

The Eritrean Covenant

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE JUSTICE AND PEACE¹

Reviving the Eritrean covenant: We, the authors of this statement, are a diverse group of civic-minded Eritreans who come from all walks of life, from inside Eritrea and the Diaspora and from different ethnic, regional, and political background and persuasions. Individually, like many ordinary Eritreans, we have been involved in varying degrees in Eritrea's struggle for independence. Since 1991, we have been speaking out on behalf of all Eritreans against the injustices perpetuated by the PFDJ ethnocratic regime^{2, 3}. We invariably have done so while advocating the urgent need for constructive dialog, national reconciliation, and the principle of unity through diversity as the cornerstones of peace, stability and justice in Eritrea, but unfortunately with little prospect for a meaningful change. After years of wrestling with the decision of how best to broach these difficult issues, we have reached a consensus to speak out as a group following the long tradition of Eritrean Muslims of resisting oppression and domination that started in the 1940's and decidedly gave rise to the development of many patriotic movements and eventual independence. However, seventy years later, the very just demand for fairness and equality that spurred the independence movement remains elusive for Eritrean Muslims. The need for us to consider speaking out collectively has become ever more important and urgent especially in this post 911 era where politics of fear is opportunistically peddled by the ruling clique in Asmara and some politicians in the opposition. In this statement, we examine these issues in the context of the overall deteriorating situation in Eritrea that prompted us to speak out, and the attendant threats of the PFDJ's ethnocratic policies to the peaceful coexistence and mutual respect between Eritrean Christians and Muslims. We speak out so as to heighten public awareness of these critical issues and their wider implications of these conflicts to the future of our country's security and prosperity.

We hereby attempt to re-ignite the spirit of initiative-taking and fighting injustice, hoping to eradicate the state of indifference, opportunism, and narrow self-interest now rampant among many. Most importantly, we urge all fair minded Eritreans to be creative and resourceful in coming up with practical solutions to these decades-old conflicts—conflicts that without a doubt remain as impediments to our efforts to make up for the lost seven decades of missed opportunities for social and economic developments and for the chance to compete in regional, if not in global, markets. These issues are far too important and complex to be left to politicians alone.

Thus, from this new and fresh perspective and in a constructive spirit that seeks to promote a win-win solution for all Eritreans, we have decided to voice our concerns and views on the challenges we face and on the possible ways forward towards a new, democratic, and more inclusive common future. We firmly believe that these challenges, though seemingly insurmountable, could be resolved if we apply radically different and transformative approaches. Throughout our historical struggle, there have been many challenges and setbacks, but there were also opportunities that were missed that could have pointed the way forward to a more just society. In these challenging times, we have a narrow window of opportunity that we all must seize if we are to build a prosperous, peaceful, and stable country that we all can collectively call home.

I - Objectives

1. To assert our rights and to restate our core values, aspirations, and guiding principles with regard to Eritrea and Eritreans, we have authored this document as a position statement hoping it would serve as:

- a. A cautionary narration of the deteriorating situation in Eritrea and its implications for Eritrea's national unity and the peaceful coexistence between Muslims and Christians.
 - b. An educational tool for those who may not be fully aware of the legal, social, and economic status of Eritrean Muslims.
 - c. A unified and fairly representative position statement and a platform for dialogue among Eritreans in an attempt to create a healthy environment.
 - d. A discussion paper to stimulate discussions for possible solutions and a way forward towards resolving our society's most precarious conflicts.
2. What follows is an articulation of some of the pressing issues that Muslims deeply care about and which inspired this initiative. It is only meant to be one starting point with recommendations that advance the scales of justice in the right direction. Understandably, some of the conflicts are easy to address and resolve; others will be more difficult and cannot be addressed in the absence of a legitimate, representative government. Eritrean Muslims understand this and will be patient as long as they see genuine efforts being made to resolve these conflicts. These issues should not and cannot be postponed till some future post-PFDJ Eritrea. They need to be part of the ongoing national dialog for democratic change in Eritrea.
3. **Eritrea's Moment:** At this historical juncture, we seize this moment to speak out now because we have become increasingly concerned by the following recent developments which have exacerbated the already troubling situation:
- a. The UN Security Council imposed sanctions on the Eritrean regime on Dec 2009 for its destructive role in destabilizing Somalia and refusing to negotiate with Djibouti to resolve the border issue. The UN resolutions text epitomizes the frustrations felt by international and regional organizations, in dealing with the Isaias regime's military adventure in Sudan, Ethiopia, Yemen, and now Djibouti. Undoubtedly, the arms embargo puts Eritrea in a precarious position to defend itself as it has become a pariah state in the eye of the international community. The resolution had the support of the African Union, and this is the only time in the history of this continental organization that it has called for sanctions against a member state. In 1974, the OAU had called for sanctions against the racist white minority regime in South Africa, but the Apartheid regime was not a member state of the organization. The sanctions are therefore unprecedented and indicative of the gravity of the situation.
 - b. The outcry and denunciations of the recent state-sponsored land grabbing and resettlement campaigns in the Lowlands. Facing current and pending food shortage as a result of its outdated policies and failed practices, the regime has formally announced in its Dec 2009 cabinet meeting that resettlement of farmers from the Highlands to Lowlands will be among its top priority.
 - c. Since the year 2000, army conscripts' desertion to neighbouring countries and with women no longer being forcibly conscripted, has radically changed the composition of the Eritrean Defence Force⁴. Still, Tigrinya-speaking Christians, although according to reliable sources make up less than 50% in the army, continue to constitute more than 90 percentile of the upper echelon of the state apparatus, including the military⁵, an imbalance that has been a source of political tensions in the society at large and insubordination and declining morale in the army. The tension is also partly due to the fact that Muslims deeply resented the use of national conscription as a principal means for promoting the Tigrignization of the Eritrean society.

- d. Moreover, the border war stalemate has taken its toll on Eritrean society over the last ten years and with no end in sight. The daily ongoing desertion did not escape the Ethiopian regime's attention which seeks to weaken Eritrea through a war of attrition. Lack of information on the Eritrean army's compositions, cohesion, and morale has and will likely constrain EU and US policy-makers from taking tougher positions against the regime for fear of introducing more uncertainties to the region. Some politicians, who for sectarian reasons wish to keep the ethnocratic regime intact after removing the dictator or by making a deal with him, use this inherent uncertainty and play the 'Somali chaos' fear card.
- e. More visibly, whenever there is a roundup of draft dodgers, some residents of the Eritrean Highlands misdirect their resentments towards those who conduct them, who often are disproportionately Muslims from the Lowlands. We are alarmed by this and several other reported incidents of ethnic and religious tensions between the army and civilians.
- f. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the majority of the youth fleeing conscription are Christian Tigigna speakers from the Highlands. This evokes painful memories in our history when one segment of our society is perceived to be less committed to national causes. The regime's controversial policy of shoot to kill at the border is often not enforced by those who ethnically relate to the deserters and thus view it as an act of fratricide, which in turn puts them at odds with those who resent being left behind to defend the country.
- g. The June 2009 ethnic unrest in the east of Akel Guzay drew wide support and solidarity from the local Eritrean Muslim community spurred by anger at the arrest of family members of the insurrectionist conscripts and the confiscations of their properties. The unrest started when a Muslim captain attempted to stop his commander from coercing a young Muslim conscripted girl as to become his concubine, a dreadful common practice of the ruling clique and its military leaders.
- h. After the 2000 border war, and after realizing the devastating effects of a failed policy of drafting women to the army, the regime stopped rounding them up while still punishing them by denying them access to education, jobs, and exit visas. Many Eritrean Muslim women in the rural areas have been denied access to education because their parents would not allow them to be drafted and perhaps used as concubines for the regime's corrupt officers. An IMF report states that the gender gap in education is much wider than it was before Eritrea's independence⁶.
- i. Since 1991, the PFDJ regime has continuously created obstacles for the half a million Eritrean Muslim refugees to return to their homeland and continues to treat Eritrean Muslims as second class citizens.
- j. The PFDJ regime failed to create a political and economic space under which all segments of the Eritrean society can live in peace and harmony.
- k. The often condescending and sometimes hostile attitudes towards Eritrean Muslims by some groups in the opposition, as evidenced by their deliberate and exclusionary practices, have also added urgency to the need to voice our concerns over their indifference and insensitivity towards the plight of Eritrean Muslims, especially to the question of the refugees' right of return, and the most recent land grabbing and resettlement campaigns.
- l. Eritrean Muslims do not have Western lobbyists and interest groups who advocate their

cause and fight for their interest.

4. The formal, state-sanctioned land grab policy became the tipping point that gave the majority of Eritrean Muslims sufficient reason to conclude that a long suspected ethnic cleansing policy of depopulating the Lowlands and subsequently resettling them with people from the Highlands was finally being consummated. The misguided policies, reckless actions, and ethnocratic attitudes of the PFDJ regime have undermined our national unity and exacerbated the political, historical, socio-economic disparities between the two segments of Eritrean society.
5. On the one hand, we are encouraged to see the regime is being abandoned daily by its rank and files who are rejecting its divisive policies of pitting Eritreans against each other along regional, ethnic, and religious lines; we are also encouraged that the struggle for justice has now created a strong force of diverse Eritreans who represent the true Eritrean mosaic and carry the banner of justice and fairness.

II - Eritrean Peoples Diversity

1. Rather than allowing Eritreans to be characterized by Nehnan Ealamanan⁷ (We and our Goals, hereafter NE) manifesto that divides the people along arbitrary linguistic lines, we hereby exercise our unalienable rights to express and assert who we are and how we wish to be characterized. All Eritreans, without exception, have the right to be what they choose to be and their overlapping identities should be recognized and respected. This is the only way that all Eritreans regardless of their cultural, regional, or religious background can coexist peacefully and with equality, sharing power and resources for mutual benefit and in accordance with fundamental principles of justice.
2. Islam and Christianity are genuinely indigenous to Eritrea and were well established ahead of many parts of the world. Christianity entered the region in less than 300 years after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, while Islam entered our region when the Prophet Mohammed was still being chased by his own tribe in the city of Mecca, the holiest place for Muslims. As such, the faiths of Eritreans are deeply rooted in their history and would accept neither over-bidding on their faith nor belittling their historical claim to their faith.
3. We recognise that Eritreans are a product of centuries of migration and interaction between different peoples and civilizations in the Horn of Africa, and Eritrea is home to all its citizens regardless of their faith or ethnic affiliation.
4. Muslims and Christians lived side by side for centuries, for the most part in peace and mutual respect, and for decades they fought side by side to rid themselves of Ethiopian occupation. Today, Eritrean Muslims are struggling alongside their fellow Eritreans from all faiths to bring about freedom and justice to Eritrea.
5. Eritrea is a country of mainly dual heritage: Islamic and Christian traditions and kinships; the religious impulse runs deep and is tightly woven into the fabric of the society.
6. No reliable official census has been taken but estimates (including those of the Government of Eritrea) put the proportion of Muslims and Christians in Eritrea as more or less equal.
7. Eritrean Muslims recognize that Eritrea's cultural communities have cross-border extensions as well: while the Christians of the Highlands find their religious and cultural kin inside Ethiopia similar to the Jeberti and the Saho speaking tribes; Muslims of the Western regions find it across the border in Sudan; and some Eritrean Muslims who inhabit the coastal regions of the Red Sea find their extensions across the Red Sea, while Afar Eritreans have their kin inside Ethiopia and Djibouti; and the Kunama have their kin in Ethiopia.

8. The social structure of Eritrean Muslims has always been greatly influenced by Islam; and the Muslim society is an evolving structured society partly influenced by sedentary, pastoralist and agro-pastoralist lifestyles and partly by urban experiences and characteristics that can only prosper in an environment of justice and equality.
9. Arabic is the store of Muslim civilization. To Eritrean Muslims, it is an important part of their heritage and their medium of education since time immemorial. Furthermore, Arabic has been a matter of agreement among Eritreans in all their protocols, including the 1952 constitution. The current ruling regime has made it its task to weaken and destroy Eritrea's Arabic heritage both as a medium and as a culture.
10. Eritrean Muslims do not appreciate the fact that their multi-layered identities and their choice of Arabic language as a medium is considered identity crisis by the ruling regime and those who subscribe to its values. Eritrean Muslims are aware that they are a product of many ethnic roots and use diverse languages and dialects that they want to preserve; but they do not accept their many dialects and languages to be tools for their disunity.
11. Taking into consideration the exception of the weighty major presence of Muslims in the Highlands, and of the counter-presence of Christians and adherents of indigenous belief systems in the Lowlands, the religious factor is primarily the major factor that defines the Eritrean person's psyche together with ethnic or clan affiliations and geographic locations.
12. In order to create an ethnic based political clientele, the ruling clique characterizes Eritrean Christians by a vaguely defined 'Tigrigna' as an identity name. Using language as the only attribute to classify the Eritrean people was first enunciated in the NE manifesto as advancing rights of all nationalities, though in reality it was a political objective to camouflage the clique's sectarian nature. Though many Eritrean Christians seem to have accepted the adaptation of the "Tigrigna" name as a category of identification for themselves, we believe this should not be imposed on the Jeberti who do not accept that classification; as well as other groups who do not accept the PFDJ's classifications.

III - Background

1. Eritrean Muslims reject the revision of history that has been taking place since the inception of the Isaias-led organization and policies which are being pursued persistently ever since the independence of Eritrea. We thus strive to offer a national narration of Eritrea's collective memory from our perspective. We hope that one of the outcomes of the truth and reconciliation process we are calling for would give an accurate account and reconcile the different national narratives of what has transpired in the last 70 years.
2. Eritrean Muslims are aware that the first crack in the anti-colonial struggle appeared in Bet Giorgis⁸ in 1947 when Ethiopia used its funds, terror, and influence over the Orthodox Church to gain supporters in its attempt to incorporate Eritrea. Eritrean Muslims found themselves at a crossroads when they were aggressively pressured to support partitioning Eritrea so that they can join their Muslim brethren in Sudan. But through the steadfast struggle of their representative party, Rabita Al-Islamiya⁹, they rejected partition and fought to stay with their Christian brothers in the only country they knew, Eritrea. This wish was realized when a minority Christian party joined them and the Independence Bloc was formed. Eritrean Muslims grudgingly settled for federation with Ethiopia, fighting within the federal framework to ensure equality for all Eritreans until that arrangement was also violated by Ethiopia and its Unionist supporters.
3. It was in response to the continued violation of the federal arrangement and Eritrea's autonomous constitution that Muslim exiles in Sudan first launched the Eritrean Liberation

Movement¹⁰ (Haraka), and subsequently the Eritrean Liberation Front, which fought to regain the violated rights of liberty and freedom.

4. After forcibly annexing Eritrea, Ethiopia continued to use the Christian Orthodox Church to lure Eritrean Christians into supporting its occupation designs. Unfortunately, many took the bait and aided Ethiopian aggression for some time. But by the early 1970s, increasingly larger numbers of Christians joined the independence movement and steadfastly stood alongside Muslims in the call for independence; their historic and heroic joint struggle is a solid record securely placed in history.
5. The era of the armed struggle witnessed a welcome event as Eritrean Christians swelled the ranks of fighters, injected a fresh zeal into the movement and brought it much closer towards becoming more representative of the population at large.
6. But it was not long before the movement faced some serious challenges and was forced early in its history to grapple with internal conflicts of a religious nature (for which it was ill prepared)—a small group of Christians under the leadership of Isaias accused the predominantly Muslim leadership of the time of discrimination, killings, and persecution of Christians. We believe that the accusations of the claimed killings, including that of Srryet Addis¹¹, which became a rallying cry, must be properly investigated along with the killings that were a result of those who defected to Ethiopia or spied on their fellow citizens.
7. Isaias Afwerki, the current dictator of Eritrea, gathered around him like-minded people mostly composed of Christian Highlanders. He quietly hatched a movement that was bent on monopolizing power in Eritrea through a small chauvinistic sectarian clique of the Highlands that never slept until it took control of the Eritrean struggle and monopolized the resistance. This eventually resulted in a joint assault on the ELF¹² in collaboration with the TPLF¹³, thus pushing the ELF outside the country.
8. The venomous NE Manifesto penned in those days became the rallying cry for all sorts of enmity and prejudice against Eritrean Muslims. The anti Muslim sentiments that we see rampant today did not just suddenly sprout out of nothing, they are deep rooted. The current prejudice that continues unabated in one form or another to this day is the direct outgrowth of the seed that was planted in the past by Isaias Afwerki and his clique who later nurtured and perfected these sentiments and raised them to new heights.
9. Despite the lengthy religious polemics the NE Manifesto spouts, the amelioration of Christian suffering was not Isaias' concern; far more Christian fighters were labelled Menka'a¹⁴ and other labels and killed by Isaias' death squad than those Isaias claimed to have been killed by the ELF leadership—Muslim victims of the ELF outnumber those of Christians.
10. As his illustrious career amply proved later, Isaias was consumed by two enduring passions; a) deep hatred of Muslims (as was evident by the anti-Muslim rancour discernible throughout the document as well as by his subsequent speeches and crackdown on Muslims), and, b) an insatiable lust for power which became the hallmark of the style of his leadership, which is the driving force behind his ongoing tyrannical grip over our nation.
11. Historical truthfulness requires us to note that Muslim leaders played a destructive role in igniting the fratricidal battles that wasted the lives of many Eritrean combatants; the manifestations of these wars have exasperated the disunity of Eritrean Muslims that still carries unhealed wounds that show up in the form of regional and ethnic schisms; we call upon all Eritreans to leave historical political differences and other destructive experience to the annals of history and move on recognizing that the civil war of the early seventies was mainly an intra-

Muslim conflict that Isaias exploited to consolidate his power. We should also note that he has embraced many ex-operatives of the Ethiopian occupational regimes, while Muslims remain prisoners to their differences of the past.

12. Historical truthfulness also requires us to note that it was Eritrean Muslims who flocked en masse to embrace the independence movement in its formative years and it was upon them that the full arsenal of Ethiopia's wrathful vengeance was unleashed when Ethiopia embarked on a horrible mission of mass massacres and uprooting of Muslims as a punishment. Historical records show, and living eyewitness recount the gruesome, merciless reign of terror that swept across Muslim villages and towns destroying lives, property, and everything else in its path.
13. Entire villages were razed to the ground; men, women, and infants were indiscriminately slaughtered; pillaging, armed aggression, rape, and massacre in the Muslim regions became a favourite pastime of the Ethiopian military (with some help, we are sad to note, from Eritrean Christian Commandos who collaborated with them) before atrocities engulfed the whole country.
14. The after-effects of this historical nightmare are truly incalculable in terms of its human cost: displacement, family disruption, educational deprivation, starvation, and marginalization that contributed greatly to Eritrean Muslims' current underprivileged status.
15. Eritrean Muslims are still suffering from the repercussions of those injustices and are determined to fight back relentlessly; they adamantly refuse to surrender or to abandon their cause and will continue to struggle for the general wellbeing of their country alongside their Eritrean compatriots.
16. Like all Eritreans, Muslims were jubilant when Eritrea became independent with the defeat of Ethiopian forces in 1991. Like the majority of Eritreans, they enthusiastically and overwhelmingly voted in mass for independence in the 1993 referendum, believing their suffering and marginalization will finally come to an end.
17. The hopes of Eritrean Muslims were quickly dashed when the course of events conspired to bring about Isaias at the helm of power. His post-independence actions clearly showed that he never let go of his old hatred for Eritrean Muslims. Soon after independence, the worst fears of Eritrean Muslims came true when his regime unveiled a series of draconian measures against them. Eritrean Muslims have been singled out more and suffered more (comparatively speaking) both under Ethiopian occupation and under the Isaias' dictatorship, which left them weaker, poorer, and more disadvantaged.
18. Throughout the era of the liberation struggle, the image that Isaias and his regime cultivated with the help of Western journalists and academics as being 'different from the rest of Africans' has been shattered following the crackdown of 2001. Disguised as reporters or human right activists, a handful of Westerners have done more to damage Christian-Muslim relations than any of the enemy's propaganda could have; some never seem to have left their destructive roles.

IV – Current Situation & Background

1. Having lived and suffered the brunt of successive meddling and repression by Ethiopia, Eritrean Muslims are deeply concerned about the current border stalemate. Even though Ethiopia has accepted the arbitral court ruling, we urge Ethiopia to allow demarcation process to start immediately.

2. Eritrean Muslims are committed to good neighbourliness with all neighbouring peoples in their cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, and insist on policies that foster peaceful coexistence in the region and beyond._
3. For the entire period of the struggle, most Muslims and Christians shared common dreams and aspirations that didn't materialize due to the coming to power of an oppressive regime._
4. We understand that in politics there are two essential tendencies, 1) an inclusive one that desires to extend resources as widely as possible, consistent with principles of equality and 2) an exclusive one that desires to control, limit the distribution of resources or gives greater control to particular groups. The latter is the prevalent tendency in today's Eritrea.
5. We understand that the ultimate aim of power is the control of resources. Sometimes these resources are intangible, such as freedom, empowerment, access to decision-making and education, and at other times they are tangible, such as food, water and shelter. In Isaias' Eritrea, a small ethno-centric minority has a grip on the state apparatus allowing itself a monopoly of power and public resources. It has used such monopoly to prolong its stay in power.
6. We do not have any doubt that the entire Eritrean society is suffering from dictatorial repression of a devastating kind. Muslims are working closely with all peace loving groups inside and outside Eritrea in the general struggle to rid their country from the yoke of oppression. But, Muslims, like other particular cultural or religious communities have their own unique and specific concerns that must be addressed separately.
7. Essentially, the pattern in Eritrea is the familiar one: a regime that refuses to give up or share power, and in defence of that power develops a pattern of worsening human rights abuses that in turn lead to greater reluctance to share power for fear of being held accountable for its abuses.
8. We believe that Eritrea is no different than any other African country, and if the PFDJ oppressive regime stays in power any longer, Eritrea might follow the path of other African countries in which one group dominates the political, social and economic life of the country to the exclusion of other groups, thus, ushering in prolonged conflicts and violence.
9. As Eritreans struggle for a peaceful coexistence, a sound understanding of the challenges that face them, in terms of who is their real enemy, is of paramount importance. We firmly believe that the overwhelming majority of Eritreans, both Muslims and Christians, want to coexist and live peacefully. The source of disharmony in the society is primarily the ruling clique that is responsible for the worsening of historical imbalances and inequalities in the country.
10. The privileged clique is a small minority that is mostly made up of Tigrinya-speaking men, Christian Highlanders who now are in their 60's and whose number is estimated to be a maximum of several hundreds. They ascended to power by forming a clandestine sectarian wing within the EPLF¹⁵ and took the NE manifesto as a blue print to hijack the national liberation movement.
11. **Colonial Legacy:** As in any anti-colonial struggle in Africa, a privileged group is created by colonizers and left behind to continue colonial practices; it divides and rules perceiving itself as distinct from the rest of the population, and attributes its privileged status and claim to power in some kind of ethnic superiority—neither Eritrea's ruling regime nor its offshoot from the intra clique squabble is in this regard an exception. The clique's sense of entitlement to rule and to impose unapologetically its language on others stems from its supremacist belief of having superior and distinct traits that has enabled it to amass power and dominance. In reality, the ruling ethnocratic clique itself owes its existence to Ethiopian colonial rule. It is a by-product and a once beneficiary of the Ethiopian occupation during which it had enjoyed power, privilege, jobs,

education and access to state resources to be empowered. It is regrettable that this privileged clique is following the same sectarian policies that were once used by the Ethiopian occupation.

12. Some Eritreans are using the PFDJ constitution, which was crafted without the consent and against the wishes of the majority of Eritrean Muslims, as yet another blue print to institutionalize their power and privileges. We believe this group neither represents the majority of Christians, who are suffering severe economic hardship while their human and civil rights are being violated, nor identifies with the vast majority of Eritrean Muslims who are suffering persecution, de facto exclusion, institutionalized discrimination, and systematic disfranchisement.
13. Unfortunately, there is a small group of opportunist Christians who attach themselves to the regime's autocratic patronage systems for economic benefits. Sadly, there is also a small but vocal group of Eritrean Christians, mostly in Western countries, who, out of parochial loyalty, are trying to prop up the predatory regime whose very survival hinges on the chances of one single man at its helm staying alive. The latter group, with its bigotry and hate mongering campaigns, has done incalculable damage to our national unity, damages that may have surpassed that of the Unionist Party campaign of terror in the 1940's.
14. **Vast Disparities:** Since the end of WW2 when the Italian colonization ended and the British Military Administration took over the country, followed by a compromise settlement that federated Eritrea with Imperial Ethiopia, Eritrean Muslims have gone through a religious, political, social and economic upheaval that has destroyed their communal structures. Their capacity for self-sustenance is being further undermined by the regime's policies.
15. The socio-economic disparity today is a direct result of Ethiopia's scorched earth policy that left the Lowlands' social economic structure destroyed following the burning of hundreds of villages in the Lowlands in the late 1960s that resulted in a half a million Eritreans to take refuge in Sudan.
16. The impact of the virtually destroyed Lowlands is still felt today. The disparity is a remnant of a colonial vestige, scars from the Ethiopian colonial wounds that the PFDJ regime did not want to heal. In the past eighteen years, the PFDJ regime has not done anything meaningful to rebuild the Lowland's economic and social life or allow refugees to return to rebuild their ancestral home.
17. All fair-minded Eritreans recognize, and the data shows that, though equal stakeholders in the country, Eritrean Muslims are treated as second-class citizens by the ruling clique in their own country. And since the abrogation of the federal arrangement by the Ethiopian occupiers, Eritrean Muslims have been denied their fair share of power and suffered gross injustices under ruthless successive governments, resulting in the deterioration of their economic, social and educational lives. This has not improved since 1991 and the policies of the PFDJ regime have made the situation of Eritrean Muslims worse.
18. Only two Islamic civil societies (Qur'an Recitation Group that teaches children the Qur'an and Awqaf (Endowments) Committee that provides funeral services) that have been in existence since the Italian rule have been allowed to operate in Eritrea while there are dozens of international and domestic Christian civil societies in Eritrea. Muslim Awqaf, administering real estate properties, has been long nationalized by the state under the pretext of inability to pay taxes. Christian institutions were able to claim their properties because they were able to raise funds from overseas while Muslims are banned from funding any kind of social or development projects in Eritrea.
19. There is enough evidence for the apartheid like socio economic system that the PFDJ regime has established in Eritrea since 1991 through a network of ethnocentric patronage system.

20. Christians from the highlands make up the overwhelming majority, often in the high 90 percentile, of Eritreans awarded access to post elementary education, scholarship to study and train abroad, admission to local colleges, government employment¹⁵, political assignment, governorship, assignment in diplomatic missions, management of state owned enterprises, military and civilian leadership, national and local administration. Basically, the whole state apparatus is exclusively ethnic based, it neither reflects a national characteristic nor the diversity of the Eritrean people.
21. The list of grievances of Eritrean Muslims are too long to enumerate here but they include religious discrimination, marginalization, torture, murder by death squads, abduction, closing of traditional Muslim Schools; harassment; persecution of religious leaders and scholars; imposition of government appointed religious leaders; systematic uprooting and forceful settlements in Muslims' lands; cultural and moral domination among other things.
22. Eritrean Muslims lived wholeheartedly by the credo, "give me liberty or give me death," abandoning their livelihood, their social status, their villages, their wealth, and their very dear lives in the pursuit of freedom and independence; they received no liberty but suffered a lot of death; and those who survived find themselves excessively disadvantaged by the policies of the PFDJ regime in their own country and in the Diaspora.
23. Muslims never had—for as long as they could remember—equal participatory power in the affairs of the nation and always ended up holding, as it were, the short end of the stick in all affairs. In terms of opportunity, access to resources, and political power, they had been, and continue to be, an underprivileged group.
24. Eritrean Muslims as a whole were the first to call for an independent and free Eritrea and they were among the first to identify and oppose the tyrannical regime of Isaias.
25. Naturally, Eritrean Muslims cannot hope for their status to change (it may even get worse) under the Isaias regime. They are pinning their hope instead on the post-PFDJ era which hopefully will herald a period of peace, justice, and democracy.

V - Guiding Principles

1. Eritrean Muslims, who have never shown ethnic supremacy aspirations in their history, believe in the equality of all citizens under the law; all citizens must be accorded equal opportunities to education, employment and economic benefits.
2. Eritrean Muslims have always been true to national unity and have paid their fair share in safeguarding the unity of Eritrea as a political entity; this is their legacy since the formation of Eritrea and they will always remain truthful to it.
3. Eritrean Muslims base their patriotism on the spirit of the Eritrean constitution of 1952 which was willingly adopted by all Eritreans when they expressed their vision of Eritrea in a relatively free environment where the rights of citizens and founding principles of the Eritrean nation was agreed upon by representatives of the people. Despite its limitations with regard to women's right to vote or be elected, the 1952 constitution was ratified by a democratically elected legitimate assembly in 1952.
4. Hence, the spirit of the basic tenets of the 1952 constitution still guides Eritrean Muslims today with regard to national symbols, education, governance, land ownership, employment policies, liberal politics and Arabic/Tigrinya as official languages.
5. Most Eritrean Muslims embrace the Arabic language as a fundamental component of the

foundation of Eritrea as they consider it a cornerstone in the structure of the country. The forefathers of Eritrean Muslims had long ago reached a consensus and willingly adopted Arabic as their unifying language for the sake of a greater ideal and for the common good without relinquishing their very right to develop their own respective languages.

6. Eritrean Muslims firmly believe that their patriotic credentials are deeply rooted in the history of the nation and they take pride in keeping the legacy of their fathers and forefathers, the renowned patriots including Ibrahim Sultan, Abulkadir Kebire, Hamid Idris Awate, Sheikh Mohammed Omar Akito, Osman Saleh Sabbe, Idris Mohammed Adem, and others. Eritrean Muslims reject the desecration of the names of our heroes, belittling them or disrespecting them in any way or form.
7. The bigotry of the ethnocratic regime is nowhere more evident than in its designations of what constitutes Eritrea's national heritage and historical landmarks. For a multicultural society, it is no coincident that the entire eleven members of the regime's Culture Heritage Commission are Tigrinya speaking Christians. It is not surprising then that both the Debre-Bizen Monastery, which was built by Abuna Filipos in 1361, and the 200-years-old Kidane Mehret Church in Senafe are listed as cultural heritage sites worthy of restoration while none of Massawa's four grand mosques (Missjid Abu Hanafi, built in 1203; Misjid Sheikh Mudui, built in 1503 by Hergigo's Sheikh Mudui; Missjid Hamal, built in 1543 by Sheikh Omar Ibn Sadiq AlAnsari and Misjid Shaaf'e) or the ruins from the Sahel, Dahlak or even Adulis were even listed as historical sites.
8. Eritreans Muslims do not appreciate the Eritrean regime's obsession with restoring and preserving Fascist and colonial Art Deco in Asmara while ignoring and destroying centuries-old Muslim heritage, (mainly in the port city of Massawa) which has been declared World Heritage by UNESCO. This includes the promotion of "Hamlay Deset" as a Tigrinized name for the "Sheikh Saeed" island.
9. The best way for Eritrean Muslims, who are poly-lingual, multi-ethnic, and culturally diverse and spread apart geographically, is to coalesce and defend their rights in the national equation, and that can only be achieved when these rights are defined based on their common identity.

VI – Justice, Freedom & Democracy

1. We understand that democracy is a method of deciding who shall rule and how. Whatever its virtues, democracy neither guarantees freedom nor peace. However, democracy is necessary for freedom to flourish and for peace to prevail. To have a free and peaceful country, we strive to create a society in which the inalienable rights of the individual and of communities are respected, and the powers of government are limited.
2. Eritrean Muslims believe that in order to promote peace, justice and freedom and to live in a multicultural¹⁷ democracy, the following principles must be upheld.
 - a. Recognition of the essential dignity of the individual and the equality of all citizens.
 - b. Acceptance of the principle of free and fair elections with the offer of genuine choice.
 - c. Drawing the just powers of government from the consent of the governed.
 - d. Accountability of the government to its electorate and the acceptance of the right of genuine opposition.
 - e. Principle of justice and equity before the law, and the upholding the cherished freedoms of

speech, association, movement, conscience and religion.

3. Dissent is the highest form of patriotism. The right, ability, and willingness to criticize every branch of our government at every level should be part of our democratic culture. We also believe that for the success of democratic government, both rulers and ruled must learn and exercise tolerance.
4. We recognize that no issue, Muslim or otherwise, can be safely raised and solved in the absence of democracy, which itself cannot achieve its full potential if disadvantaged groups are excluded from full participation. The journey towards democracy must not start with some empowered and others crippled by the colonial rule and its aftermath.
5. Slogans of "equality" cannot be raised without levelling the playing field of opportunities and rights; democracy cannot thrive, or even sprout, but would usher the degeneration of any regime into tyranny if it is installed on a shaky and unjust foundation.
6. Eritrean Muslims believe that until and unless justice is done and served to all Eritreans on par by eliminating overt and covert classes in citizenship both assumed and practiced, Eritrea will face upheavals that would undermine its viability as a state. The extant severe disparities of rights and powers must be eliminated and justice and equality restored.
7. Hence, the steps towards healing and reconciliation require recognizing these unmistakable historical facts as manifested by the current socio-economic disparities and addressing those facts with the intention of closing the socio-economic gap for the formation of a secure, viable, and sustainable, post PFDJ state.

VII - Governance

1. Fundamental agreement and accords between the components of the society, upon which harmonious relations are based, should remain constant and points of reference that are not changeable. The fundamentals of Eritrean national unity should not be negotiable.
2. Eritrean Muslims do not recognize proclamations passed under the auspices of an authoritarian regime; and though they struggle for constitutionalism, they leave the topic of a constitution to a truly representative group that should be assembled under a just system to tackle the constitutional and other issues related to social justice.
3. The Constitutional Commission that was tasked to draft the 1997 PFDJ constitution was exclusively composed of Eritreans who were members or sympathizers of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF.) Naturally, this meant that the perspective that was brought to it were the principles that guided the EPLF in all areas including: language policy, land policy, centralization of power, and national symbols (flag), a considerable departure from the negotiated arrangement that was reached by representatives of the Eritrean people in the 1952 constitution.
4. Eritrean Muslims reject being ruled from a central bureaucracy (similar to that of Ethiopia's colonial rule) and by a group of self appointed clique while they are relegated to the peripheries; they demand more autonomous regional governments to govern themselves within broad national parameters.
5. Since the primary divide in defining the inhabitants of Eritrea is faith-based followed by the tribal and geographical localities, a sect-sensitive system of governance (state level) and an equitable power sharing regime which allows more autonomy (regional level) could be the ideal antidote to Eritrea's problems associated with inequality and lack of freedoms.

6. Appointments to public positions should take into considerations the diversity of the Eritrean society—we should strive to establish an egalitarian system, similar to the one that was sabotaged during the federal period.
7. The regime has baptized Eritrean regions with new names, and official terminologies and phrases used are exclusively Tigrignized with the exclusion of other Eritrean languages. The process of Tigrignization of the state must be halted immediately and reversed.
8. Eritrean Muslims believe that the Eritrean Defense Forces should be a non-partisan national institution and a muscle of the people on whose behalf it guards the democratic institutions of the country and its security. In order to build a professional and competent army that safeguards Eritrean national cohesion, its leadership should be representative of the Eritrean diversity and subservient to a civilian leadership.
9. Equal opportunities should not be understood to mean Sekou Toure style “ethnic arithmetic” that Isaias and others employ by ostensibly dividing cosmetic cabinet “power” or responsibility equally among people carrying Muslim and Christian names, when in reality, power actually resides with him and his clique alone; Eritrean Muslims reject token representation and token opportunities including that afforded to them by some groups.

VIII - Assertion of Rights

1. It should come as no surprise to anyone that Eritrean Muslims want the same things that every Eritrean wants: equal opportunity; freedom of expression; freedom of worship; equality under the law; protection from harassment; access to resources. Eritrean Muslims assert their rights for a fair, unabridged share of power and resources, and a complete exercise of rights to the fullest in our God-given land for which we paid preciously.
2. Eritrean Muslims believe in the geographical division of Eritrean regions as it existed in 1952; any changes done without the consent of the people, through their duly delegated representatives, should be considered null and void.
3. Eritrean Muslims do not accept being treated with suspicion and mistrust by the ruling clique and its appendages and thus be treated as second class citizens in their own country.
4. **Indigenous Peoples Rights:** Eritrean Muslims are concerned with the predicament of the Kunama people, a segment of Eritreans whose numbers have been decreasing drastically and their land shrinking to severe levels. If the current policies of the regime are not remedied, this minority group faces extinction.
5. In general, indigenous cultures and beliefs have either disappeared or were incorporated to a greater or lesser degree into the practices of the two major belief systems: Islam and Christianity. This has happened to many communities that are either extinct or on their way to extinction. For example, the Bitama, and the Elit peoples have either been totally swallowed or went extinct.
6. In present Eritrea, the Afars and the Kunamas can be considered the most disadvantaged communities whose lifestyles and traditions had sustained severe blows by the policies of the PFDJ regime.
7. We thus believe the Afars and the Kunamas, who consider themselves and want to have the right to remain distinct people, qualify to be characterized as indigenous peoples. Their rights to culture, identity, language, employment, health, education should be recognized and protected

under guidelines of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People of 2007. The declaration "emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations". It also promotes "their full and effective participation in all matters that concerns to them".

8. **Rights of Return:** Eritrean Muslims strongly condemn the conspiracy of the PFDJ regime to depopulate Eritrea of its Muslims by hatching and pursuing several plots that are forcing Eritrean Muslim refugees who were forced out of their country by successive Ethiopian regimes not to return to their homes, and instead to be assimilated in Sudanese society.
9. The UN declaration on human rights, Article 13 declares that "everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country." Eritreans were forced to leave their country and for over 40 years have been pinning away their lives in various refugee camps where the vast majority are Muslims who should be repatriated and rehabilitated in their ancestral lands.
10. The issue of refugees and their repatriation is a recognized global humanitarian issue that all countries are morally bound to help. Eritrean Muslims are determined to struggle for the rights of refugees languishing in the refugee camps of the Sudan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Djibouti and who are rendered exiles by the regime.
11. Their ancestral homes are being taken over by regime sponsored settlements that must be stopped immediately. Refugees (and owners of any confiscated land) should be properly compensated to rebuild their lives.
12. **Women's' Rights:** Eritrean Muslims are determined to struggle to improve women's conditions and rights; and they believe that the issue of women should not be characterized (as it is mostly done) as a dispute between champions of women's liberty and those who want to deprive women of liberty; they also believe that education is the key to the emancipation of women.

IX - Freedom of Religion

1. In the case of Eritrea, the tradition of religious tolerance was especially marked in ancient times when religion was traditionally considered a matter of personal choice as attested by the fact that in some families and clans, close relatives or even siblings might adhere to different religions.
2. Eritrean Muslims strongly uphold the right to freedom of worship and are against proselytizing by anyone or any sect.
3. Eritrean Muslims recognize the ideological challenges posed by global Islamist movements that polarize Muslim societies around the world and consider it a serious phenomenon with ensuing repercussions on Eritrean religious fabric in general and the cohesion of Eritrean Muslims in particular. Eritrean Muslims condemn any act of terrorism against civilians.
4. Eritrean Muslims recognize that the growth of more extremist forms of Islam is mainly recent and is of a political nature associated with nationalist movements in Islamic countries; Eritrea has so far been shielded from such extremism; Eritrean Muslims shun all forms of extremism while at the same time they are worried by the fact that the policies of the Eritrean regime are brewing all forms of extremism.
5. Extremist versions of Islam and the imposition of austere interpretation of Sharia law appears more as a reaction against Western influence and the human impulse to preserve one's traditional values; Eritrean Muslims have always been moderate in practicing their religion and they strive to keep it that way.

6. But intolerance is by no means a characteristic of Muslims (Eritrean Muslims do not have such a history at all); on the contrary, it was the extremist and violent approaches of Ethiopia and its allies that caused all historical sufferings in Eritrea and the rampant violence and violations of right in Eritrea is not the making of Muslims.
7. Eritrean Muslims want the government's hands off Muslim affairs; they do not accept that the government should appoint their Mufti, it is the task of the Council of Muslim Ulema. Eritrean Muslims will always demand a secular government (and not "secular religions") because only secularism would protect them from government interference in their religious affairs.
8. Eritrean Muslims are determined to assert their Islamic identity in their country and will equally uphold the right of their fellow Christian compatriots to their own chosen identity. They are guided by the teaching, "There is no compulsion in religion." And "To you is your way of life (religion), and to me is my way of life (religion)" is how Eritrean Muslims lived their lives throughout their history and that is how they will continue to live.

X - Languages

1. Eritrean Muslims believe that, in the field of education and employment, Arabic language fluency must be recognized as a valuable skill, and that concrete efforts should be made to bring it on par with the employability of Tigrinya.
2. The credits of those who choose to study in Islamic schools must be transferable to public schools as long as they meet national standards which should be set by a panel of experts who are representative of the Eritrean people without any language, religious or regional bias. And an incentives scheme must be established to encourage scholarships for Muslims to train or study in subjects or skills where they are underrepresented because of historical disparities.

XI- Land:

1. Since the sixties, Christian elites had taken it as a project to expropriate Gash and Barka lands. In the sixties, vast areas of the Kunama land were taken by aggressive settlement projects designed by the Ethiopian occupiers and executed by their Eritrean operatives including Colonel Gebrequal in Upper Gash region.
3. The Muslims of the Western region, who have preserved their environment for centuries, have now become open to land grabbers pushed to expropriate their lands by the PFDJ regime—the whole region faces a serious environmental degradation due to the wrong policies of the regime.
4. The Kunama people divide their land into three portions and rotate its use for habitation, farming and grazing; disrupting this culture of land management under the influence of sedentary values, the PFDJ is destroying the ecology, economy, social life and the environment of the entire Lowlands.
5. As settlements grew and as the wide stretches of land that were pastures suddenly became the property of some other people, the livelihood of pastoralists and their way of life, even their very survival is being threatened.
6. In general, the people of the Lowlands never had problems with newcomers settling in their lands as long as they didn't disrupt the social and political structure of the communities where they settle.
7. Eritrean Muslims are against the onslaught by the regime on pastoralist and agro-pastoralist which are a way of life for the overwhelming majority of Muslims who depend on sustainable, environment-friendly mode of production. The pastoralists' often declared statement that "land

belongs to Allah” should not be understood that they do not mind being stripped of their ancestral pastures.

8. Eritrean Muslims deplore the PFDJ regime’s policy of militarization of the society that has gravely impacted natural habitats and caused indiscriminate deforestation of the land, thus damaging the natural environment that was already impacted by the long years of war.
9. We call on Eritreans to recognize that Eritrean Muslim lands have been under an assault for more than 50 years and that all just and fair Eritreans should struggle to stop this aggression on land and other resources.

XII - Development

1. Eritrean Muslims recognize that the enemy of all Eritreans is the baneful combination of ignorance, poverty, and prejudice; and in cooperation with all willing compatriots, they will continue to struggle to ameliorate the consequences of these underlying causes.
2. While aware that liberal, market oriented economy is not a panacea, we believe economic salvation would come by adopting a free market economy in which property rights are respected and our people have the right to pursue whatever means they see fit to achieve economic success, not forgetting that any economic development should be socially responsible and follow global standards for the protection of the environment and social cultures.
3. Eritrean Muslims demand that special attention be given to the developing of the war-torn areas of the Lowlands that have suffered unprecedented damage for decades and now being damaged by the presence of extensive militarization of the nation.
4. Eritrean Muslims condemn the regime’s practice of establishing projects by its companies or by its favored private sector concerns at the expense of residents of an area; residents of a given area should be the primary gainers from any such enterprise, including those in the field of mining.

XIII - Call for Action

1. We call on all Eritreans to reject the PFDJ constitution and call for drafting a new constitution once the Eritrean people are rid of the oppressive regime; a constitution that will take into consideration the will and aspirations of all Eritreans.
2. We call on all compatriots to recognize the rights of our different Eritrean communities that are blessed with rich cultural, tribal, ethnic and linguistic diversity, representing a kaleidoscope of cultures that form an integral part of the cultural tapestry that adorns Eritrean Society.
3. We call on all Eritreans to help restore the refugee status and legal protection for all Eritreans in Sudan, and not just the ones in the UNHCR designated refugee camps; a move that the PFDJ regime has been campaigning against.
4. We call on Eritreans to recognize that local environments are best promoted and protected by their own indigenous populations; they should condemn the social engineering and the policies of uprooting and settlements of communities that are being carried out by the PFDJ regime.
5. We call on all Muslims to abandon narrow sectarian and regional tendencies in favour of promoting a united force and collective leadership that promotes and protects the rights of Eritrean Muslims, and by extension, the rights of all Eritreans.

6. We remind Eritrean Muslims that there are options and opportunities for negotiated settlements to these issues and thus they should struggle to assert their rights by seeking consensus and dialog.
7. We call on all peace and freedom loving Eritreans to endorse the rights stated above, and to rectify all the disparities along with every other Eritrean grievance.
8. We call of all Eritreans, inside the country and outside, to rally behind the citizens rights articulated above and organize to use The Promise as a platform.
9. We call of all Eritreans to break the psychological, emotional and political barriers and act in unison towards realizing the Revival of the Eritrean Promise.

XIV - The Way Forward

1. The concept of conflict resolution is based on the idea that a sustainable resolution of a conflict requires solutions that are acceptable to all the parties, otherwise the parties will continue their struggle until one or all are exhausted, often at the detriment of both parties' interests. If a settlement is reached without addressing the underlying problems, the conflict is likely to re-surface in one form or another if any of the party's feel they have been treated unfairly.
2. Modern techniques of conflict resolution seek to identify the factors and conditions that make it difficult for the parties to consider a negotiated settlement. One such technique is reframing and re-examining the assumptions underlying a conflict.
3. We, as advocates of a conflict resolution approach, believe in the need for exploring alternative approaches that may be more likely to allow all stakeholders to work together by convincing them that a solution can be attained if and when it is based on enlightened self-interest rather than one that is based on a narrow hegemonic self interest.
4. The interests of all Eritreans can only be asserted in a united multicultural, multilingual, democratic country where citizens feel they have equal stake in its advancement.
5. This, of course, will require efforts from all of us to develop alternative perspectives to find creative arrangements which will satisfy the concerns of all segments of our diverse society. Otherwise, we all would be wondering for generations to come as how it is in the diverse, multi-ethnic polity of Eritrea, a single ethnic group that completely controls and occupies virtually all positions of the state apparatus could possibly continue to sustain its grip on power without undermining the viability of Eritrea as an independent state.
6. **Future Work:** Eritreans (including Eritrean Muslims) will have a variety of opinions on this statement. Synthesizing these disparate views into a workable solution that all can be agreed upon will be among the first challenges that a post-PFDJ government will face.
7. To follow up on the issues raised here, we encourage all scholars, researchers and academics to publish a series of papers to expand on the issues raised in this document.
8. For politicians and community leaders, we suggest the following objectives:
 - a. Outline a political framework under which a representative national unity government could be envisioned.

- b. Propose means and ways to close the socio-economic disparity among all ethnic, regional, and religious groups.
- c. Offer a vision of a just and equitable system of governance and rally Eritreans around the objectives of achieving it.
- d. Initiate discussions and propose a framework for reconciliation through truth and forgiveness.
- e. Educate the public on the myth and reality of global Islam and the difference between Islam as a faith and political Islam in the context of the geopolitics of our region.

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February 11, 2010

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End Notes:

1. 'The Eritrean Covenant' is intended to be publicly owned by all justice, peace and freedom loving Eritreans immediately after its publication. Mejlis Ibrahim Mukhtar is only a sponsor of 'The Eritrean Covenant' and does not claim sole ownership over it. The Mejlis is a council made up of Eritreans inside and outside Eritrea and is named after late Mufti Ibrahim Mukhtar (1909-1969) who was the Grand Mufti of Eritrea from 1940 until he passed away in Asmara in 1969. Mufti Ibrahim Mukhtar was a great religious leader, a scholar, an author, a staunch Eritrean patriot and unifier. You can read his [brief biography](#) by visiting [a website dedicated to his works](#).
2. PFDJ: People's Front for Democracy & Justice—the transformation of the EPLF through which the ruling clique consolidated power after the independence of Eritrea
3. [Ethnocracy](#), as defined by Wikipedia, is a form of [government](#) where representatives of a particular [ethnic](#) group hold a number of government posts disproportionately large to the [percentage](#) of the total [population](#) that the particular ethnic group(s) represents and use them to advance the position of their particular ethnic group(s) to the detriment of others. Ethnocracies are characterized by their control system – the [legal](#), institutional, and physical instruments of power deemed necessary to secure ethnic dominance. An [ethnic elite](#) refers to an [ethnic group](#) which in a local context has gained a position of economic and power over that of other groups. Ethnic [elites](#) may also foster ideologies and beliefs which serve to sustain their relative power.
4. Based on publicly available data and reliable inside information, we believe the army's composition has changed substantially since 2000. Best available estimates put Christians at 52% during 1998-2000 war. This figure is slightly higher than in the general population because conscripts are heavily drawn from major cities and compliance is less enforced in rural area. With an estimated 10% desertion since 2000, the current figure of Christians in the army is likely to be in the mid to high 40's.
5. List of [Top Military Officers of the Eritrean Defense Forces](#).
6. Bulir, Ales, Brixiova, Zuzana and Comenetz, Joshua. The Gender Gap in Education in Eritrea in 1991-98: A Missed Opportunity? (July 2001). IMF Working Paper, Vol., pp. 1-25, 2001.

7. The genesis of the ethnocratic regime can be traced to a manifesto published in November 1971 entitled *Nehnan Elamanan* ("We and Our Objectives"), an unsigned document that is widely believed to have been authored by Isaias Afwerki and aimed to serve as a clarion call for uprising and a blue print for ethnic domination. From its very title, the document for the first time characterized the conflict from the "Eritreans vs. Ethiopians" focus of the Eritrean struggle for independence to "Christian Highlanders vs. Muslim Lowlanders". It demonizes the Muslim leadership of the ELF as corrupt, sex-crazed, religious fanatics and barbaric murderers who had no political vision other than to shoot their guns aimlessly and to fight for the sake of Allah and make Eritrea an Arab state, a smear campaign taken straight from Ethiopia's propaganda playbook. In contrast, it characterizes the Christian Highlanders as patriotic and progressive. It alleges that the ELF persecuted and "slaughtered with knives" some 550 Christian's fighters and civilians, but only provides the names of two individuals. It further alleges that the ELF stole Highlander's cows and with the proceeds took up multiple wives in Sudan. The unsubstantiated allegations were presented as facts and repeated in the Western media and academic publications authored by Isaias' supporters. This stereotypical image of Eritrean Muslims persists until day. Any organization led by a Muslim Eritrean, whether it is a political organization, a website, or a charity, is habitually accused of harbouring Jihadist ambitions by Issias supporters and some opposition leaders, politicians, and writers in the internet.
8. Bet Giorgis: a place in the outskirts of Asmara where the first inter Eritrean congress was held.
9. Rabita Al-Islamiya: the first organized Muslim party that struggled for independence of Eritrea and against the partition of the country between Ethiopia and Sudan.
10. ELM: Eritrean Liberation Movement, also known as Haraka, was formed in Port Sudan in 1958 as the first organized group to struggle for the right to self-determination.
11. Srryet Addis: a unit that was allegedly killed by the ELF according to Isaias' NE manifesto. So far, after over forty years, no names of the victims (whom NE claims to be several hundred) have been publicized; but the incident was and is still used as a rallying cry in Isaias' mobilizing activities and to agitate the Eritrean Christian population.
12. ELF: Eritrean Liberation Front. The organization that began the armed struggle to liberate Eritrea and from which all organizations split.
13. TPLF: Tigray People's Liberation Front- The Ethiopian organization that is a major component of the Ethiopian ruling party, EPRDF.
14. Menka'a: the first group of dissenters to appear within the EPLF and who were eliminated by Isaias and his clique in the mid-seventies.
15. EPLF: Eritrean Popular Liberation Front: The organization that Isaias came to control after taking over another two factions that split from the ELF.
16. List of names of Civil Servants of the Eritrean Government: Lists of Civil Servants: [Regional](#) and [Country](#).
17. [Multiculturalism](#), as defined by Wikipedia, is the acceptance or promotion of multiple ethnic cultures, for practical reasons and/or for the sake of diversity and applied to the demographic make-up of a specific place, usually at the organizational level, e.g. schools, businesses, neighborhoods, cities or nations. In this context, multiculturalists advocate extending equitable status to distinct ethnic and religious groups without promoting any specific ethnic, religious, and/or cultural community values as central.