

Eritreans For Liberation In North America (EFLNA)

By Mehretab Mehari - July 26, 2007

Introduction

This paper gives a brief account of the lively and spirited activities of a movement known as Eritreans for Liberation in North America (EFLNA), which emerged in the 1970 and ceased to exist by the end of the 1979. It highlights the major turning points in the history of the movement and focuses on its link to the nationalist movements in Eritrea, especially the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and African and other Third World and leftist political movements in the United States and Canada. It aims to show how the rise, growth and final demise of the movement was directly related to major historical events that were unfolding inside Eritrea. The EFLNA's brief life cycle was determined by its relationships with the nationalist fronts in Eritrea, the Eritrean student movements in Europe and the Middle East, the policies and actions of the Ethiopian, the US, the USSR and other governments towards Eritrean nationalist aspiration and its relationships with leftists and nationalist movements based largely in the United States and to some extent in Canada. This is content analysis of the various writings of EFLNA and is presented in chronological order and provides a glimpse of the rich history left behind by EFLNA.

Early Beginning: Eritrean Youth for Liberation

Eritreans for Liberation in North America (EFLNA) started out with a name, *Eritrean Youth for Liberation* in 1970 in response to the killings of civilians in Keren, Eritrea in December 16, 1970. The organization stated it was a spontaneous response showing anger of Eritreans in the US on the civilian killings by the Ethiopian army in 1970 and was not an outcome of an organized or planned effort by any group or individuals (Liberation 1973 vol.2, no1, p.6). It was possible, however, that there were individuals among the organizers who had prior informal links to the nationalist movements in Eritrea. What we can state for certain is that before December 1970, there was no organized and publicly visible support for the Eritrean nationalist movements in North America. By February 1971, however, there was a movement which avowed not only to support the efforts of the Eritrean fighters but also "to radically change the nature of the Eritrean struggle and provide the guiding light to its long term objectives" (Liberation Vol. II No. 1 January 1973:6). Those who started the movement included three groups whose composition varied in terms of background and life in the US. The first group included those who came to the US from privileged families or were connected to privileged families that had either connection to the Ethiopian government or to wealthy and middle classes families who can afford to send their children abroad. This group was given permission to come to the US either through family connections to important people in the government or bribing some officials. The second group consisted of those who were sent on governmental or some organizational scholarships to advance their academic training and career and return to work as professionals in Ethiopian governmental

or private institutions. The Third Group were those who dropped out of schools at home and somehow managed to come to the US to find some meaningful way of making a living. This diversity of background and life in the US made it initially difficult for the movement to form a unified program or goals (Liberation Vol. II No.1 January 1973:6).

Immediately after the formation of *the Eritrean Youth for Liberation* (EYFL), the organizers of the protest contacted Eritreans who lived in US and Canada who could potentially become sympathizers or supporter of the EYFL. The EYFL sent letters to Europe and “all other parts of the world” (p.8). It also sent a letter to then the Supreme Council of Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which has been defunct for two years, demanding it hold a national congress “within the shortest possible time; or else, we are ready to contact all other Eritreans at home and abroad, hold a national congress by ourselves, delineate a correct ideology and start our struggle” P.8. Until the summer of 1971, the movement described its activities as follows “...trying to bring all Eritreans in North America under the same organization, establishing contact with all organs of the E.L.F. in the field, and announcing its formation to Eritreans throughout the world were, thus, the focus of all organizational activities” p. 8.

In February 27, 1971, EYFL held the first sub-general meeting in New York and formed a *Working Group* whose function was to publicize the Eritrean case, to raise funds and to contact with other “progressive” movements in the US and similar other activities. It also tried to introduce some political education and study of revolutionary theory and methods to its members. The movement had written “The Proclamation and Program of the Liberation Struggle for Socialist Eritrea” which was meant to be the guiding manifesto for the EYFL as well as the Eritrean Liberation movements. The manifesto was not widely distributed nor discussed among members, but it showed the leftist and socialistic desires of the some of the early founders of the EYFL. (p.8) (See also Revised Constitution of Eritreans for Liberation in North America in Liberation vol.11, No.1 p.19).

The emergence of Eritrean For Liberation (EFL)

From June 18-20, 1971 the 1st General Congress of Eritrean Youth For Liberation was held in Washington DC from June 18-20, 1971. During this General Congress the youth movement agreed to change its name from Eritrean Youth for Liberation to Eritreans for Liberation in North America (EFL). The topics of the Congress centered around reports of what was going on inside the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), particularly the division between the General Command (Kiada al Amma) and the Popular Forces. Although the movement lacked sufficient information about the divisions within ELF, the movement wanted to affiliate itself closely with one of the two groups. In its initial stages, the looseness of the movement, allowed some individuals who had personal knowledge of personalities in the Eritrean nationalist movements, especially the Popular forces to assume the organizational communication and personal information and tried to shape the movement by creating some networks of trusted individuals called “obedients” [sic]. They were to serve as secret means of controlling the organization within the movement and also a means to connect the leader to the movement in Eritrea, when the leader “leaves” to join the nationalist front. . The movement needed to take formal structure for communication and accountability

because it lacked of organizational procedure (p.9). The Congress ended with a clear decision to support the Popular Forces, without defining how and in what ways.

In 1971, the EFL was a movement run by a Coordinating committee, whose structure and function was still ill defined. Eritreans in New York were designated to serve as the Coordinating Committee. The Coordinating Committee in New York had some internal problems stemming from members' ideological differences and levels of commitment to the movement. There was also personality conflicts and mistrust between the committee members. Thus The committee could not come up with an agreement of sending a representative to the Congress of Eritreans in Europe (p.9). There was no organizational constitution nor who could become a member and what the requirements for membership were. "The only basis of membership were that one was Eritrean by blood and that he/she paid \$20 a year and these were based on tacit agreements with no mechanisms for enforcement" (p.10). There were several chapters but there were no coordinated activities between chapters and between the coordinating committees and chapters. Some chapters such as Boston and Philadelphia became non-functional because of "mistrust, general apathy and backbiting" (p.10?).

The Coordinating Committee called a general meeting on November 14, 1971 to create a common understanding of its internal problems and find solutions. It was brought out that \$1000 which was to be sent to the fighters of Popular Forces through intermediaries in Europe was rumored to have never reached them. Some members of the Coordinating Committee were criticized for donating money to Ethiopian Student Union in North America (ESUNA), when the then ESUNA leader, Mesfin Habtu, died without getting consensus from the other members. This issue polarized the group and the group could not reach a common solution or understanding (p.10).

This polarized situation was to change when in November and December 1971, a delegation the PLF-Foreign office lead by Osman Saleh Sabbe and including Ato Woldeab Woldemariam and Taha Nur submitted a memorandum to the UN and as well as gave talks to Eritreans New York (New York Times Dec 15, 1971). They also visited Washington DC. The coming of Ato Woldeab, Osman Saleh Sabbe and Taha Nur in New York City and meeting with members of the EFLNA gave moral boost to the members. From the visit, members gained information on the conditions of the Fronts.

In January 1972, the New York chapter decided to dissolve the old Central Coordinating Committee and replace it with two members who would devote their entire time to work as coordinators of the organization (p.11). After such reorganization, the two individuals became the main coordinators of the movement. For the first time, an EFLNA newsletter called *The Eritrean* came out in 1972. Most chapters started to work actively in raising funds, and other activities. The movement discussed its problems and dealt with the personal conflicts and mistrust created by the events of the previous year. However, there was a lack of common understanding and what the function of the movement should be. Some saw it as an movement within which one could find a common social umbrellas to interact with other Eritreans, i.e., find some social identity in an "alienating" American society; to others it was an movement within which one increases his/her commitment to the nationalist movement and join the front in time. A third

group saw the movement as one in which the members would develop themselves to gain knowledge about political ideology and action and help articulate the political ideology and action in the nationalist fronts. Therefore, some informal small “groups” existed that had different goals and commitments and desires for the movements. (p.11)

The Second Congress and the EFL in 1972

In June 1972, the 2nd Congress of EFL was convened. The discussion in the Congress centered on ideological issues such as the question of revolutionary leadership and practical issues, focusing on what the role of EFL should be in relation to the Eritrean struggle. In order to analyze Eritrean society and gain the basic political and ideological understanding of Eritrean society, the Congress formed a Political Education Committee assigned to design political education lessons to be followed by all chapters. In 2nd Congress, a constitution was adopted. A paper written by fighters in the front which stated clearly the ideology, their views of the national liberation struggle, and their actions and needs was read in the Congress. Such position paper gave a major moral boost to the general membership and for the first time gave the organization a clear ideology and material needs of the fighters in the field and the members left the congress to raise funds to the amount of \$10,000 and send it to the front by September 1, 1972. (p.12).

In this Congress, EFL positioned itself clearly as part of the world-wide socialist movements organized to fight oppression and imperialism. It used the rhetoric of socialist revolution and national liberation, which was then fashionable in left wing movements in the 1960s and 1970s. It stated that under the leadership of socialist political party, workers and peasants (who were characterized as the most oppressed and opposed to oppression in its totality), should be mobilized and organized to form an alliance and struggle for the liberation of Eritrea from its oppressors. The Congress issued its short, intermediate and long term goals for the Eritrea. In the short term, its goal was to achieve national liberation, meaning political independence from Ethiopia and its long term goal was to bring about a socialist transformation of Eritrean society within an African context. (p.12) It positioned itself as part of the African liberation struggle in which the Eritrean nationalist struggle has to be seen as part of a struggle against colonial and imperialist oppression and whose objective was to mobilize all Eritrean forces who were opposed to oppression to be mobilized to achieve national liberation. It also discussed how the liberation struggle should be conducted and by whom. It ideologically justified the armed nationalist movement by stating that “In order for such a political party to emerge in our country, however, it is necessary that a strong political-military body be created within the field that can unite the fighters for a communal national goal and provide the birthmark of a national political-military organization.” (p.14).

Following the Second Congress, the various EFL’s chapters started their organizational activities and followed the structure of the movement. The organizational looseness of the EFL was seen as a weakness and easy prey for maneuvering by individuals in the Coordinating Committee as well as members. The competition between leaders on influencing the chapters and having access to information about members and influence their activities increased. Such setting of networks of friendships and relationships hampered the movement from identifying individuals who wanted to participate in the organization and the nationalist movement in a more committed manner. It was

seen as subjected to maneuvering of cliques and the clique that formed seemed not open enough for others to join and work through the movement. Some formed their own organization and try to join the fronts on their own way (p.13)

The EFL as a political unit came into conflict with the organization as a social group. Although it was professing to have long terms political aims, it was essentially a social group based on personal relationships and friendships. With the increasing political agenda of the movement, however, there was a clear need to emphasis the political rather the social role of the movement. The goal of the movement became more clearly political, i.e., identifying individuals who would support the nationalist struggle strongly and actively, and bring them more into the inner circle of the movement and separate them from those who did not. This was seen as a remedy to the loose organizational structure of EFL (p.14). Although this seemed a sound policy, it was really hard to separate the two. One could even make an argument that the social relationships between the members made it possible for the movement to accomplish its political goals.

The Third General Congress and the EFLNA in 1972-73

The Third General Congress was held on December 24, 1972 in New York City. The organization officially changed its name from *Eritrean Youth* to *Eritreans for Liberation in North America (EFL)*. In its revised constitution it declared, “We Eritreans in North American hereby establish the organization ‘Eritreans for Liberation in North America (E.F.L.)’ to be guided by the principles embodied within this constitution” (liberation vol.11, no.1 p.19). Henceforth we will call it with its best known acronym EFLNA. Seeing itself as part of the socialist oriented movements, EFLNA restated its aim of bringing national liberation and socialism in Eritrea. The Congress discussed some of the movement’s weakness in its efforts to “become a more functional supportive organ of the Eritrean Liberation Struggle.” (p .13), EFLNA stated it desired the creation of a “vanguard” political body in Eritrea that will unify all the fighters under a single national front. It reaffirmed its role should be to provide maximum support to what it called the “progressive elements in the field” that are working towards the creation of the vanguard body. The organization agreed that its duties should include (1) the mobilization of all Eritreans outside the field, (2) the development of political awareness among Eritrean, (3) creation of *Organic Link* with the struggle in the field, (4) political support to the struggle, (5) material support to the fighters in the field and (6) encouraging and preparing Eritreans abroad to join the armed struggle. Thus EFLNA sought to encourage members to fully commit themselves to work for the national liberation struggle in whatever ways necessary (pp. 17-18).

Before the Congress, the Ethiopian Student Union in North America (ESUNA) issued a solidarity message for “Eritrean revolutionaries” and declared its unconditional support for the right of the Eritrean people for self determination (See Liberation Vol. II, No.1, p 26 November 22, 1972.). In January 5,th 1973, Eritrean for Liberation in North America and the Ethiopian Student Union in North America co-sponsored a demonstration in Washington DC in protest of the December 8th 1972 killings of 6 student activists who they attempted to highjack an Ethiopian Airline plane while aboard on the plane. Before the demonstration, the Executive Committees of EFLNA and ESUNA held a meeting and agreed to begin and expand efforts of mutual cooperation, and

support and “militant comradeship between EFLNA and ESUNA and revolutionary solidarity between the Ethiopian and Eritrean people” (Liberation vol.11 no. 1 p. 26).

In January 22, 1973, EFLNA sent a telegram mourning of the loss of Amilcar Cabral and its solidarity to nationalist movements of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (PAIGC) (Liberation vol.II no.1 p. 33). From November 27 to 29, 1972, EFLNA participated in the Kwame Nkrumah Conference of African Students, Youth and Development held in North Carolina State University in Durham, North Carolina. THE Eritrean representative presented a paper titled “The Eritrean liberation struggle and the African revolution” (liberation vol. II no.2 p. 6). The conference discussed “African Revolution” and attempted to identify the means for collective involvement in the revolution (Liberation vol. II no. 2 February 1972, p. 6). The conference prescribed scientific socialism for Africa and resolved to support all African national liberation struggles including Guinea Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, Azania, Zimbabwe, Chad and Eritrea. The Eritrean liberation struggle was recognized as the “vanguard” of the second phase of the African revolution, meaning “the struggle for the liberation of African peoples from neo-colonial and class oppression” (Liberation vol. II no.2 p.6).

In February 17, 1973, EFLNA sent message of solidarity to ESUNA to its semi-annual regional meeting. In this message, EFL called Ethiopia as colonial ruler and attacked Ethiopians’ vacillation on the Eritrean question (lib.vol. II, no.2 p.6). In its March 1973, issue of Liberation Vol. ii no.3, the EFLNA’s published the PLF’s manifesto *We and our Goal (Nehnan-Alemanan)* translated from Tigrinya. It also declared its supported of the separation of PLF from ELF General Command and called PLF as the fast growing “revolutionary vanguard” and denounced the leadership of General Command of ELF and called it “reactionary”. (Lib. 1973 Vol. II, no. 3 p.4.)

The ELFNA chapters in Boston, New York and Washington announced that they held successful fund raising events in 1973. The Boston Chapter indicated the its program consisted cultural shows, i.e., songs, and dances from Eritrean weddings ceremonies in the highlands and from the lowlands of Eritrea as well as songs praising the freedom fighters. The main purpose, however, was fund raising for the nationalist front in Eritrea and to inform the various left wing and Third World movements and their followers about Eritrean nationalist struggle and its relationship to African liberation struggle (lib. Vol. II, no.4; p.21).

In April 15, 1973, the Boston chapter sent message of solidarity to the World Wide Union of Ethiopian students for its first congress in Berlin, Germany.

The “Patriot”, a newspaper of the Afro-Asian solidarity forum, in Seattle of June 22, 1973 wrote on Eritrea struggle informing that the *People’s Liberation Front (PLF)* had become *Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF)*, and that the Front has a Central Committee based in Eritrea and that it had started its monthly publication called *Fitwerari or Vanguard* whose first issue came out in 1973. Hence, the EPLF was the vanguard to lead the Eritrean revolution (liberation vol. ii, no.5 p. 29). The EFLNA executive committee issued a statement in May 15, 1972 condemning Haile Selassie’s

visit to Washington and called his action towards Eritrea as a both colonialist and aggression (Lib. Vol. ii, no, 5 p.32-33.)

The Pavia Declaration of 1973

The Fourth Annual Congress of Eritreans for Liberation in Europe (EFLE) met from August 25 to 29, 1973 in Pavia (Milan). The Congress issued a joint declaration of Eritreans for Liberation in Europe (EFLE), Eritrean for Liberation in North America, (EFLNA), the General Union of Eritrean Students (GUES-Cairo) known as the “Pavia Declaration”. In this declaration they made it clear that “they will coordinate their activities and seek unity among those who considered themselves “progressive organizations”. They stated that Eritrean revolutionary Struggle should be mass based, i.e., popular, secular and with internationalists outlook. They declared their full support for national liberation in Eritrea headed by Eritrean Liberation Front- Peoples Liberation Forces and recognized that group as the only genuine “Vanguard of the Eritrean revolutionary struggle for national independence and condemned the ‘Revolutionary Council” of the Eritrean Liberation Front and called it “anti-people” organization with counter-revolutionary policy and fascistic program that would eliminate the “vanguard” of the Eritrea revolution.. (lib. Vol.iii, no. 1 p.28.). They also condemned the supporters of the “revolutionary council” who called themselves as General Union of Eritrean Students (GUES-Bagdad). The Congress stated “We had the ELF-PLF as the Vanguard of the Eritrean revolutionary Struggle. We fully endorse the program and activities of ELF-PLF and reaffirm our commitment to its ideals”(lib. Vol.iii, no. 1 p.29.).

EFLNA saw itself as part of the leftist African student movements and sent telegram to PAIGC on congratulating them on their success for gaining independence for Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde (lib. Vol.iii, no. 1 p.31). It conducted fund raising “Eritrean Solidarity Night” in August 1973 and gave speech in New York city (lib. Vol.iii, no. 1 p.39.). EFLNA declared Eritrea as an African country. (lib. Vol.iii, no. 1 p.39).

In 1973, EFLNA sent a message to ESUNA on its 21 Congress accusing ESUNA of failing to actively support the ELPF, especially in relation to what EFLNA saw a situation in which the revolutionary forces of PLF were pitted against counter revolutionary forces of ELF and Ethiopian government. It accused them of being formalistic and sophistic in their arguments. They wrote to the editor of struggle, the main journal of ESUNA, saying the message of solidarity received from ESUNA was insulting and infuriating. lib. Vol.iii, no. 1 p.41).

The Fourth General Congress and the EFLNA in 1973

The EFLNA held its 4th General Congress in Washington D.C from 1st to 3rd September, 1973. In this Congress, it (a) declared that its commitment to the principled and correct revolutionary line of the EPLF, (b) sought stricter enforcement of organizational discipline on memberships, (c) agreed to revoke membership privileges whenever necessary, (d) recommended that the Women’s Question in Eritrea be studied and wanted to conduct political education, establishing a committee that would set up syllabus for reading articles and books by all members and disseminate regular publications in Tigrinya, (e) stressed that fund raising in every chapter to be more effective, and (f) agreed that the executive committee to meet quarterly (lib vol.iii, no.1,

p.6). It received message of solidarity from African Youth Movement for Liberation and Unity (lib. Vol. iii, no. 1 p.41).

The 4th Congress accepted in principles the proposed federation of Eritreans for Liberation in Europe (EFLE), the General Union of Eritreans Students (GUES-Cairo) and Eritreans for Liberation in North America (Lib.vol. iii, no.1, p. 9). The congress raised the issue of its relations with ESUNA and expressed its uneasiness with ESUNA's contradictory position on the Eritrean question, especially in its insistence that the Eritrean question was a national rather than colonial question. EFLNA reasoned that ESUNA equated the Eritrean question on the same level as the question of nationalities such as Wollo and Gojjam in Ethiopia. EFLNA asked "If the ESUNA members were concerned on the welfare of the Eritrean people, why did they not publicize and mobilize support for the 'Ethiopian' peoples in Eritrea in their 12 years of struggle against oppression of Ethiopian 'peoples' in Eritrea. How can it remain neutral in the life-death struggle between revolution and counterrevolution in Eritrea when the vital interests of the 'Ethiopian' peoples are at stake?" How is it the colonial question in Eritrea different from that in Namibia or Guinea Bissau, for instance? Why does ESUNA deny the Eritrean national liberation struggle equality of exposure with the other national liberation struggles in its programs and forums?" P.7

In 1973, The EFLNA chapters around the country created alliances with the socialist and other leftist movements. For instance in 1973, an Eritrean Liberation Support committee made up of Third World (Afro-Americans, African, afro-Asian and Latin American) and North American "progressives" movements claimed its commitment to the cause of the Eritrean national liberation movement and proletariat movements against imperialism world-wide. The support group stated that it saw the Eritrean nationalist liberation struggle an integral part of the international struggles (lib. Vol.iii no.1 p.22). Another example was the case of the Boston chapter of EFLNA allied itself with movements of the left and far left persuasion including African Liberation support committee, the Marxist-Leninists of North America, Resistance in the Middle East, New American Movement, May 15th Coalition, Women's Committee to Support Palestians, Afro-Asian Student Organizations, Young Americans against War and Fascism, as well as individuals who claimed to be progressives, African Students from the Somali republic, students from greater Boston Communities and educational institutions in 1973 (lib. Vol.iii, no.1 p. 23).

The 5th General Congress and the EFLNA in 1974-75

EFLNA's 5th General Congress was held from August 30 to September 2 in 1974 in Boston Massachusetts. Over 200 Eritreans, including a large number of women from many cities across the US and Canada participated in the Congress. Many leftist movements and individuals attended the special events. A rally was held on the night of September 1st, to hail the 13th Anniversary of the beginning of the Eritrean armed struggle. The congress revised EFLNA's constitution, conducted two workshops, one workshop focusing on EFLNA issues of mobilization and organizational methods of becoming a strong chapters and another workshop on the Eritrean nationalist liberation struggle. The Congress also heard reports from 13 chapters, the political education committee, and the editorial board and the executive board, and assessed the success and the problems of the movement. In addition, women separately discussed their role in the movement and how to mobilize women in the movement. In this meeting, members spent more

time on organizational and ideological matters rather than on personality issues and squabbling between individuals. They agreed for the need for mobilization of hundreds more of Eritreans. (Lib. Vol.iv, no.1, p.3-4).

In this congress, the movement defined its tasks more clearly as follows: 1. Mobilize all Eritreans in North America, and pay attention to mobilizing Eritrean women, 2. Raise the political consciousness of Eritreans through centralized political education programs, seminars, 3. Carry out propaganda and raise material support for the armed struggle, 4. Establish ties and work for the principled unity of all leftist movements abroad, and 5. Establish principled fraternal relations with all leftist known then as progressive organizations (Lib. Vol. iv, no.1, p.5-6).

EFLNA condemned the Ethiopian military regime for its massacre of Eritrean children, women and men in Western Eritrea and the systematic poisoning Eritrean waters, and the military repression in Ethiopia. It condemned the Revolutionary Council for its decision to wipe out the EPLF by force and reaffirmed its resolute support for the Eritrean People's Liberation Forces and its "revolutionary political line and program" (Lib. Vol.iv, no.1, p.6).

EFLNA in its fifth congress supported the spirit of unity expressed in Pavia declaration with units of GUES, and EFLE. It received messages of support and solidarity from Afro-Asian, Latin American People Solidarity Forum, Seattle Branch, and the Central Organization of the US Marxist-Leninist (Boston Branch) (COUSMSEL) (Lib. Vol.iv, no.1, p.9).

In its publication, EFLNA wrote about its other activities including condemning atrocities of the Ethiopian government. It gave account of brutality of the Ethiopian army including the killings of 30 men in *Ailet* and *Gumbet* villages who were herded into a house and then set on fire in June 11, 1967, the bombing of Keren city, killing of civilians the December 16, 1967 which forced of thousands to flee of refugee camps in the Sudan, and poisoning of *Mensae* and *Sahel* area in which 50 people died of poisoning on May 11, 1974, and 250 in *Umi Hager* in August 1974 (Lib. Vol.iv, no.1, pp.18). It provided the declaration of EPLF to the people in Tigrinya, Arabic and English. It also gave news on Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau. (Lib. Vol.iv, no.1, p.18). It listed its news section that EFLNA staged a vigorous demonstration in NYC in front of the UN Building to protest the massacre of 250 Eritrean civilians in *Umi Hager* in 1974. It praised the support of what it called the progressive organizations and individuals and condemned US imperialism and Israel Zionism. It also reported other two demonstrations including one, on October 2 in Washington DC and October 9 in Detroit organized by the local chapters in DC and Detroit. The news report described the Demonstration in Washington DC and claimed about 60 Eritreans and supporters marched from the Ethiopian Embassy to the US State Department denouncing the two alliance of the two regimes demanding the end of military support of arms to the Ethiopian Junta and expressed outrage at the killing of 250 civilians in *Um Hager* with placards stating "Death to the military junta: 250 villagers massacred in *Um Hager*, remove the Ethiopia troops from Eritrea and stop poisoning Eritrean waters (Lib. Vol.iv, no.1, p.27).

The EFLNA newsletter published the bombing of villages north and west of Asmara in February 10 and 11, 1975 (Liberation vol.4, no.3 Feb-March 75) and celebration of African Liberation Day in 1975, support and its support for the Yeman and Oman liberation struggles, (Lib. Vol.4, no.4) June and July 1975). In this issue, pieces on Eritrean women, on South Africa, historical materialism and Eritrean working class united front against Ethiopia fascist junta (Liberation vol.4, no.5, July and August 1975).

The 6th General Congress and EFLNA in 1975-76

The 6th General Congress of Eritreans for Liberation was held from August 29 to September 2 in 1975 in Washington DC. Eritreans from all corners of the US and many cities of Canada participated in the congress. The congress celebrated the 14th anniversary of the Eritrean nationalist movement in which an estimated 500 people took part. The program included speeches, solidarity messages from 24 organizations prominently among them was the solidarity message received from the Irish Republican Movement in Dublin, Ireland, slide shows as well as cultural programs. Owusu Sadauki a representative of African Liberation Support Committee delivered a speech of support. The leaders of the EFLNA explained that EFLNA has grown in number, size, and political maturity although the publicity works was weak and limited, and ideological development was low, and ended the meeting with criticism and self criticism. The leaders presented their visions for the success of the Eritrean revolution through successive stages of revolutions, explaining the radical changes in Eritrea and internationally in Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos, Mozambique and other countries. (Lib. Vol.5, no.1, September October 1975 p. 2).

EFLNA reported to its members that there has been cessation of civil war between the Revolutionary Council of ELF and EPLF since November 1974 and further escalation of the liberation war in February 1975 (Lib. Vol.5, no.1, September October 1975 p. 2-3). EFLNA expressed its support for Zimbabwe, Azania, Angola, Namibia, Djibouti Rio-de Oro, Spanish Sahara, Palestinian, Oman liberation movements and hailed the victory of Mozambique, Principe and Sao Tome, Cape Verde over Portuguese colonialism. It reported it received support from Eritrean people's Support Committee (EPSC) of Madison, Wisconsin (Lib. Vol.5, no.1, September October 1975 p.10).

EFLNA sent a letter of congratulating the MPLA in 1975 after Angola won independence on November 11, 1975. EFLNA rejected the Khartoum Unity Agreement between the foreign mission of EPLF and revolutionary council of the ELF that met between September 2 to 7, 1975, and its indicated that it supported the UN resolution Zionism was a form of racism (Lib. Vol.5, no.2, October , November 1975 pp: 1-23).

In 1975, The Eritrean struggle gained international coverage after the February and March offensive in Eritrea by ELF and EPLF. The EFLNA chapters in many cities demonstrated condemning Ethiopian army and conducted teach in many cities. Eritreans gains support from many international movements. Support came from a famous Afro-American poet, Amiri Baraka, co chair of Congress of African People in the US, Saduki of the African Liberation support Committee, African Youth movement for Liberation, Afro -Asian solidarity organization, Somali

Student Union, the Movement Haitien de Liberations. Following this recognition, a number of Eritrean Liberation Support Committee have been formed in the US and Europe. The debate on Eritrea among leftist organizations increased. Some criticized the EPLF adopting a two stage revolution and some criticized it for not declaring a Communist party at time and some considered Ethiopia a socialist government. (Lib. Vol.5, no.3, January and February 1976 p. 25).

The Liberation newsletter reported that EFLNA celebrated International Women's Day on May 8 and recognized the significance of women in the struggle for national liberation (Lib. Vol.5, no.4, March, April, 1976 p.3-5).

In 1975, The EFLNA hailed the end of EPLF's relations with its foreign mission headed by Osman Saleh Sabbe. It called Sabe's group as reactionary and blamed Sabbe and his group willingness to peace solutions with the Derg in 1974 and for signing the Khartoum unity of merger with the ELF (Liberation vol.5, no.5 May, June 1976, p.3-7). It also celebrated May first as the International workers Day (p.13) and May 25 the African Liberation Day ((Liberation vol.5, no.5 May, June 1976, p.18). In August, it publicized the joint statement of EPRP and EPLF affirming that the Eritrean question is not a national question but a colonial and supported the growing solidarity between EPRP and EPLF). (Liberation vol.5, no.6 May, June 1976, p.26

In July 1976, EFLNA executive Committee wrote a message to all members of branches, study groups, and individual members a response to a text that came from Eritreans in Europe which stated the EPLF killed Marxist Eritreans in the field. The organization denied such killings and attacked the document as false and defended EPLF's policy and stand vehemently. (Lib.1-5?)

The 7th General Congress and EFLNA in 1976-77

The Seventh general congress of EFLNA was held from August 18 to 22, 1976 in Washington DC. Eritreans from various places in the US and Canada attended. On Friday August 20, 1976 a special session was held to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Eritrean revolution. Over 750 Eritreans as well as supporters from many countries participated in the various celebration and programs. The leader of the EFLNA gave a speech on the justness of the armed struggle, how popular and revolutionary it was. A representative of PLO gave a solidarity message. There was film and slide shows and photo exhibit and cultural presentation depicting the struggle. The Congress greeted the victory of MPLA in Angola, support for Azania, Zimbabwe and Namibia, Palestine, Oman, Western Sahara, East Timor and Djibouti. EFLNA reaffirmed its support for EPLF. It called for more political education and greater relations with organizations in the US and condemned ESUNA, and EWSCNA . (Liberation vol.5, no.1 ? September and October 76 p. 3-6).

In the Tigrinya version it stated that EFLNA has become a mass organization of the EPLF. The article stated that this formalized what has been going on for a while. (Liberation vol.5, no.1, September and October 76, p37). The article also indicated that same thing happened in Europe as well, i.e., EFLE also became a mass organization of the EPLF (Liberation vol.5, no.1 ? September and October 76, p. 43)

In its publications, EFLNA welcomed the first Congress of the EPLF that was held from January 23 to 31, 1977 and hailed it as historic. The EFLNA participated in the First Congress of the EPLF and gave its political report to the Congress. Liberation reported that 300 delegates, youth, mass organizations workers, peasants, students participated.. EPLF's First Congress held in Sahel in Northern Eritrea where the national democratic program was adopted (Liberation vol.6 no.4 p.3) (Liberation vol.6 no.4 and 5 March June 1977pp.12-13; Liberation vol.6, no.3 p.3 May, June 1976, p.3 and pp.12-13). In this Congress, the EPLF declared itself as self reliant organization and changed its name from Forces to Front. It declared that it has drafted a constitution, a new insignia and a flag of the organization. The EPLF also declared itself as *vanguard or Merih* of the Eritrean Revolution run by a Central Committee made of 43 members with 37 permanent and 6 alternate members. (Liberation vol.6, no.6 August 1977 p Liberation vol.6, no.3 Feb 1977 pp. 11-12).

In 1977, EFLNA presented the unofficial English version of the first issue of *Vanguard, Merih*, the monthly journal of the Eritrean Liberation Front-People's Liberation Forces (ELF-PLF) from its original Tigrinya which was originally published in January 1973 as *Merih* Vol.1, No.1. January 1973. Liberation vol.6, no. July and August1977l). This publication stated "The first issues of the Vanguard, the monthly of the Eritrean Liberation Front Peoples' Liberation Forces and the Eritrean Liberation Forces, published in the field, is a significant step in the advance of our struggle against Ethiopia colonialism and the US imperialism ...Eritrea people have been fighting against the Amhara feudalists and US imperialists for a long time, at first through peaceful means and then through full-fledged armed struggle. Since the Eritrean people have to persevere in a protracted struggle, they need a vanguard party that can clear the path of the armed struggle and lead the people according to correct patriotic principles, free of tribal, religious, sectarian and egotistic considerations. Vanguard is our party's journal. 'Vanguard' means that which propels forward, shatters the enemy as it advances and leads and guides by fighting at the forefront. A party which starts and leads a movement to destroy oppression is known as a 'vanguard' party. We have given our journal the name vanguard because it declares our guiding line and principles, points out the path of the Eritrean people's struggle, and the voice and echo of the people and the fighters who are beating back the enemy in the front lines. (Vanguard??? P. 4)

The 8th General Congress and EFLNA as a Mass Organization

The 8th general congress of Eritreans for Liberation in North America was held from August 15 to 20 in 1977 in Washington DC. It was attended by 700 members and non member Eritreans residing all over the US and Canada. A representative of the EPLF also attended the congress. The representative gave a well received speech. Messages from Eritrean organizations in Europe and Middle East-Eritreans for Liberation in Europe (which became the Association for Eritrean Workers in Europe and the Association of Eritrean Students in European) the Association of Eritrean Women in Beirut, the Association of Eritrean Workers in Kuwait, Association of Eritrean Workers in Libya and the Association of Eritrean Students in Libya. The Congress deliberations centered on the discussing the political significance of the EPLF's First Congress, reports from the Central Committee of EFLNA, reports of from various chapters and the various committees. Analysis of the international situation, the situation in Eritrea and the North of Africa and the

internal organizations issues of EFLNA were the focus of discussion. The congress passed resolution including its alignment with the international organizations that advocate for national liberation, socialism, anti imperialism, anti colonialism and especially the African national liberation movements including Zimbabwe, Azania, Palestine, Oman, Sahara, East Timor, Philippines, Puerto Rica and other struggles against imperialism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the working classes in the capitalistic society especially in the working class in US and oppressed nationalities against monopoly capital. This is significant because this it the first time it openly mentioned its alliance with working class and minorities in the US. (Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp.1-2)

The 8th congress hailed the EPLA for its victories and called its success as part of the correct strategy of the “People’s War,” using the Maoist rhetoric to describe the Eritrean nationalist movement. It also acclaimed the EPLF’s First Congress as a great political victory and accepted the Maoist oriented Revolutionary Democratic Program adopted by the EPLF First Congress. The EFLNA’s Congress pledged to implement the national democratic program and the resolutions of the EPLF Congress. What we see here is that it has increasingly become allied with the EPLF and subordinating its independence to fit to the programs and resolutions of the Eritrea based nationalist movement, EPLF. Calling EPLF as the *Vanguard* of the Eritrean Revolution, EFLNA condemned ELF’s campaign against the EPLF and denounced the resolutions passed at the 3rd regular meeting of the ELF’s Revolutionary Council (RC) while expressing support the rank and file of ELF fighters. ((Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp. 2.)

The 8th Congress discussed in detail EFLNA’s role and tasks in the Eritrean struggle in relation to those of the EPLF’s mass organizations inside and outside the country. The leaders argued vehemently of the necessity of solidifying the strength and unity of the so called “revolutionary patriotic forces” around EPLF. The leaders noted that the EPLF’s mass organizations of workers, peasants, women, students, and youth have grown tremendously and were playing remarkable role in the revolution. On this basis, the Congress passed a resolution to reorganize the EFLNA’s organizational structure and in place of EFLNA, two mass organizations, the Association of Eritrean Students in North America (AESNA) and the Association of Eritrean Women in North America (AEWNA) were established. This reorganization was meant to enable Eritrea patriots (nationalists in exile) a more active role in the movement and unite the AESNA and AEWNA to work more closely with the EPLF in its organizing structure by transforming these essentially autonomous organizations into a more of mass organization. (Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp.2).

Although the movement assessed its achievement positively in terms of the politicization of the members, the Congress wanted to increase more political education, mobilized non-member Eritrea and strength its ties with what it termed anti-imperialist movements in North America (Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp.3.)

In the 8th Congress, EFLNA discussed its relationship with ESUNA and called the ESUNA, Ethiopian Students Union in Europe, Ethiopian Women's Study Groups in North America (members of World Wide Federation of Ethiopian Students) as social chauvinistic in their stand against Eritrea and EPLF and resolved to condemn them as national chauvinists. (Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp.3). It also declared the Congress as a sign of unity of the revolutionary and patriotic forces at home and abroad, in the field and in Diaspora around EPLF, and thus an indicator of the active organized participation of the Eritrean masses in the struggle for national salvation and liberation. (Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp.3)

In the month of September, the Association of Eritrean Students in North America (AESNA), and the Association of Eritrean Women in North America (AEWNA) celebrated the 16th anniversary of the armed struggle. EFLNA estimated 4,000 people including Eritreans, supporters and friends participated in the programs in Washington DC, New York, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco and Los Angeles among others (Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp.4). The programs included speeches from a representative of the EPLF, guest speakers from ZANU and PLO, a new film on the national liberation, a cultural show and photo exhibits and solidarity messages. ZANU representative spoke in Washington DC and New York City. The PLO representative to the UN spoke in New York. Messages of Solidarity came from several organizations that considered themselves as anti-imperialist and revolutionary organizations, including African Youth Movement for Liberation and Unity, Group of Khmer Residents in America, May 18 Revolutionary Organization of Haiti, the Union of Democratic Filipinos, Central Organization of the US Marxists Leninists, Communist Party of Canada (M-L), Iranian Students Association-member of Confederation of Iranian Students (national Union) Organization of Arab Students, Organization of Progressive Pakistani, the Guardian etc. Eritrea in Struggle newsletter claimed around 1,500 participants came to the 16th anniversary celebration in Washington DC. (Eritrea in Struggle: Newsletter of the Association of Eritrean Students in North America Vol.ii, No. 1 October 1977 pp.4)

The 9th General Congress and the End of EFLNA in 1979

The 9th General Congress of the Eritreans for Liberation in North America and the second congress of the Association of Eritrean Women in North America (AEWNA) between August 19-20 1978 in Washington DC. was held between 14-18 August 1978. Both organizations unanimously condemned the EPLF leaders as "capitulationist leadership" and decided to cut off all relations with it. EFLNA has been a mass organization of the EPLF for two years and AEWNA has been a mass organization for one year (See: Against the capitulationist line of the 'Leaders' of the Eritrean Revolution EFLNA New York New York 1978 p.1). It justified its actions by stating that "The stand taken at our congresses is a culmination of year and half internal struggle with the EPLF leaders on major questions of strategy and tactics of the Eritrean revolution. The principal differences between us the EPLF leadership lie: whether to regard the Soviet-led revisionism as our enemy or friend, especially when it is directly confronting our revolution, on the question of peaceful solution and the characterized the Ethiopian military junta." (See: Against the

capitulationist line of the 'Leaders' of the Eritrean Revolution EFLNA New York New York 1978 p.1) . The pamphlet presented the fundamental questions as it saw it and its differences with EPLF. First it stated clearly that EFLNA's role has been "organizing Eritreans in North America, cultivating them in revolutionary theory, exposing the reaction line in the Eritrea struggle, publicizing EPLF, raising material support for the EPLF and participating in the armed struggles and other tasks. However, it saw it as its duty to expose EPLF leadership's serious errors accusing the EPLF as having departed from "the correct line" and, along with the ELF leadership, had "capitulated to the Soviet led revisions". They stated that the Soviet revisions had openly declared "counter revolutionary war" against Eritrea, along with Cubans and South Yemenis and the fascist junta in Ethiopia and were waging war to crush the Eritrean revolution. It accused ELF and EPLF as having embraced the Soviets regime as "the strategic ally" of the Eritrean Revolution and the Ethiopian fascist Junta as an "anti-imperialist force." According to EFLNA, both Fronts have in the most "shameless manner betrayed the national struggle" and "have proclaimed themselves as apologists of the Soviet-led revisions aggression. ..Under the guidance of Soviet revisions, they have renounced the banner of self-reliant protracted people's war and are waging the white flag of 'peaceful solution' Thus, the leadership of the two fronts have become fifth columnists of the service of Soviet-led revisionism in Eritrea" (See: Against the capitulationist line of the 'Leaders' of the Eritrean Revolution EFLNA New York New York 1978 p.1

From its inception EFLNA was affiliated with the formerly PLF and which later became EPLF. The sudden turn of event of relationship between EFLNA and EPLF sent shock waves among its members. EFLNA changed from an organization that treated every decision made by the EPLF as correct, principled and revolutionary to suddenly considering it as "counter revolutionary and revisionist". After returning to their respective places of residences, members entered into a personal and collective crisis of loss of direction. The organization they worshiped as faultless was suddenly diminished and tarnished. The connections with EPLF that have given them a sense of having an impact on events in Eritrea was suddenly lost. The cutting off such link sent them into period of personal reckoning and conundrum. Many individuals who committed themselves to the movement confronted uncertainty in their beliefs and convictions. Many had sacrificed their scholarship from some illustrious universities in the US or bright future and had devoted their time and money to the movement. Many of them delayed commitment to having families and children, and professional careers. From the beginning there was so much confusion and disillusionment among members. By 1979 the members could be categorized into four discernible large groups. The first were "loyal" members of EFLNA who held the line of the congress and maintained their beliefs in the actions of dissociating from EPLF. The second group consisted of "loyal" EPLF supporters who questioned the decision to disconnect from EPLF. The third group were members of EFLNA who were on the margins of action and decision making and found a new opportunity to become more powerful within the student movement by aligning themselves with the "loyal" EPLF supporters. These two regroup to bring back members to supporting and affiliating with EPLF. The largest majority refocused their energy to their own personal lives including going back to school, pursuing professional careers and getting married and creating own families in the US and most vowed to participate in non-political events concerning Eritrea and Eritreans. There were open conflict and even fist fights between the "loyal" members of EFLNA and the "loyal" followers of EPLF in some US cities. By 1979, with increasing internal squabbles and in fights within the EFLNA, it ceased to exist as a viable organization.

Conclusion

This is a brief history of a student inspired movement that came out in 1970ies, where there was more freedom and opportunity in the United States for movements to operate in the US and also connect with radical and organized political organizations in other parts of the world freely and openly. Even though initially hesitant of the new found freedom to organize and mobilize in the United States, Eritreans in the US soon found open transnational fields that allowed them to organize and mobilize without direct restrictions or repressions from authorities and organizations in the US. The organizers of EFLNA took advantage of this opportunity and organized and mobilized students, former students, intellectuals and workers to act as active supporters of the nationalist movements inside Eritrea, and particularly the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. Learning from own experience and experiences of other movements in the United States, EFLNA became a forum for learning how to organize and mobilize and foster inter organizational linkages both within the US and in Eritrea. In this sense, EFLNA was not an a transnational wing or extension of the Eritrean nationalist movements, but a unique growth of the fertile and tolerant political climate in the United States that allowed Eritrean in the United States in the 1970ies to focus their attention to the concerns on events and activities in their home country. What role of EFLNA in shaping the ideological and leadership make up of the EPLF is beyond the scope of this paper and will have to be written by veterans of the EFLNA and EPLF. We have, however, to avoid the tendency to exaggerate the role played by EFLNA in the Eritrean nationalist struggle, without taking into account the role played by Eritreans in all walks of life, in Eritrean villages and cities, inside Ethiopia and in the Middle East, as well the open and hidden support of non-Eritrean individuals and groups, international organizations and governments in different parts of the world to the Eritrean cause.