

“After the dust has settled, our horizon will still be there” President Isaias

“2015 is a Transition Period Which Gives A Clear Picture of the New Chapter We Are About To Enter:” President Isaias

“The People is the Army – This is our Unwavering Doctrine”: *President Isaias*

It is to be recalled that President Isaias Afwerki conducted an interview with the national media outlets mainly focusing on domestic affairs in connection with the New Year on the 30th of December 2014. In the interview that was broadcast live through Eritrean Television and Dimtsi Hafash highlighting all-round national and regional developments, as well as future prospects, the President shed light on the implementation and progress of development programs, nation-building programs set for implementation in 2015 and other domestic and regional issues. Here is an excerpt of the interview.

Although our questions are mainly about domestic issues, they are highly influenced by regional and global issues and let's begin with those. In previous years our world has passed through a tumultuous stage. Economic recession, popular uprisings, conflicts and terrorist attacks are all manifestations of this reality. Can you briefly explain to us the current global situation and its forecast and its outlooks?

First of all I want to wish a happy new year to all Eritrean people. It is a broad topic but to explain it simply I will only state our reading on it. What causes all these turmoil and how do we read it? It can be concluded that the clash and the polarization within a society that come about in history ultimately leads to conflicts and uprisings. This can be seen from a global, region or even individual countries. When the gap widens between the haves and have-nots, and those who are given opportunities and those who are deprived of it, then conflict arises. It is also important to see how this conflict arises in the history of each country. In this 21st century the globalization phenomenon (I don't really believe in it by the way), has encroached among countries in different regions of the globe, and the domestic factors that brought about these scenarios were also influenced by external factors. The Uni-polar world that transpired after the end of the cold war led to the domination by few powerful corporations that competed for the control of financial and capital institution, weapon industries, cultural and educational centers, and the

main stream media. The tension and crisis in our region was the result of the polarization that occurred between societies, regions and speculators that came about due to the developments in the end of the 20th century and the 21st century driven by the corporations. It meant to create an order where few in a society control every aspect of life in a country. We can take the examples of countries like Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan, Iraq and turkey. A collision resulted between those few who hold power with the help of the corporations and those who were exploited. It might have started spontaneously and with no preparation for its sustainability which is why it has lost its direction. The result was gruesome chaos. But in general if we were to evaluate the past 3 – 4 years scenarios it was the result of a clash between a highly polarized societies. If we look back to scriptures of 17th and 18th century or even in the gospel and Quran they issue has always been the same; and it was the tension between those who want to live of exploitation and those who are deprived of opportunities to live a descent life. If we take the example of black Americans they were enslaved but since they did not have any means to organize themselves against this injustice they resorted to prayers and church for solution. In our region too, after the cold war there were not national progressive forces that can resolve the polarization in the society as they were sidelined and weakened by the corporation world. Deprived of such forces people tended to look to the religious world for divine solution. Such circumstance create a fertile ground for religious brokers or agents (I don't think it is correct to refer them as religious organizations) in Christianity of Islam that exploit the vacuum and offer for divine solution. This develops to the point where desperate solutions like suicide bombs are brought as an appealing solution.

As we have seen, whenever there is a vacuum in a society and when there is lack of proper management of the polarization, religious brokers exploit this chaos till they come to power and control the economic and other tentacles of the country. This scenario has been there for a long time. But since they don't have real programs they cannot address the polarization within the society. All they offer are alluring and temporary promises. However the past three or four years has been a good lesson to peoples. With the help of technology information disseminated instantly from across different countries tend to control peoples mind. People couldn't see the big picture in three dimensions instead of two dimensions. This is difficult because the flood of information can be mind-numbing and one cannot take a sober and well balanced look at the scenarios that were unfolding. But the development in these years can be seen individually. You can see foreign agents trying to exploit the situation and also the crisis in the corporations and make sense of it all. In our region this developments have been a lesson to the people. We can see that the sentiment of the people before 4 years and now and how it reached to this level.

This is how we have been reading the causes of this confusion. How it affected us depend on our reading of the development. If you have a careful and logical reading, you can hold firm amidst this big wave. If you have a good understanding and control of your situation and also the realities in different societies and within yours, then the chaos will finally end in its own time. How and when is another issue? The fundamental issue of polarization within societies that has

reached even at the global level has caused the different situations in the world to influence each other. This is primarily the offshoot of the intention to create a unipolar world after the end of the cold war. And where is the world heading now? The corporation mindset that strives to control the world through its technological advancement, military might, the control of resources, and remain the sole super-power for the next 50 years has been rendered impossible by the development of the past 20 years. The world is becoming a multi-polar world as many powers have risen and are still rising. The economic reality is changing and many influences are growing in the resource centers. The competition and tension among the big global powers are increasing daily. Through economic influences, technological advancement, military might each region is experiencing a transformation. We are now in a transition period and that's how I see the past 20 years. It is the transition from one global order to a new one. We don't expect a dramatic shift of global order but the signs are geared towards that direction and the situations in every region can be explained from this big picture.

Mr. President, as you have explained foreign interference has caused internal political, economic and security crisis in countries of our region. And this has become a hindrance to a coordinated development program in the region. Can these countries get out of this trap and ensure regional coordination? What is Eritrea's vision and strategy in our region?

There are a lot of issues that beg for explanation as it is a big topic, but I will try to answer it briefly. One of the problems in our region is the attempt to create a uni-polar world after the end of the cold war. I call this a corporation world. The idea is to have proxies in every region. If we see the different documents prior to 2000, the plan was to divide Africa in to regions and appoint a proxy in each of them. The proxy wants to become a dominant power in the region with the help of the corporation. It doesn't have its own power to impose its dominance. We have many such countries in our region who tries to take advantage of the situation brought by the attempt to create a uni-polar world. This motive of there is reflected in their news. And the foreign interference exacerbates the complex situation even further. In their attempt to become dominant the proxies now try to complicate the situation in each country in the region in order to control it through their own proxies. Since they try to use the tension in each country to their little ambition they complicate issues even further. So in this transition period what is happening is that the global powers are trying to dominate with their military, economy, and other means of influence while proxies tries to complicate the tension and polarization in the region and each countries. So these situations beg for a careful reading of the development. Therefore we are going to develop, deepen and enrich our reading of this development. And we need to first have our own perspective. Although we can't talk at a global or regional level, we are nonetheless people who want to live in peace and security, and change our lives with our own work. But in what environment can we do that? The above circumstances affect us and hence we need the security of our region to do achieve our goals. But we know that security doesn't come out of mere wish, you have to work for it. The Red Sea, by virtue of being an international sea route,

gives peculiar importance to our geographical location. This influences every country in the region. The proximity of the Middle East also affects the region in different ways. It is because of this influence that we advocate cooperation and coordination in security, economy and investment in the Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf region to create peaceful and secure region. The same is true in the Horn of Africa, we can also talk about the Nile Basin region as an issue that affects us. In general term these are the regions our foreign policy addresses. We can consider these as sub-regions. But is there a coordination and cooperation environment in the sub-regions and in the region? In the past 20 years we have worked to promote a cooperative environment not only to ensure a peaceful region but also to meaningfully participate in the world arena. This is a natural aspiration of any people and ours' is also not different. But the situation in region has exacerbated. And this basically is due to the complication of tensions as a result of global powers' intention and the intentions of regional proxies. Overcoming this problem to create a stable and peaceful region requires an active engagement. At times we don't engage in active diplomatic even with the presence of clear picture. It is better to wait and just observe. But if the sub-regions are to be stable and secure we have to constructively engage even if it is a humble contribution. But it is a conscious contribution that can have an effect in the desired outcome and aspiration. To surmount the complication created by the proxies with the resources of, we have to create awareness. The conscious element in each country is trying to address this polarization. If we can't come together under the common interest and if we are working to exploit the tensions in each country in the attempt to become proxies, then we cannot ensure the progress of the region. We have learned a lot from the past years that we can create our environment and also there is an environment that can be created as a result of external intervention. If we can address our regional problems and come together under constructive engagement then it is very easy to isolate the challenges imposed from the external. And as I have mentioned earlier our foreign policies are based on clear understanding of this fact. We know what we are capable of and what we want to do. This country and this people cannot be brought down for an auction. We have passed through a long and arduous struggle and we are concerned about our progress; we don't want to be entangled in a meaningless tension and clashes between blocs. What concerns us is the stability, cooperation and progress of the region. And when the dust that veiled the horizon settles down we will be on our way to progress.

Your Excellency! Let's proceed to domestic affairs. It is very noticeable that tremendous activities have been carried out in food security, and huge investment has been made in different infrastructures. Thus, it seems, a great leap has been made towards better achievement. But, what is your vision about Eritrea in the next three to five years?

"What is your vision about Eritrea?" Well, this is not an easy question that could be answered without thinking over and over. The general development concept we have been pursuing and all the programs we have been carrying out are well known to everybody. But, it is worth to repeat what is known to everybody and use it as a source of reference.

This country belongs to all nationals. We are well aware of how we achieved our liberation and independence and about the road we traveled through towards that very end. However, what were the aspirations and great expectations of the entire people in making huge sacrifices of all sorts? If we consider what we went through as a sacrifice for a common cause, we could come to a common understanding. Nevertheless, do our expectations match with the reality? Since this country is equal to every national, all our development programs, policies, and all projects have been in line with enabling all nationals to have equal access to all natural resources. What is the overall picture of living standards of over 95% of the Eritrean society? A huge gap of living standards which are inherited ones or results of different reasons need to be narrowed. Lifestyle of all citizens of this country is not the same. Thus, any gap including a minimal difference should be steadily narrowed. The existing gap among those with resources and those disadvantaged, among hard workers and manipulators should be narrowed. The uneven standards of living among cities and villages, cities and semi urban centers, and different geographical locations of this country need to be changed. The huge gap in living standards of nationals in different parts of this country including big cities should be reduced. The ultimate goal is to minimize the gap. If this narrowing of gap is to be achieved, all development programs that could be divide sector by sector need to be collectively directed to hit the envisaged target. The final result should also be maintained steadily without any fluctuation. The development program should have an ever growing momentum which secures sustainability. This is not only a general or ambitious vision, but is rather an expectation of the people who paid huge sacrifice. Hence, what should be done if this great expectation is to be realized? This could be seen sector by sector or in different regions. We have been working through dividing the country into three regions of development undertakings as a best approach to reach the envisaged goal. Eastern development region that includes coastal areas, the second region stretches from the edges of Nakfa to edges of Southern region mainly covering highlands, and the third is western development region. As these all development regions have their own differences in terms of geographical placement, climatic condition, as well as different resources, any program to be carried out is mainly based on the nature of the development regions. All the development programs are mapped out in a way that ensures their implementation on the ground. There should be a clear plan to make sure the program is tangible but not only a general vision or expectation. The programs may not be final ones but could be gradually developed to big projects which could lead to the ultimate end. The integration among programs should be continuously reinforced for a better result. If the development programs are to be seen topic by topic, the utmost priority is security of water supply that could be utilized for different purposes. Nothing is possible without adequate supply of water. Development programs are hugely dependent on supply of water. Supply of water could be secured through using sea water, but there is no need to do so.

Taking into account that water plays a decisive role in any development undertaking, we have been diligently working to increase the amount of water we could impound. No matter what the amount is, we have been engaged in reserving water in all parts of the country. It is only when

supply of water is secured that the topics like agriculture and other development programs could be discussed. Without water, nothing could be said about different industrial works. Water takes a leading place in all development programs. Food security is seen in line with secured water supply. Food security alone is not, however, sufficient. We should go beyond it. Besides water conservation, utilization of water should also be carefully planned. We should also exploit rain feed agriculture to its utmost level. The impact of water in agriculture and general economic growth of a country is not to be viewed lightly. Above all, there are strategies, programs and projects that go in line with the plans that are aimed at annually increasing the amount of ground and surface water resources. Apart from impounding or reserving water, there plans to judiciously utilize such a resource. If asked about the result of the investment we made in water supply, we would say the efforts we have exerted have taken us towards the final goal. If we are to fully achieve food security, the size of farmland we intend to cultivate along the amount of water that we could impound and the amount of annual harvest, in terms of type, needs to be increased. We could, at this point in time, say we are marching on the right truck towards that end. It is not only about surface or underground water resource or about water impounded in different reservoirs, but is largely about huge investment which would follow later on. Infrastructure for water reservation could be put in place; however, other distribution infrastructures and energy supply is required to fetch the water to a desired place. Investment should be made if the irrigation technology that is planned to be introduced is going to bring fruitful outcome by all standards. Since people are the end users of such resource, investment should be made to enable people have good understanding of such programs and make ultimate use of it. Once water is reserved, proper management is what comes next. It could be said extensive campaign has so far been made as regards water management. If not in the next two or three months, what we confidently say is, 2015 is going to show us the extent of a major leap we are about to make or where we are to head to. Even though we have not yet accomplished all the setout programs, taking into account all resources that are related to agriculture, livestock, other industries that are related to agriculture, marine resources, cash crops we are at a threshold of registering a major progress and 2015 going to be a transition to a new chapter. Apart from supply of water, we have so far accomplished other successful projects too. What comes along water is the issue of supply of energy in every spot where water is impounded. It could be said there is no supply of electricity in this country. There should exist and effective water pumping system that gives a 24 hours service. This demand of energy could not only be generated from big power plants, but it should be rather fulfilled with renewable sources such as wind and solar energy. We have been revising the strategy we had about supply of electricity. The western region of this country is to be given an utmost priority in the supply of electricity. If all agricultural and agro industrial plants of this region are to be functional, this region need to have supply of electricity ahead of any part of this country. The existing supply of electricity around Fanko, Aligidir and Teseney represent a limited area of the region. Leaving Haykota aside, all areas to the north such as Akordet, Afhimbol, Kerkebet and other areas that stretch until Sel'a have its own supply of energy. There is also a separate program that is gradually to be

implemented in the environs of northern Afabet that goes to Nakfa. This all programs will go parallel with agriculture, water, food security and other development activities. When we speak of agriculture is does not only mean about cereal crops, but we have also tired extensive programs. There are cotton, sugar cane, and flowers plantations that have not yet shown good progress. Apart from cereal crops, there are programs as regards cash crops. If the existing economic burden in different agricultural produce such as wheat, sorghum, millet, corn and other different grains that we continue to import along other consumables is to be alleviated, it remains a huge topic as what should be done in agricultural and the overall food security program. There are also programs that are related to livestock, dairy and meat products. If these agricultural programs are to operate effectively, there should be reliable supply of electricity. As it is not practical to distribute electricity supply generated from one central area to all regions of the country, the general concept we previously had has been change and we are phase by phase introducing separate sources of supply of electricity in the aforementioned areas.

What comes next to supply of energy is infrastructure. Effective infrastructure of roads should be put in place. Such effective roads infrastructure is a prerequisite if the economic and agricultural hubs in which the supply of water and electricity has gradually been enhanced are to be integrated to the economic activities and the livelihood of people. There are huge land, aviation and marine transportation programs that are still postponed. These projects have been postponed because we have other priorities. The issue is whether this is the right time to work on these projects or not. We have big development projects in Massawa and Assab ports. There is also a plan to develop airport in line with domestic and regional services as well as to upgrade to international standards due to its economic importance. If we are, for instance, to export flowers, there should be an airport as well as smooth land transportation system that takes to the airport.

Parallel to roads, railways, and beyond it ropeways has been considered. There should be a presence of a speedy transportation in inside the country, in the neighboring as well as in other countries. If cooperation among neighboring countries is to be realized, an infrastructure that links us with Sudan, Djibouti, and Ethiopia as well as with different countries along other local infrastructures is included in the program. These all are collectively physical infrastructures. Beyond that I call them software. But, enhanced competence of people that could integrate all the programs is needed. Human capacity is highly important towards improving all economic and agricultural and particularly food security or industry (manufacturing), tourism services and others that could have big contribution in our regional and global activities. The greatest challenge we have been witnessing in all the endeavors is educating people. Since people is the end user and beneficiary of all the projects, if there exists an agricultural project in a respective area, raising people's awareness as regards making ultimate use is highly essential. Without raising huge topics, 2015 is a transition period which gives a clear picture of the new chapter we are about to enter. However, there are activities that should be carried out in the upcoming two or three months. We have imported huge number of machineries in the last two-three years with an aim of implementing all the development programs we have. At first the number of machineries

seemed more than sufficient. But, let alone to satisfy all the demand we have, it has become clear that such number could not sustain us anymore. So, we are planning to import as equal to that number in 2015 before the beginning of the rainy season. As regards human capacity, there is more than enough readiness. We have been able to educate and mobilize enough capacity. We do not have any deficit to begin decisive programs that would be carried out phase by phase. There is also huge demand of resources. These machineries would demand oil and other equipment are also needed. I could give you a clear answer if you ask me after four or five months. Generally, 2015 would become an entrance to a new chapter. We would what the future would be in the next two to three years. So, let's march to the mid of 2015 with patience and I can tell you if you interview me at that very time.

Your Excellency! In last year's official celebrations of Independence Day, you said that a new constitution would be drafted. What exactly does this mean, putting in to consideration the 1997 national constitution? And what action has so far been taken in this regard?

As everybody knows, there is no constitution. I cannot say there was a constitution which existed or died...I do not even want to bring any excuse about the challenges we have been facing in the last 15 years that were woven to intimidate our existence, sovereignty and development. Majority of our political progress has been under such consistent external ploys and havocs. Thus, the constitution could taken as an already died document before it was declared. Before over ten years, many were suggesting us to declare a state of emergency. But, what they are saying now is another story. However, the constitution is practically a dead document before its declaration. Was it necessary to declare it or not, I think it is of no use to open a platform for an argument. As for us, we do not want to put ourselves in such meaningless issues, but we rather opt to go beyond. Who drafted it, how was it drafted, what was it aimed at? well, we have learnt too much about this issue in the last 15 years. We have learnt many things and upgraded our political maturity. The awareness and the anticipation we had back then comparing with what we are having now is completely different. At that time, due to emotions and goodwill, many things might have been seen. But now, we are highly matured. So, putting in to consideration what we have learnt from our last experience, there must be a Governmental System which helps not only to narrow the gabs among societies but also to protect the recurrence of any sort of gab. Above, the system should ensure the living standard of every national is improved. Based on this, a body is formed to work on it. It is another issue whether the formed body is declared or not. Because, the main concern is the task. This is not a public relations agenda. Since we are well aware of our situations, we perform our job without needless propaganda. As I have said during the Independence Day celebrations, there is a body formed to take charge of it. When it is announced, you can interview this respective body.

There is a methodology that serves in the drafting of the constitution. The most important thing is, when and how would the constitution be prepared and become operational. The former one

has become outdated. Since we have learnt too much in the past 15 years, the new one should be better and that serves for the future. The document is just a means but not an end. In this country, where huge sacrifice of life and time has been paid, what we prefer is a system that takes us to the path we aspire to go and that could lead us towards achieving the big objectives I have mentioned earlier. Since, the system is not by itself an end; the process is progressing without any haste in the right time. We do not want to put ourselves in an argument about how and what it would look like. This is our domestic issue and the document is not for external political gain. The document we are drafting is aimed to serve for the huge sacrifices we paid for a number of generations, to take us to the journey we aspire to reach and to the chapter we are looking to be in. Thus, it is not an issue where we ask for external support or acclaim. So, it would be practically prepared passing through needed research and preparation and without any publicity. Everybody is ought to understand the document in the fact that it is aimed to sever neither individuals nor to minorities interest. This document takes in to account the future of this country and not the interests of individuals. There is nobody who works on the document to make it perfect and without any errors. But, there should be a document that serves for the transformation that is in the near horizon. There is a procedure on how to rectify or make amendments. Thus, for the time being, it is suffice enough if we understand the document is not a perfect one but it would rather continually revised. Everybody who wills to make contribution to the country is most welcomed. Many have been sending their suggestions and shared their views in different forms. I am stating this in a time where we entered to a new transitional chapter. So, we could make humble deliberations in a time where we are setting up or drafting a system that serves the people. A body has been set up in the last six months and we would steadily publicize on how this body operates.

Mr. President, contrary to recurrent talks about the mass exodus of Eritrean youth, the majority of them remained steadfast in their homeland dedicatedly working for the rebuilding and sovereignty of the nation. Are there any tangible plans regarding their compensation or their future?

I don't want to talk about something that doesn't exist. Many have been plunged into quagmires in consequence of their actions (motivated by their families and environments) to go somewhere where they would supposedly find riches and change their lives. This is nothing short of a promulgated war. Different measures have been taken in an attempt to control the situation; and these will persist in the future.

Generally speaking, those who have gone to these "dream lands" will eventually regret their actions. Many of them mistakenly fled because their desired state of affairs didn't come overnight in this country. This is quite a big topic. Detailed studies on the issue have been documented, along with the entailing legal and economic ramifications. Other related conspiracies are also documented. And what's saddening here is the fact that the youth are the victims of this organized crime. And this cannot be dealt with only emotionally; but it rather needs a well-planned handling. Regardless of their mistakes, these citizens are part of the nation

and the people and as such the government, the nation and the people should be able to look after them wherever they end up.

Regarding the endeavors that has been so far implemented, or those in the process or those planned for 2015, we have more than enough human resource capacity. It wasn't a military war that was waged upon us in the last 15 years. It was instead one that, on top of the economic, diplomatic and political smearing, held our minds and capacities hostage crippling our development endeavors. These ploys played a role in hampering our economy by limiting the growth of individual productivity. Nevertheless, we were not totally oblivious to these ploys. The intention was to keep us in the dark as hostages of a continued "tension." But we shouldn't allow ourselves to be in such a state. We are presently under constant harassment, with our sovereignty still violated. We therefore should be focused and clear in our objectives. And because we chose to rebut any ploys determined to plunge us into desperation, we have reached our present standing.

The issue of the youth needs to be addressed separately. The mass media should be focusing on how we achieved such big endeavors. It wasn't because we imported machineries or invested the foreign currency we had in buying fuel. It was because we had people working. There are also people here who don't work, who are disoriented and don't know what they are doing.

If we talk about the active youth, one is tenfold because he's not being assessed by the number of hours he worked, but rather by the kind of work he is doing and its end result. If we consider how this trend will go in 2015/2016, the important factor is not adding machineries, but building the youth's capacity and boosting its experience so as to make it work with increased motivation.

Regarding the compensation, we need to first and foremost build a stable ground and favorable environment. The sacrifices we are paying are intended to take us there. If we can achieve the desired level in our development endeavors, agriculture, industry (manufacturing) services, our investments will have returns, and those returns will be our compensation. And that compensation is earmarked not for a few individuals only but for the whole people.

Everyone who is working to implement the endeavors is not being compensated. How many have access to potable water? Limited places may have all services but others have not had adequate water or electric supply or transport services since independence. So like I said, work is being done. We have no invisible resources, what we have everybody knows it.

There are life-changing development programs planned for execution at the national level. And these will take time and efforts. If we ask ourselves why people paid so many sacrifices, it is because they wanted to reach a desired level. Independence is good but not enough. You need more sacrifices to ensure an equitable and adequate living standard. When talking about compensation, we need to talk in terms of the collective efforts we are making. It would be wrong to assume that one can live off the government paycheck, because even the government is included in that collective effort. Hardships and sacrifices may occur along the way, but in the end, the compensation comes from the returns of the collective investments. These returns need to be able to improve the living standards of the people.

We should not be giving soothing promises of salary increase or improved conditions because compensation doesn't come from anticipation. Instead, it takes hard work, investment and sacrifices. We can say our vision is to change the people's livelihood. And since this entails hard work, now is not the time for compensation. For those who choose to go abroad and live off charities without working, or those who constantly worry they will never be rewarded, time will definitely teach them.

Excellency, the guarantee for the existence and growth of a nation is its defense force. Are there any plans to embolden the defense capacity? Related to this is the issue of the reserve (people's) army. How can the tasks of the reserve army (training and other activities) be carried out without hampering productivity?

I know this question is directly related to the harvesting season. But we don't need to talk about the military conditions. When talking about the army, be it the reserve, regular or the defense forces, the people is the ultimate army of the nation. In simple words, and not for the sake of political consumption or public relations, that's what our doctrine says. Under any conditions, the ultimate army that defends the nation and safeguards its sovereignty is the people. But this should not be confined to words only and needs to be observed in practice as well. The people need to be ready at all times. The imposed sanctions, conspiracies and different economic ploys waged against us in recent years all emanate from the enemy quarters' inability to understand what this people is made of.

For the last 15 years, we have been sitting in trenches in the eventuality of any provocations. Those soldiers scattered along the frontlines are citizens of this nation, and despite their dedications, they are definitely not mercenaries. So where is the justice for them to stay out in the open while others sleep safely in their homes? What about those who are working day and night? It's not because they have more obligations...

There is also the issue of national service. For 6-7 years, members of the national service were not deployed to the army, because we thought we could fend against any provocations or hostilities with the defense forces already in place along the frontlines. While that consideration is still in place, we need to at least secure our reserves. One of our losses last year was that the national service members were fruitlessly scattered. The proposed vocational trainings failed and those who didn't score passing marks to colleges were left wandering pointlessly. What's important here is to make sure that these youth not only shoulder the responsibility to safeguard the nation's security and sovereignty, but also be productive and help themselves, their families and their country.

The training of the reserve armies that was recently announced was supposed to be done in every district and region long before the harvest season. The whole concept of the reserve armies is nothing new. It caused agitation only because its timing coincided with the dissemination of threats of war from Ethiopia (which meant nothing for me personally). Other than that, a reserve army, regardless of age or gender, needs constant training and exercise so as to be able to go into action whenever necessary.

This training program started later than expected and as such it collided with the harvesting season. There was a good rainy season and subsequently a good harvest, and thus crop ricks were still out in the field. And because threshing is still conducted traditionally (with oxen) and demands hard work, the program posed a problem. So we had to prioritize between the harvest and training programs. Plans to incorporate both didn't work out. The choice had to be made at a national level. The training that ensured the preparedness of the reserve army was chosen as a priority and is being implemented. While the implementation of the training program was a huge advantage, I don't consider the delays in the harvests were a big loss. I know there are still haystacks seen alongside the roads and they would all be destroyed if it rained, but I think that's a problem we can live with. And this is solved out in the field and has nothing to do with the issue of reserve armies or the nation's general preparedness for defense, dignity and safeguarded sovereignty.

Mr. President, while you have already mentioned it, I would like to ask you a question about what is being aired by senior Ethiopian officials in relation to invading Eritrea. They have been repeatedly publicizing that they will invade Eritrea. What do you think is the root cause behind these official statements?

At the beginning, people used to say that they were saying this and that, but we didn't want to react to what was being said. I don't want to go to the detailed analysis related to military strength and overall capacity. However, what is being propagated is associated with the worrisome situation inside Ethiopia.

One of the major conspiracies engineered against Eritrea is sanction. The sanction is a two-edged blade. One objective of the sanction is to constrain our ability to realize the major development goals we have in Eritrea. In this case, the most important target is limiting the possibility of strengthening Eritrea's capacity to defend its sovereignty. The other side of the sanction is intended to psychologically undermine Eritrea. In 2009, a lot was said about how the sanction was developed. It was an amazing decision. The Security Council's decision to sanction Eritrea is an apparent abuse based on evident lies and deception. This indicates the nature of the prevailing world order. It is related to the advent of a unipolar system, which has been prevalent since the end of World War II. At this time, it has been clear to many that the decision is a terribly shameful one. While they may not explicitly confess about it, even those who supported it at the beginning regret it today. No one believes that the decision was just and legally acceptable and justifiable. And nobody believes that it should be further tightened. If we look at the paper detailing Ethiopia's last year diplomatic strategy, its main content is that the sanction should not be undone and it has to be further tightened. However, at this time, it is really hard to propagate and accordingly justify that the unjust sanction has to be further tighter as nobody can lend ears to such unconvincing claims.

While its deceptions worked in the past, now the Ethiopian government has realized that it is not that possible to further justify the continuity of the sanction. The point is that the aforesaid

propaganda in relation to the phony war about invading Eritrea is partly intended to create lame excuses for the sanction not to be lifted. The second objective of such a maneuver is to cover up the domestic problems prevailing in Ethiopia by diverting public attention. The vertical and horizontal polarization that the regime has created among different forces in Ethiopia is very disturbing. Even though this may not be that apparently visible for those who are observing it remotely, this problem is evidently clear for those who are inside Ethiopia. Weyane's strategy of governing Ethiopia is based on divide and rule mechanisms across ethnic lines and by creating cleavages even within ethnic groups. If we look at the horizontal polarization between the haves and the have-nots, very few have controlled the resources in the economy while the majority of the Ethiopian people are disadvantaged – they are at a polar opposite. They talk a lot about the economic growth in order to falsely indicate that major projects are being effectively realized in the country. This by itself is meant to cover up the worrisome problems they have inside the country. Given the worries related to the upcoming 2015 election, one can clearly understand such issues. One has to ask herself or himself, 'what is new making them beat war drums at this particular time?' For a composed person, this issue is immaterial. We should remain composed and not even talk about it. We should not be obsessed about this issue so as not to be disrupted and deviate from our direction. We just need to focus on what we are doing instead of trying to be reactively preoccupied about such public relations issues intended to cover up their internal problems.

When it comes to diplomatic concerns, it seems that the attempts to diplomatically isolate Eritrea have failed. How do you see Eritrea's situation in the region and the world at large? What about the plans to further strengthen the overall diplomatic endeavors and the public diplomatic efforts?

We should look at this issue from different perspectives. There are those countries that are really or nominally powerful ones. There are also the members of the Security Council. It may be important to examine the respective perspectives of all these countries. However, this has to be analyzed vis-à-vis the influences of other actors. One may consider Europe as a whole, Russia, China and India. Latin America also has its own dynamics. There is a need to cumulatively analyze the views of each influential country or region in order to have a clear picture of the overall effect of all the influences or interactions. There is also a need to examine the motives and perspectives of those who conspire against us.

It may be premature to talk about the possibility of lifting the sanction. Which is more sensible, to be reactively preoccupied by the situation or proactively initiate and get engaged in partnership programs? It is likely that we have to show how naked and unjust the sanction is but what matters more is the partnerships we establish with influential states as part of our regional and global diplomatic strategy. Where the needs of all actors are aligned, it is easier to synergize the efforts of all concerned groups. It is also more important to be much more concerned about having a good neighborhood in our immediate region. Whether it is heartily or not, everybody

wishes the neighborhood to be characterized by stability and cooperation; nobody argues otherwise. The problem is different groups have different interests. Given such cases, what is more important in diplomatic efforts is creating mutual understanding. There must be concerted efforts to create good relationships in our neighborhood; there have to be forms of cooperation that benefit all actors. Little by little it may be possible to develop practical and specific projects and programs that benefit all countries. However, there are conspiracies that hinder the realization of such a strategy. The issues related to Hanish, Badme and the sanction against Eritrea are just some of the examples that destabilize our region. We don't believe that these conspiracies are particularly targeting us.

Consequently, there has to be a concerted effort and a commonly shared desire to promote the stability of our neighborhood. In general, our diplomatic effort places more emphasis on creating a stable neighborhood characterized by cooperation. We have cooperation programs that are related to the respective perspectives of the countries mentioned earlier. And this is progressing well. The good thing is many of them say that they misunderstood the way the sanction was engineered at the time it was decided. They claim that it was a wrong decision. The fact that there is nobody who feels that the sanction was a right decision is a considerable advantage providing us with diplomatic upper hand. But what is mainly important to us is creating a stable region. While this may be a goal that is realized in the long term, the bilateral relationships have to be developed into concrete partnership programs. Hence, it is the key task of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to further strengthen and promote 2014 efforts in 2015. In connection to accomplishing our domestic objectives and those objectives that have to be realized in collaboration with our partners, we need to further strengthen our diplomatic efforts to promote investment opportunities.

Your Excellency, in the course of realizing the objectives associated with making Eritrea a prosperous country, the people of Eritrea faced and were able to overcome many odds. Given this background, how do you assess our capacity to realize our aspirations? Do we have the human and material resources required to accomplish the tasks ahead?

Human and material resources are what you can create. For example, everybody wants to live peacefully. However, peace is not something that is a heaven sent opportunity. Rather, one has to work hard to bring peace. We need to clearly identify the resources required for achieving our objectives. There are different resources such as technology, machinery, different raw materials, etc. However, human resource is the key of all the resources. Hence, all the resources become useful with the help of this key resource. In this case, what matters more is not the number of people but their quality. Therefore, it is important to improve the quality of our human resource in order to make them more energetic, productive and committed. However, being enthusiastic and committed alone is not enough if the people lack the required skills. Work culture is also very important for materializing what you aspire. This is part of what we have been traditionally doing in relation to raising the awareness of our human resource, mobilizing and equipping our

human resources. For realizing our objectives, awareness is a critically important factor. This has to be further reinforced with acquiring the required knowledge and skills. This is not a one-time assignment. It has to be done sustainably. If a person has a strong desire, ambition, readiness, and skill, plus if the person has acquired the required experience and if the person is provided with the right technology, for that person to be ultimately effective, his or her work culture matters more. The work culture is not necessarily and mainly associated with being hard working only. How efficient the person is matters too. For this reason a person's performance has to be measured in terms of the outcome achieved. Performance should not be measured in terms of the inputs used; it has to be measured in terms of the outputs produced. For this to be a reality, work culture is critically important. Therefore, there should be concrete efforts to cultivate appropriate work culture.

While there may be some idle and unproductive individuals, the majority of the citizens in different parts and sectors of the country are productively engaged in promoting the quality of life of the people and this dynamism is really encouraging.

In 2014, you spent much of your time at project sites. What impressions, associated with this, would you share with us?

While it may have been forgotten at this time, when we were establishing different ministries and government organs, it was felt that they have to be established not only in the capital city but in different parts of the country. In this case, where they may be established has to be related to the nature of their mandates. It is more important to closely observe what is actually taking place on the ground and according you need to be accurately informed about the actual performance. Once you are engaged in some of the tasks, it is not possible to distance yourself from them. However, this doesn't mean you become engaged in such tasks at the expense of or by postponing other key responsibilities. A balanced weight has to be allocated among the responsibilities you should discharge. I advise others that it is helpful to be where the actual performance is taking place in order to effectively serve the people. Whether you are a president, a minister, a department head, a regional or a sub-regional governor, etc, you need to closely supervise what is actually being done under your jurisdiction and to ensure effective supervision; one has to be close to the reality. What you do in your office and the time you spend at field sites where the projects are actively implemented have their respective importance and value. As long as it is well calculated, sometimes it may not have any problem even if you make a tradeoff between the two. As regards my impression, let me talk about it later.

Your Excellency, what messages would you like to convey to the Eritrean people on the occasion of New Year?

All of us should work hard and speed up our pace in order to improve the quality of life in our country. In the last few months, when I was away from office, I observed different things about the real life of different people. For example, I observed students who travel 15-20 kilometers to attend school. I also observed people who are 90, 85 and 87 years old and yet they are productive and actively participate in a productive work. The same is true with women. This observation is not limited to one or two areas; rather this is what you observe in different parts of the country. Therefore, as I am myself energized and inspired by what I observe, it doesn't make sense to try to advise such citizens. I just say that we should keep what we are doing so as to progressively move ourselves to our desired state of improving the standard of living of our people.