrigna and the Moslems through Arabic, they resolved to make Tigrigna and Arabic the official languages of Eritrea.

## **F. Culture and traditions**

In the area of culture and traditions, the Eritrean people may differ in accordance with their ethnic, provincial and linguistic origins. However, this apparent difference is obscured by our people's commonly shared economic conditions, political awareness, history, geographic location and religious affiliation. As a result highland Eritreans share, more or less, the same culture and traditions. Similarly, although lowland Eritreans may have radically different cultures and traditions, they are closely linked through a common religion.

Like other peoples, therefore, Eritreans are, as we have seen, made up of different groups. Nevertheless, through ages of a common colonial experience, the Eritrean people's already related history, economy, political development, languages, culture and tradition have been so interfused, interbred and intertwined that today they stand on the same foundation. Therefore, Eritreans are a people that can neither be separated nor divided.

It is true that the people of the Eritrean highlands may be religiously related to the Christians of Ethiopia. Similarly, they may be linguistically (through Tigrigna) and by virtue of same common cultural and traditional characteristics be related to the people of neighbouring Tigray. Moreover, the history of Eritrea, it is said, might have had some direct ties with that of the ancient kingdom of Aksum.

In the same way, Eritreans inhabiting the areas bordering on the Sudan may be

religiously, linguistically and by virtue of some common cultural and traditional characteristics is related with some of the peoples of eastern Sudan.

Lastly, Eritreans who inhabit the coastal areas may, by virtue of their proximity to the sea, be susceptible to and influenced by the culture and traditions that come to them across the sea from the Arab world.

However, the internal relationships and unity within the country have a much broader and a stronger base. The surface similarities with neighbouring peoples along the borders can never be a rationale for the slicing up of a nation. It is for this reason that Eritrea must remain a single nation. It is not a country that will acquiesce to its division between Ethiopia and the Sudan.

Besides, if the Eritrean people along the Sudanese border are viewed within the context of the people of Sudan as a whole, we find they are hardly related. In the same way, Eritreans along the Ethiopian border are very different if related to the people of Ethiopia as a whole. What is more, just as there are geographic, economic, religious, linguistic and folklore differences in our country Eritrea, there are equal or even more pronounced differences amongst the peoples of Ethiopia and the Sudan. If we remember ancient history, we find it almost unrelated to what we have in this modern age. If we were to re-establish nations and determine borders based on ancient history, we would have to create a new world consisting of new nations.

In the case of Africa, we do not even need to go back to ancient history. For, if we were to attempt to create new nations based on the conditions that existed a few centuries ago, we would form a continent consisting of thousands of parts and division. In short, the differences amongst the Eritrean people are a phenomenon found in many other countries and, as such, our recognition of them is neither a source of shame nor a hindrance to a united Eritrea. What we are trying to clearly state is that religion by itself cannot be a basis for any struggle for national liberation. It is rather a tool of oppression and personal gain. Can we contend, for example, that all the religious and social differences we have already listed are merely religious?

The truth is that religion is one of over ten characteristics peculiar to the Eritrean make-up. As such, to say that it is the basis of all the differences, oppression and struggle within the Eritrean society is nothing more than injustice. As we have seen, the Eritrean society could, very broadly speaking and if the various differences are overlooked, be divided into two major groups. Since each of these major groups has its own religion, (Islam or Christianity), it could conceivably appear as if the social differences in Eritrea are religious. Such an assessment appears more pointed whenever foreign oppressors and opportunistic Eritreans exaggerate it in order to promote their own selfish interests.

The main objective of the above exposition is to clearly state that it is wrong to divide the Eritrean people on the basis of religion and to stress the fact that Eritreans are a united people. Anyone who denies the truth of what we have said, be he an Eritrean or an outsider, either does not know what he is talking about, or is an opportunist or expansionist. Let us now return to our main topic. If the situation is as we have described it, why have we decided to separate? The reason and basis for our separation goes back to the formation of "Jebha", the movement for the liberation of Eritrea.

This goes back to 1961 and involves many events. We will, therefore, try to relate it as briefly as possible.

**A/** The progressive forces in the world know that a revolution that is based on a struggle without a clearly defined political line cannot be crowned with victory. As has been made clear by the Eritrean experience, the mere fact of roaming around with arms and sporadic shootings, if unaccompanied by a clear political direction, is vain and futile.

That the armed struggle which started in 1961 had no political direction and did not take into account the objective conditions in the country has been commented upon by many Eritreans. The Eritreans who founded 'Jebha' proclaimed the advent of the armed struggle without making sufficient study and analysis of the concrete conditions of our country and society. They simply proclaimed the "revolution" without a revolutionary line or organisation, and with no delineated program of action, nor did they have a defined political objective or direction.

## **B/ Propagation of Islam**

The point cannot be missed that the reason for the absence of clearly delineated political direction (guidelines) was the lack of sincere revolutionary leadership. Those who started the movement felt ashamed to give the cause its true nationalist essence; they believed that the most effective way of attaining the necessary power was by propagating Islam. They, thus, tied the movement within the bounds of Islam and programmed their actions accordingly both within and outside of Eritrea.

The bosses of "Jebha" assumed the responsibility to deal with foreign governments; supposedly in execution of this responsibility, they established links with those countries and organisations professing the faith of Islam. They tried to solicit the help of these countries and organisations against Haile Selassie, "that king of the Habasha who is oppressing the 80% (eighty per cent) Moslem population of Eritrea".

They presented their case as that which seeks to resist the expansion of Christianity by Haile Selassie, and to that end they asked for the sympathy and help of their "Moslem brothers". Having wholeheartedly embraced whatever help was extended them; the bosses gave the movement a totally Islamic base.

Likewise, their armed followers in the field told the innocent people of the lowlands (Metahit) that they were engaged in a war of "Jihad" (holy war) against the "kafir" king Haile Selassie, who is the grandson of Yohannes, that king of the Habasha who had ventured to wipe out Islam and expand Christianity. In the course of fighting the holy war (Jihad Fi Sabil Allah), they conducted vicious anti-Christian propaganda, which was not in line with the interest of the national liberation struggle. The extent of the propaganda was such that the Christian Eritrean was ostracized as a "kafir" (infidel/traitor) and attacked as an enemy. Lacking the capacity to correctly understand that the roots of its oppression were essentially of economic and political nature and not merely religious, the Moslem population of the country vehemently responded in favour of the "Jihad" operation designed by the leaders of "Jebha". However, those Eritreans who were not aware of the "Jihad" politics of the front, assessed the situation to be similar to that which was prevalent during the period preceding the federation; and conscious as they were of the manoeuvres of foreign oppressors, their true nationalist sentiment drove them towards Idris Awate who led the armed struggle in 1961. The basis for the widespread Eritrean nationalist ferment and the resolute

determination to engage in armed struggle lay in the politics of crude oppression that characterized the period 1950-61. This period was particularly rich with political events of national resistance. It must be stressed, however, that this national resistance was devoid of religious antagonism; it was a common struggle of Moslems and Christians, highlanders and lowlanders. This experience unified the people and raised the level of their political awareness.

Aroused by these developments, the Eritrean people resolved to join the struggle. Even though all Eritreans materially and morally supported the armed resistance headed by Idris Awate, almost all of those who joined him in the fields of Barka were Moslems. At that stage, the highland population did not participate in field operations the reason is solely that geographic conditions did not facilitate such participation.

The allegation that highlanders avoided the struggle with the knowledge and for the reason that it was initiated by Moslems is groundless. The movement flourished and continued operating till 1965; nevertheless, there was no halt to the propagation of Islam.

### **C/ Tribal Dissensions**

If we were to ask ourselves whether the fighters who were mostly Moslem, were really united by the propagation of religion, we might be bewildered at the answer. We should always remember that in any society or grouping of people there are conflicts between the interests of the few and those of the majority. In the Eritrean struggle which then was not based on a correct political line the few opportunists increased their ranks in number and embarked upon a struggle for personal power. They cultivated differences and discord and aggravated them increasingly.

They became increasingly preoccupied with the devising of schemes aimed at gratifying their lust for power; and they decided that they found an effective tool in the ethnic differences among the fighters in the field. Thus in an effort to capitalize on them, they magnified these minor contradictions and then used them to manipulate the liberation forces. This corrupt pursuit of personal aggrandizement eventually led to dissensions within the front.

The bosses who enjoyed a luxurious life outside of Eritrea had the capacity to conceal their true selfish interests. Nevertheless, they felt the need to make empty gestures to solve the problem. For that purpose they temporarily left their seats in the foreign countries and went to the fields where, around the end of 1965, they divided the forces into four groups. Their main purpose behind this measure was to quell down their agents in the field, who instigated the ethnic dissensions, and to further expand their followings and consolidate their forces. The professed reason for dividing the forces was that it would facilitate the setting up of more zones of operation and would enable more Eritreans to come into contact with the ideals of the movement and join it. But this kind of operational framework could be soundly devised only after a thorough study of the concrete conditions of Eritrean society, the accurate identification of the opportune timing and the careful consideration of all political and military strategies. This was the kind of undertaking which required serious and thorough study and planning; it was thus meaningless to assign a division for Barka a division for Senhit, another division for Hamasien, Seraye and Akele Guzai, and another for Semhar and Denkel. Such a division of an already small force, without making the requisite study,



serves no nationalist or revolutionary purpose. It is, thus; clear that this measure was intended to promote the selfish interests of those few individuals.

**D/** Even though there was a continuous flow of highlanders into the armed struggle, their number did not still equal that of the Moslems. Highlanders joined the various divisions of the front in the course of fulfilling their role as Eritreans; however, they came to sense the tint of ethnicism and regionalism in the set-up of "Jebha".

With the idea that an ethnic group can most effectively be dealt with by those who are its members, it was decided that the various divisions should be headed by individuals who are natives of their respective regions of assignment.

But the division for the Christian highlands of Hamasien, Serae, and Akele Guzai was led by a Moslem from the Saho. The Christian highlanders thought that this was not in accordance with the adopted policy: this awareness led to their discontent and complaints. The bosses of "Jebha", true to their tendency to put their selfish interests in the forefront, decided that the discontent that prevailed among the highlanders in the field would be quelled by setting up a division of Christian fighters under the leadership of a Christian. Thus in 1966 they organized the Fifth Division by extracting forces from the four divisions, chopping the Third Division in Hamasien province, and installing a Christian lackey as its head. By compounding their mistakes, they only aggravated the problem they had caused a year earlier.

## **E/ Religious Convulsions**

The setting up of the Fifth Division was a further extension of the policy based on ethnic differences; it certainly could not be a solution to the problem. As stated above, the measures taken by the bosses were not guided by true revolutionary principles; they were military strategies opposed to the people's interest and based on religious, ethnic, regional and reactionary considerations. Under their respective leaders, the five divisions of "Jebha" continued their operations in accordance with the outlined strategy.

The leaders of the divisions, who had neither the correct understanding of, nor the inclination to promote the national interest, competed against each other, exploited the efforts and looted the property of those whom they professed to liberate; within the country, they established five groups and delineated five areas of plunder.

They ventured to acquire all the requisite wealth and power and to commit acts of atrocity for the purpose of realizing their respective dictatorial aspirations. These leaders, who were eager to see their selfish interests fulfilled within a short period of time, did not curb their religious fanaticism. They stirred up some long dead grudges among some of the ethnic groups and started preaching that the Christians were their enemies, that the highlanders were their enemies, and that the Christians wanted unity with Ethiopia. Thus, they revealed their true sentiments and caused the eruption of religious convulsions within the front. Furthermore, they ordered their forces to plunder the Christian highlands of the country.

As a result it is estimated that about ten thousand heads of cattle were periodically looted from the lowlands of Serae and the eastern ridges of Hamasien by the First and Third division forces that were stationed there. The cattle were driven to the reserves of Kessela in the Sudan.

Further looting and the burning of settlement of innocent civilians were conducted; and those who, in the face of such cruel incidents, demanded the observance of their rights were brutally put to death. In a place called Senbere, the leaders of the divisions, who could not control their thirst for human blood, condemned innocent peasants as "kafir" (infidels/traitors) and massacred more than fifty of them. Such killings of innocent civilians continued at a greater rate and intensity.

As a result of the successive plunders, the agents of "Jebha" acquired huge capital which they invested in construction and transportation industries in the Sudan. With their new fortunes, the unmarried acquired wives, and those who had wives took additional ones. In short, they used the wealth which they brutally milked from the people for establishing themselves, for decadent indulgence and alcoholism in the Sudan and the Arab world.

Upon the intensification of these corrupt measures, the true picture of the leadership of "Jebha" became more and more revealed. The bosses and their agents in the field constituted an oppressive class in the Eritrean society; those fighters under their leadership became simple mercenaries; and the Eritrean people, aware only of Haile Selassie's oppression.

Unexpectedly fell into the oppression of "Jebha".

In view of this, the highlanders who, more than any other group, suffered from this oppression, resolved not only to renounce "Jebha", but to even resist and combat its forces. The oppressive government of Haile Selassie saw an opportunity in the situation to escalate its propaganda regarding the religious motive of the movement. Furthermore, it supplied arms to the defenceless people and lined them up to combat the forces of "Jebha".

Using this situation as a pretext, the leaders of "Jebha" intensified the same policy of killing and plunder instead of seeking the correct revolutionary solution; and by that, they only aggravated the already prevalent feelings of alienation and dissension.

The feud and confusion did not revolve around the national interest of the country; they were essentially religious. This being the case, it was the fighters in the Fifth Division, the minority of which were Christians, who, more than any others, felt the grave nature of the problem.

They became seriously concerned about the corruption that prevailed; not only did they denounce it while in the field, but finally went to the headquarters in Kessela in order to air their grievances. The officials of "Jebha" in Kessela taking advantage of the political tensions in the Sudan, ordered the fighters to their zone of operation.

The complainants resisted the order of the "Jebha" officials and continued to stay in the Sudan, where they were detained by government authorities of the country. All these incidents combined frustrated them to such an extent that some finally handed themselves to Haile Selassie's consulate in Kessela. The agents of "Jebha", using all kinds of false accusations, issued orders to the effect that the remaining Christian fighters in the field should be liquidated. Accordingly, more than one hundred innocent highland revolutionaries were hunted down and killed in the vales of the country.

The oppression of the people which ensued from this corrupt leadership was reflected in the armed resistance so clearly that religion-based dissensions became more and more grave. Following the submission of highlanders to the consulate in Kessela and

the subsequent killing of valiant revolutionaries, very few Christian fighters remained in the field. The enemy echoed its propaganda with exaggerated reports on the situation. The whole phenomenon became disheartening to the people of the highlands, who then began to lose faith in and cast an auspicious eye on 'Jebha'. It may seem that all these events would take a whole generation to occur. Surprisingly, however, they all happened within One year, that is, 1966 - 1967.

In the subsequent period the killing, plundering and the perpetration of acts of atrocity continued. The capitalists of 'Jebha' found it time-consuming to stay in Kessela making accounts of the revenues they obtained from the sale of cattle. They thus moved to the interior of the Sudan from where they started to direct their businesses. The role of their soldiers was limited to that of looting the people's cattle, driving them to Kessela and returning to the country for more plunder. They had no qualms about their corrupt and exploitative engagements. The people lost faith in them even more and more. Eventually, there developed a marked popular opposition to "Jebha".

## **F/ Falling Back on Former Mistakes**

Committed revolutionaries in the field never ceased seeking the means to solve the problem. They realized that it was the enemy which time after time stirred up the religious based differences. They took it as their revolutionary duty to combat the foundations upon which "Jebha" was based. It was concluded that the most effective approach was to combat the dictatorship of the five agents of "Jebha", and enlighten and bring under one banner all the fighters who were used to serve reactionary goals. Sensing the determination to arrive at this solution, the bosses of "Jebha" and their agents realized that their interests were at stake, and made an all-out counter effort for a period of nine months. Consequently, the attempt to form a united front out of the five divisions was not completely successful.

Whereas the Third, Fourth and Fifth Divisions agreed to unify their supply and training units, the First and Second Divisions maintained their separate existence. Thus, from 1968 onwards, the three divisions continued successful political and military operations under one banner; it is to be recalled, however, that some running dogs of the bosses tried to sabotage them through the other two separate divisions. Furthermore, there were a number of false revolutionaries who infiltrated the three unified divisions.

The "Unity of the Three" rekindled the hope of the disheartened people of the country; the highlanders and particularly the Christians started joining the armed struggle in substantial numbers.

It was not only the capitalists of "Jebha" who were terrorized by the accelerated development of this united force. Haile Selassie's government, more alarmed than over, intensified its military activities and espionage to combat this invincible force. However, the United Front, through chains of historic victories has marked ineffaceable scare of defeat on the enemy.

The unity of the divisions certainly marked the beginning of the process of correction. But, since it was not built on the basis of revolutionary political principles, the disguised opportunists managed to sabotage it.

Taking advantage of the fear of espionage, those disguised opportunists declared that

no more fighters would be admitted to the Front. This was framed to serve the regressive, religiously motivated policy of keeping the number of Christians in the field at a controllable level. This policy however, apparently of no big significance, injected venom into the administration of the United Front.

Those opportunists in the two separate divisions were waiting precisely for a confused situation which they could exploit. Realizing the problems in the administration of the United Front and hoping to exploit these problems, those opportunists declared their willingness to join it. All those who, from the outset, aspired the unity of all the forces, welcomed them believing they were sincere. Thus, the fighters met in a place called Adobha where they agreed to unite all the divisions under the common leadership of "Kiada El Ama". It was then decided that a National Congress would be held within a year, that is, sometime before September 1970.

## **G/ The Second Phase of Oppression**

It is said that "the offspring of a cat follows its mother's nature". These religious fanatics who did not previously find the chance to carry out a religious war now found opportune conditions with the leadership of the "Jebha" in their hands and they started to roll up their sleeves and sharpen their knives to murder the "Christian" fighters whom they always viewed from a religious standpoint. To accomplish their scheme, their first Step was to eliminate those within their ranks who were opposed to them. Thus they placed six members of the "Kiada El Ama" in prison and subjected them to harsh treatment. Further, right in the heart of Kessela, they murdered the two revolutionary fighters, comrades Kidane Kiflu and Welday Gidey, who for many years had energetically worked to redirect the course of the struggle. They were under the impression that if they killed these valiant and insightful leaders, the rest could hardly accomplish anything. The dead bodies were placed in sacks and put on a taxi to be transported to a trash dump called Hafera. On the way however, as if to plead their case to the world-public, the corpses of the two martyrs fell out in the middle of the street.

After the death of those martyrs an order was passed, similar to that of 1967, to kill all the "Christians" who were in the field. Consequently, more than two hundred revolutionaries were slain throughout the field. In desperation, over two hundred others surrendered to the Haile Selassie government. Besides giving orders to kill Christian peasants, the leaders of "Kiada El Ama" also tried to further their criminal schemes by distributing arms under the cover name of 'Militia' to people who did not understand the concept, and then started to stir up long forgotten feuds that existed between some Christian and Moslem communities.

Moreover, they committed and are still committing savage crimes in the highlands by throwing bombs, opening machine gun fire in public gatherings, looting and raping women. In general, almost all the Christian fighters in the ranks of the "Jebha" were either murdered or forced to surrender to the Haile Selassie government.

## **H/ What alternatives do exist?**

Conditions being as such, should one opt to face butchery in the hands of "Jebha" simply because one was born Christian or should one surrender to the enemy, the

Haile Selassie government? Which option is better? Dying at the hands of religious fanatics or giving one's hand to the enemy?

Both are abominable; both are poisonous pills to swallow; both mean death. Moreover to make neither choice is tantamount to sitting on the edge of a sharp blade. But rather than choose either of the two alternatives, it is better to nit on the edge of a sharp blade.

Now then we are the fighters who chose to alt on the edge of a sharp blade. We are the fighters who made this choice rather than die in the hands of the religious fanatics of "Jebha" or flee to Ethiopia. It in said that he who does not participate in battle belittles its hardships.

Those who did not face what we have faced, those who have never confronted the physical and moral hardships which we have experienced may spread rumours about us and even blame us. It is understandable.

We wish to make it clear that we separated from the fascist administration of "Jebha" and not from fellow freedom-fighters. It is a big shame that there should exist religious, ethnic and other divisions within the Eritrean liberation struggle.

As freedom fighters, our role should be to eradicate this and other ills of Eritrean society; and in no way should we create a situation wherein such ills could be accentuated. What if one stood for the national cause, but the "Jebha" lenders misdirected the struggle? What if one was oppressed by these same lenders while one was fighting for national liberation? To liberation fighters, the answer is simple.

The nature of our separation might give the impression that we gathered on the basis of religion. But what alternative did we have? In fact, what saddens us is not the fact that we have gathered together and separated, but the harsh causes that forced us to do so, for we uphold the primacy of our country and our people over religion.

We are freedom fighters and not preachers of the gospel. What led us to take the stand we have taken is revolutionary conviction and not spiritual preaching. We consider what we have done to be induced by evolutionary courage, honesty and love of our country.

### **We are Freedom Fighters and not Prophets of Christianity**

It is an incontestable tact that besides a few who do not espouse any religion, the Eritrean population is about equally divided between Christianity and Islam. Instead of promoting our national cause, the leaders of "Jebha" declare that the Eritrean population is 80% Muslim and the remaining 20% Christian. We also very well-know that they rally in the name of Islam rather than in the name of the Eritrean people.

Our conviction is that the Eritrean people were and are still oppressed in the same manner as with all other oppressed peoples of the world, and our objective is the liberation of our people and of all other oppressed peoples of the world. How many Christians or Muslims exist in Eritrea is of no importance or concern to us.

Let this be the worry of those whose interest is to spread the Bible or Koran. In Eritrea, when Eritrean Muslims are oppressed, it is the oppression of the Eritrean people; and when Eritrean Christians are oppressed, it is also the oppression of the Eritrean people.

We do not recognize that oppression discriminates on the basis of religion. Should

there be any struggle in Eritrea whose aim is to liberate only those who are Muslims, we will oppose it. We are also opposed to any effort made by the "Jebha" to oppress or exploit Christians.

We are unequivocally opposed to all forms of oppression. We will not close our eyes and remain silent when we see Christians being oppressed for fear that we might be labelled as the defenders-of Christians. We will actively oppose it. We oppose it not because we are advocates of any religion but because it is oppression. We are freedom fighters who will not forget our revolutionary responsibility for fear of what might be said about us. What we wish to clarify here to those peoples or countries which give importance to religion is that the Eritrean population is equally divided between two religions.

We would also like to confirm to them that both Christians and Muslims have freedom of worship within their respective churches or mosques. We suggest that those who wish to understand the falsehood of the 80% Islam of "Jebha's" leaders to travel in Eritrea or to refer to the history of the country. A revolutionary struggle has to have a national basis. It can in no way be based on the concept of "Jihad" or "Christian crusade". We remind those who might think otherwise to correct themselves, and those who might engage in active operation under such an erroneous premise to top their actions.

Further, we wish to make it clear to those who give aid and support in the name of Christianity or Islam that such aid or support is of no use to us; we do not want it. We want to assure them that they will be only wasting their resources in vain. To those Eritreans who want to serve their personal interest using religion as an instrument, we wish to not only remind them that their opportunism is shameful but that they will also be remembered as criminals in the history of our people and in the eyes of the world. To our revolutionary people and all other revolutionary peoples of the world, we reiterate that we are fighting against oppression and for the unity of our people, without any recourse to religion. We further urge them to condemn in solidarity with us those opportunists who exploit religion to advance their selfish interests.

We are Eritreans not Arabs.

Using "Arabism" as a trump card, the leaders of "Jebha" have claimed that with the exception of the alleged less than 20% "Habeshas", 80% of the Eritrean population are Arab descendants; that our country is an Arab country, and that our language is Arabic. Just as they used Islam as an instrument for their personal ends, they have also used and are still using "Arabism" for the same opportunistic purpose. Geographically, Eritrea is a nation located in north-east Africa, physically close to the Arab world. It is evident that, because of this geographical closeness, and because of the fact that the Eritrean National Liberation Struggle is an integral part of the world-wide anti-imperialist struggle, it is not only a strategic necessity but also a revolutionary imperative that it be part of the over-all Middle East anti-imperialist front.

Thus, when we line up in struggle together with our Arab comrades, it is only because of our revolutionary conviction and the dictates of our strategic relationship, and not because we are Arabs or Moslems.

No one can deny the fact that historically, the Eritrean people, be they Christians or Moslems, have some ethnic ties with the Arabs. We should recognize however, that the Eritrean people are first and foremost Eritreans and not Arabs. We do not develop

revolutionary comradeship with people simply because they have religious or colour ties with us. We are engaged in struggle because there is oppression in Eritrea and the world; and we will continue to struggle as long as such oppression exists.

If there is any struggle which is based on race or colour, we are opposed to it. If "Arabism" or the Arab struggle is based on colour, race, or religion, let it be clear that we are Eritreans who do not distinguish among colours, races and religion.

Language is another instrument used by the overlords of "Jebha". They have consistently spread the lie that the language of the Eritrean people is Arabic. They only mention in passing that there exist other languages such as Tigrigna, Tigre, etc. These misrepresentations might have misled many people who do not know about the Eritrean languages. A concise explanation of those languages has been given in this exposition.

Arabic became one of the official languages in Eritrea only through the "Federal Decision" of 1952 in which the Eritrean people did not participate. Although they could not cover up this fact, the overlords of "Jebha" have tried and are still trying to destroy all the Eritrean languages and declare Arabic as the only language in Eritrea. It may not be known to people who are outside the struggle. But it is a fact that within "Jebha", Tigrigna and other Eritrean languages are totally suppressed. The fanatics of "Jebha" have an intense hatred of Tigrigna and some fools have gone as far as forgetting and rejecting their mother tongue in an attempt to pose as Arabs.

We would like to explain here, especially to the peoples and countries of the Arab world, that we entertain no hostility to Arabic and the Arabs. Not only do we acknowledge our strong historical ties with the Arabs, but we also recognize, and call for the strategic imperative of having closer relations with them. However, when we state this we do not in any way mean to imply that we are prepared to renounce our own languages in favour of Arabic in exchange for the help we need from the Arab peoples and governments, or in order to please their leaders. Nor do we want to deceive them by misrepresenting the Eritrean struggle as an Arab cause on the assumption that they do not know it. It is true that there are many opportunists who constantly strive to cover up the truth concerning the Eritrean situation. These misrepresentations by the bosses of "Jebha" have misled many Arab leaders and governments on various occasions by claiming that Arabic is the language of Eritrea and that Eritreans are Arabs. They have even presented Eritrea as a part of the Arab world in their maps.

Had we been Arabs or had our language been Arabic, we would not have been ashamed to say so. However, we are Eritreans who are neither able nor willing to betray our Eritrean identity or renounce our language. This is the truth and we do not hesitate to state it.

In our era, there are many international languages. When we venture into the field of international affairs, it becomes necessary for us to know many international or widely spoken languages. However, it is only through developing our languages and using them to educate and inform our people that we can acquaint our country and its people with the outside world.

Otherwise, when we try to impose an alien language on our people on the pretext that this is a more widely spoken language or that it is a better one, we are not only reduced into the role of usurpers of language but we are also forced to regress a

thousand steps backwards instead of advancing a step forward. Thus, it becomes absolutely necessary for us to refrain from this regressive and dangerous trend. Italian colonial rule attempted to destroy our languages and replace them with its own. The English also tried to spread their language. And in our own era of Ethiopian colonial oppression, Haile Selassie's regime has sought to kill our languages by burning our books and forcibly imposing Amharic on our people. The valiant Eritrean people have always been opposed and continue to actively resist such colonial expansionist policies. Many Eritreans have gone to various parts of the world, especially to Arab countries for educational purposes or for economic, political and social reasons. But to insist that our people learn study and speak an alien language borrowed from any of these countries undermines our national identity and negates the spirit of our liberation struggle. Therefore, we reject it totally. We would like to repeatedly remind those governments or peoples who support our struggle to avail us of their help because we are engaged in a just struggle for national liberation. If they offer assistance for any ulterior motives however, we do not need such support and will firmly reject it. To those governments and peoples who do not yet know the Eritrean people, languages, culture and history but who wish to help us, we extend them an open invitation to come and visit our country so they can learn firsthand. Otherwise, we urge those governments which have been misled by the reports of opportunistic liars, to refrain from violating our national identity and dignity as Eritreans. If there be any governments which continue to violate our national identity in order to promote their selfish interests, let them know that we are prepared to defend our national rights, whatever the price. We would like to make it clear to the Eritrean people that it is their responsibility to refute the various self-serving claims of being Moslems, Arabs, white or black, that are made of their behalf by the vicious opportunists and rogues. Furthermore, we would like to remind and warn false pleaders to stop deceiving the governments supporting our cause because we are convinced that whatever aid comes in exchange for our national rights is more injurious than beneficial to our struggle.

## **Our stand is Neither Ethnic nor Sectarian**

Whether it be amongst our people or within our armed struggle, the opportunistic bosses of 'Jebha' have in the pursuit of their selfish interests, found it expedient to promote ethnic and sectarian antagonism and managed to create and sustain numerous divisive factions among the Eritrean people and fighters. Their continuing frantic efforts threaten to spread the plague of division into the surrounding communities and beyond. When 'Jebha's' bosses divide the Eritrean people in this manner and scramble for the control of the resultant factions, it is always for their personal interest rather than that of the respective communities.

The only people who benefit from this are the opportunists. Our conscience does not allow us to tolerate such a state of affairs which subjugates the masses for the benefit of a privileged few. The objective of our struggle is not to foster communal strife but to promote harmony and to win national liberation. We therefore resolutely oppose the opportunistic and divisive elements that work against our national unity and thus, undermine the struggle for national liberation. Since we are witnessing within our



struggle the development of personal power contests through claims and counter claims of the allegiance of one group or another, we unequivocally state that we are opposed to ethnic parochialism. We wish to remind these tribalists who have tried and are still trying to manoeuvre us, that their attempts are futile and that they are only exposing themselves.

We are freedom fighters who are dedicated to the unity of all progressive combatants without regard to their ethnic or regional backgrounds.

## **Our Objectives**

First we will share and discuss with our Eritrean comrades the program of action we have designed to reach our final objective. Nonetheless, till we present our full program in our second exposition, we present here a short summary of our goals:

To create a society where no economic exploitation or political oppression of man by man exists.; to build a prosperous nation with educational, agricultural and industrial developments; to establish a National United Front with no distinction as to religion, ethnic affiliation or sex. To establish close solidarity with all progressive peoples in the world, especially those in Africa, Asia and Latin America; to combat world imperialism led by the United States; to smash Israel Zionism.

Firstly, we have to wage armed struggle to gain national liberation from Ethiopian oppression as an immediate goal.

Victory to the Eritrean people!

Victory to the fighting peoples of the world!

Long live the Eritrean liberation fighters!

Destruction to the Ethiopian oppression!

Down with imperialists, zionists and all reactionaries!