

# ERITREA: GREAT STRIDES TOWARDS NATIONAL UNITY

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## GREAT STRIDES TOWARDS NATIONAL UNITY

"Genuine and principled national unity," "Establishment of a single national democratic front with the worker-peasant alliance at its core and uniting all patriotic forces" -- these are among the key slogans of all peoples waging national liberation struggles. In Eritrea, these slogans have been raised by the patriotic masses and liberation fighters with particular insistence and urgency.

The reason is not hard to find. The Eritrean people united behind the demand of national independence have hurled themselves into the greatest war in their militant history. They have inflicted heavy defeats on the Ethiopian occupiers and their backers and brought their liberation war close to victory. However, the existence of two fronts (the Eritrean People's Liberation Front and the Eritrean Liberation Front) and the contradiction between them has hampered the early achievement of the people's aspiration. Taking advantage of this situation, the Dergue is preparing for an all-out offensive to reverse the tide of the war, weaken and finally crush the Eritrean struggle.

## TWO-LINE STRUGGLE

From the outset, there has been a two-line struggle in the Eritrean liberation movement on how to resolve the secondary contradiction between the EPLF and ELF. The reactionaries within the ELF have consistently sought to resolve this contradiction by force of arms. Towards this end, they declared a

war of liquidation against the EPLF in February 1972 and plunged the Eritrean liberation movement into a criminal civil war. After the cessation of the civil war in November 1974, they turned to sabotage in an attempt to foil the military exploits of the Eritrean People's Liberation Army. They also resorted to widespread beating, imprisonment and assassination of members of the EPLF's mass organizations and people's militia.

The enemies of the Eritrean struggle have tirelessly fanned the fire lighted by the internal reactionaries, hoping that a second civil war might break out between the EPLF and ELF. The Dergue has expressed its readiness to negotiate with Eritrean "progressives" in an attempt to split and then crush the liberation movement. The Osman Saleh Sabbe clique of traitors and counter-revolutionaries (the so-called "People's Liberation Forces") has worked overtime to sharpen the secondary contradictions so as to gain recognition as an alternative "third force". In an effort to strengthen the reactionary forces -- including the Osman Sabbe clique -- and isolate, weaken and smash the EPLF, certain Arab countries have interfered wantonly in the internal affairs of the Eritrean struggle.

Emanating from its firm conviction that the unity of all patriotic and democratic forces is a strategic necessity for the victory of the national democratic revolution and taking into account the enemy's maneuvers, the EPLF has waged a consistent and protracted struggle to resolve secondary contradictions democratically and step by step achieve the establishment of a single national democratic front. During the period of the civil war, it raised the slogan, "All our guns against the common enemy, democratic solution to secondary contradictions" and took a defensive military position vis a vis the ELF. Throughout, it directed all its fire-power against the enemy and persisted in organizing, politicizing and arming the masses. It dealt a powerful rebuff to the enemy's attempt to split the Eritrean movement by openly declaring that it will negotiate with the Dergue only in the presence of the ELF. It consistently called for cooperation and joint work with the ELF on the basis of a commonly agreed upon minimum program. It carried out persistent agitation among the masses and the ELF fighters calling on them to actively struggle for genuine and principled national unity.

## OCTOBER 20 AGREEMENT

The protracted struggle of the EPLF and the masses bore fruit on October 20, 1977. On that day, the ELF and EPLF signed an important agreement on national unity in which they outlined the general principles for the establishment of a single national democratic front in Eritrea. The October 20 agreement also calls for the formation of a joint political leadership and joint committees dealing with military, economic and social affairs, information and foreign relations to coordinate the work of the two fronts in the transition period. It charges the joint political leadership with the task of convening a unification congress after proper conditions have been created for its convocation and in accordance with procedure agreed upon by both organizations.

The October 20 agreement signed the death warrant on the Osman Sabbe clique when it refused to recognize it as a third force and called on its rank and file to join the ELF or EPLF.

On March 15, 1978, after six months of bitter struggle, the October 20 agreement took an important step forward with the signing by the EPLF and ELF of the "Document for the Practical Implementation of the October 20 Agreement". The March 15 document lays down the political principles that form the basis for the unity of the two organizations and detailed the practical steps that have to be taken to convert the October 20 agreement into reality.

The March 15 Document states that the EPLF and ELF agreed to abide by the following general political principles:

Oppose Ethiopian colonialism, world imperialism, Zionism and fight for the complete independence of Eritrea.

Oppose internal reaction -- i. e. all those who weaken the unity of the Eritrean people, exploit the masses and violate their rights by inflaming backward tribal, regional and religious sentiments.

Oppose all foreign interference that infringes upon the identity and unity of the Eritrean people.

Fight to consolidate the unity of the Eritrean people.

Consolidate relations with the progressive forces and liberation movements throughout the world.

The March 15 Document asserts that the joint political leadership will base its work on these general principles and implement the tasks agreed upon by both organizations.

On the basis of the March 15 Document, the leadership of the EPLF and ELF held an important meeting from April 20-24. In this meeting the joint political leadership made up of six members, three from each organization -- the Secretary General, Vice- Secretary General and Chairman of the Military Committee of the EPLF and the Chairman, Vice- Chairman and head of the military bureau of the ELF -- was formed. The committees dealing with the military, economic and social affairs, information and foreign relations were set up.

The October 20 agreement, the March 15 Document and the decisions of the April 20-24 meeting are of far-reaching significance. They will enable the Eritrean masses to unite all their resources, enhance their fighting spirit and capacity, and deal a crushing blow to their enemies. No wonder the masses received the news of the signing of the agreements with boundless joy and mammoth demonstrations of support.

Conversely, news of the agreements brought fear and dismay to the enemies of the Eritrean revolution. Not reconciled to their defeat, the Dergue and its backers, the internal reactionaries -- in particular the Osman Sabbe clique -- and their supporters are working feverishly to sabotage the October 20 agreement and obstruct the steady march towards principled national unity.

However, no matter what twists and turns lie ahead, the establishment of a single national democratic front in Eritrea -- which is the categorical demand of our heroic and patriotic masses -- is inevitable.