

## **CDRiE's Message**

### **The 25<sup>th</sup> Eritrean Democratic Youth Union Festival in Kassel – August 2010**

#### **Solidarity Message**

First, we wish to congratulate the EDY for organising this inspiring platform for democracy, where Eritreans debate and exchange ideas of common national and educational concern. As the history of Democracy itself attests, it was through platforms like this that the early Athenians developed and nurtured the concept of Democracy that has become a universal commodity today.

#### **What is CDRiE's About?**

We in CDRiE see ourselves as catalytic for change and advocates for Democracy and Democratic rights of our people. We combine advocacy for human rights and peace with the promotion of good governance and rule of law as important pillars for functioning Democracy and vice versa.

Since the launch of CDRiE in January 2009, we held a number of well attended public events on issues that included: Land, Ethnicity, Multi-Party and Self-Determination, Religion and State, Good Governance and on Smooth Transition to Democracy etc. Over 10 well researched papers were presented by CDRiE members and non-CDRiE compatriots. We hope to make the papers available in printed format in the near future.

On the Lobbying front, we have been working with our Eritrean and non-Eritrean partners to Lobby national and regional institutions like the EU to put pressure on the PFDJ regime to release political prisoners and respect human and political rights of Eritreans. This has been bearing fruit and the pressure is increasingly felt in the heart of the PFDJ regime as every single EU delegation to Eritrea do not return without raising cases of human rights that the regime can no longer deny as non-existent. We have been sending advocacy letters to governments and regional and international institutions bringing the human rights situation to their attention and pleading with them to assist Eritrean refugees and refrain from deporting them to Eritrea where they can face imminent torture and imprisonment for indefinite periods.

Our partnership work has also been visible in CDRiE's participation in landmark events such as the Brussels Conference where for the first time EU and US officials and policy makers met with Eritreans and Horn African activists to discuss the coordination of their respective policies in relation to Eritrea and the Horn of Africa. Another event was Eritrean-centred: the Peace Conferences held in London and Brighton, where the issue of realising peace within Eritrea was the main theme of these linked events.

#### **On the Opposition Camp & CDRiE Policy of Constructive Engagement**

It is unfortunate that at a time when all our efforts should be focussed on ending the suffering of our people and nation, the opposition camp is still embroiled in internal

conflicts that seems endless and consumes energies in internal squabbles. We believe this vicious circle has to be brought to an immediate end. We all need to be focussed and avoid the vicious circle of accusation and counter-accusation. We strongly believe that the potential is there for all the genuine forces to put their hands together and lead struggle towards attaining the salvation of our people and our hard-won nation state – Eritrea.

CDRiE will maintain its policy of “Constructive Engagement” with all. To this end, we have corresponded and communicated with most opposition groups from all persuasions and political affiliations. We will continue to do so as part of our fundamental role as catalysts for change and unity.

### **The need to mainstream opposition politics**

In CDRiE we believe that each and every organised group and individual can play an effective role and positively contribute to the struggle for national salvation and democracy, if we continuously assess our performance and mainstream our methods and approaches. In this regard, we clearly see the lack of proper definition for what constitutes a political party and a party or group that seeks to restore justice to a specific segment of our society as something that needs to be clarified and classified to avoid unnecessary confusion of roles and purposes.

For example, there is this general assumption that the EDA is composed of political parties. A closer look at EDA member organisation, one sees about three quarter of EDA membership are groups that should be classified as pressure groups or civil society. This is because the politics they exercise is very much local (some refer to as sub-national) and not national. This means, their political premise departs from the assumption that a specific injustice has been and or is being inflicted upon a particular religious, regional or ethnic community. Demanding specific rights for certain segments of society is indeed perfectly legitimate and should be encouraged. However, the complexity becomes clear when such groups miss their role as “seekers of rights” and try to use their ethnic, regional and religious sentiments as a premise to attain power at both the local and national levels. This hinders the progress towards Democracy because:-

1. if the “rights’ seeking” groups assume they are the sole representatives of their particular region, religion and or ethnic group, there is a strong potential that they can end up being local dictators or war-lords who would use their local power to bargain for more at every level. They would also end up committing crimes and atrocities in their bid to silence alternative voices or traditional leaderships from within their ethnic, religious and regional communities. For this reason, it is paramount that all active groups recognise that they are advocates for justice and democracy, and not necessarily the soul political representatives of those they claim to advocate for until they are democratically elected by the particular segment of our society to do so.
2. if they attain power at the national level, they will be inherently exclusionist and can eminently open up identity based conflicts, which are even more difficult to heal. They would also undermine national unity and can potentially result in state-failure.

For the above two simple reasons, we believe it is time to mainstream our national and sub-national politics. Both can play complimentary roles, especially if the political parties striving to present more inclusive national democratic and inclusive political programmes courageously embrace the legitimate demands of our different segments. These political organisations should come together and closer to strengthen their capacity and reach. Their failure and marginalisation will result in giving space for sub-national politics to dominate opposition politics and prolong the suffering of our people and nation.

## **Conclusion**

We believe through our constructive engagement approach we will be able to build consensus and overcome problems that have been hindering the progress of our overall struggle for peace, justice and democracy. In the meantime, we call on all pressure groups, civil society activists and political organisations to clear the confusion, set aside secondary differences, and focus on working on two main common programmes:-

1. Defend Human Rights, and
2. Work to realise good governance and rule of law

The above two are already commonly accepted principles almost among all in the opposition camp as well as inside the pfdj. All that is needed is to articulate them, raise awareness of the need that the issue for Eritrea is not about who governs the country, but how the country is governed. Once we have a legitimate constitution, there will be legal platforms for parties to compete to govern at the local and national levels. Until that day our job should therefore focus on coordinating and combining efforts to create a New and Democratic Eritrea where justice and peace prevails.

## **Thank You**

We thank you for giving us the opportunity to share with you CDRiE's message.

We wish us all every success in our common endeavours.