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Eritrea: An Anchor for Peace in the Horn of Africa

Eritrea is a new developing nation in the Horn of Africa region; but, a regional threat it is not. Far from it and quite to the contrary; in a region ravaged by war and ethnic tensions, Eritrea is an anchor of peace. It has a secular government with a progressive vision that is determined to save the region from becoming a "social basket case". Despite the 15-year long occupation of its sovereign territory by Ethiopia, a neighbor twenty times its size, which enjoys an unprecedented diplomatic, political and military support from such major powers as the United States, and despite the sanctions that have been imposed on it based on fabrications, and a well choreographed vilification campaign, Eritrea has managed to stay a sanctuary where its people live in one accord while pursuing policies that promote national harmony, political democracy, economic development, social justice, cultural revival and regional cooperation.

Depicting Eritrea as a regional threat can only come from the twisted minds of Ethiopia's lobbyists and their enablers in Washington in a futile attempt to protect their client in Addis Ababa from the condemnation of world opinion it deserves. The officials of the minority regime in Addis Ababa are experts at using everyone and everything to implement their agenda of demonizing Eritrea, while diverting attention away from Ethiopia's domestic conflicts.

Eritrea's population is equally split between Christians and Moslems from nine ethnic groups. This is a recipe for fragility in many places in the region, but not for Eritrea which has embraced its diversity as a blessing. Surrounded by nations that are ablaze because of ethnic and religious divisions, from a minority regime orchestrated genocide in Ethiopia, to clan-fueled chaos in Somalia, to religious-based war in Yemen and ethnic conflict in South Sudan, Eritrea with its strong dedication to national harmony, commitment to equitable development, and zero tolerance for corruption has emerged as a stable model of hope for the region and if it is allowed to live in peace it would write the first chapter of success story in Africa.

It has to be noted that young Eritrea was the first target of Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda when it was barely 3 years old as a sovereign country. Sensing the threat of international terrorism and religious extremism, Eritrea had then shown the world how it should be handled. Sadly, no one, particularly those in the US administration, took Eritrea's warning seriously and here we are with the scourge of terrorism haunting our world.

Similarly Eritrea had warned how Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia would plunge the region into chaos. Again, no one paid attention and today the region is being threatened by the menace of Al-Shabab. The irony of it all is that those who were responsible for the creation and resurgence of Al-Shabab in the same vein accused Eritrea of supporting Al-Shabab and orchestrated to impose sanctions on it. As if this was not enough, Western powers led by the US, sponsored a discredited Commission of Inquiry under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council in order to accuse Eritrea through unfounded and exaggerated accusations of human rights violations. All these were designed to punish Eritrea because it had the audacity to warn the powers that be that their wrong policies are a threat to peace and stability in the region.

Since its independence a quarter century ago, and despite the hostilities it is facing, Eritrea has managed to cut illiteracy rate from over 80%, down to under 15% and access to education in Eritrea is now over 90% up from about 30%. Annual production of vegetables in some regions has grown four-fold. Water conservation by way of reservoirs and dams has increased twelve-fold and the percentage of Eritrean citizens that have access to clean drinking water is the highest in the entire region. Furthermore, Eritrea is one of four countries in Sub-Saharan African countries that met the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in time. In this effort Eritrea had managed to successfully to cut infant and maternal mortality rate. Not only that, at this time every Eritrean has access to some health facility within 5 km of where he/she lives, and malaria, one of the chronic disease of tropical Africa, is near elimination. The total length of road networks in the country has also grown by 300%.

Without a doubt Eritrea's challenges are many, but as in 1991, when it got its independence through sheer determination, Eritrea will again surprise everyone by successfully liberating itself from dependency. Indeed, far from being a regional threat, Eritrea is demonstrating that it can be a good partner for peace for all those powers that are working to bring peace to the Horn of Africa. As a secular government Eritrea is a reliable partner for peace and the European Union, Finland,

Germany and Norway are working alongside Eritrea towards this end and many others are showing interest. How about the United States?

The US has repeatedly allowed itself to be used in this game of victimizing Eritrea in an attempt to prop up successive dictatorial minority regimes and keep a tattered empire, Ethiopia, together. Washington must learn from the errors of such misguided policies of the past that seem to benefit neither the US nor the region.

In addition, rewarding a regime that is conducting mass massacres, genocide and other crimes against humanity against its own people and is brutally suppressing the peaceful protests in the Amhara and Oromo regions of Ethiopia, with seats on the UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council does not show concern for justice or any of the other values Washington says it fights to protect. It is about time the US government realizes this and works towards a bilateral cooperation with Eritrea, for Eritrea is a safe anchor of peace for the Horn of Africa that one can count on as a reliable partner.

As Americans of Eritrean origin we have a vested interest in seeing peace, stability and security returned to the Horn of Africa region. However, demonizing the only nation that is serving as an anchor for peace in the region in an attempt to protect the real regional threat, Ethiopia, does not help maintain security in this troubled region. Therefore, we strongly believe that it is high time that the USA re-strengthen its relationship with the State of Eritrea so that peace can and must prevail in the region and, by extension, the USA's national security and interests could be respectively maintained and advanced.

Organization of Eritrean Americans (OEA)