

## Eritrea at a Glance



### PRE-HISTORY

The earliest hominoid remains in Eritrea date from two million years ago, placing the land near the dawn of humankind on the planet. Stone tools from Abdur-at 125,000 years old-are the earliest, best-dated evidence for human occupation of a coastal marine environment. Tools found in the Barka Valley from 8000BC are the first evidence of human settlement here. Rock paintings have been found in several sites dating from 2000BC. So far, fifty-one prehistoric sites have been identified across Eritrea, from Karora in the north to Beylul in the southeast, but many more are expected to be discovered in the coming years.

The earliest inhabitants of Eritrea were probably related to the central Africa pygmies. They later co-mingled with Nilotic, Kushitic, and Semitic peoples who migrated here from as far away as the Nubian lowlands. The legendary land of Punt so referred to by the Egyptian pharaohs was the target of major expeditions during 2920-2649 BC; for the area was rich in gold, frankincense, myrrh, ostrich feathers, ebony, ivory and other precious commodities.

### Ancient Empire

The Adulite Era (9th Century BC- 5th Century AD): For nearly 1,400 years, the Red Sea coastal city-state of Adulis functioned as a major regional centre for commerce and trade. Other important cultural centres also arose during this period in the Eritrean interior, linked by trade with each other and the African hinterland and only now coming under archaeological scrutiny. Among them were extensive settlements circumscribing modern-day Asmara and large sites at Qohaito, Tekhonda'e and Kesksa (near Adi keih), at Metera (near senafe) and at Der'a (near Halhal), with more discovered each year. Greek and Egyptian hunting and trading posts were established on coastal and highland Eritrea in

the 3rd century BC and later. Obsidian (volcanic glass) taken from the coastal waters and Red Sea tortoise shell were among the most highly valued items in regional commerce, which also included rhino horn, elephant tusk, frankincense and hippopotamus hides from the interior.

### **The Axumite Empire (1st-9th century AD)**

The Axumite Empire, centred in the Eritrean highlands and what is now northern Ethiopia, flourished for nearly a thousand years. At its height in the 3rd and 4th centuries, Axum's domains stretched across the Red Sea to include much of modern Yemen. This kingdom, at times allied with the Byzantine Empire, was the avenue through which Christianity penetrated northeast Africa in the 4th century. In 615, prior to his victory at Mecca, the prophet Mohammed also sent fifteen of his followers to Adulis in an attempt to counter Byzantine power in the region, making Eritrea one of the earliest non-Arabian sites for contact with Islam.

Axumite power began to decline in the 7th century and collapsed under the strain of internal and external pressures over the next 200 years. Much of its territory in Eritrea was conquered by the Bejas, who were expanding southward from Sudan. An independent Islamic kingdom also arose in the Dahlak islands during this period. As Axum's authority disintegrated, its main language, Ge'ez, evolved into two of the widest spoken languages in Eritrea, Tigre, and Tigrinya.

### **The Five Beja Kingdom (8th-13th Century):**

Starting as early as the 4th century, the Beja, a Cushitic people, originating in Sudan, began making incursions into Axumite territory along the sea coast and in the highlands of north-western Eritrea. Five distinct but interrelated Beja kingdoms at their height stretched from southern Egypt to north central Eritrea. An offshoot, known as the Bellou kingdom, flourished from the 13th to the 16th century in parts of western Eritrea and eastern Sudan. The descendants of another, the Hedareb (also known by their language, T'bdawe), inhabit northern Eritrea today.

### **The Bahre Negash 14th-18th Century)**

The kingdom of the 'Sea kingdoms' or Bahre Negash, arose in highland Eritrea in the 14th century and stretched from the Mereb River to the seacoast, encompassing the core of modern Eritrea. Its ruler, confirmed by a Council of Elders, presided and paid tribute to the Abyssinian king to the south.

The authority of the Bahre Negashes declined in the 18th century, as the region descended into clan warfare that lasted more than 100 years. Abyssinian kings from neighbouring Tigray brought sections of the Eritrean highlands under their rule during the last half of the 19th century, but their dominion ended with the entry of the Italians in the 1880s.

The Ottoman Turks (15th-19th centuries) arrived in the Eritrean coast at the start of the 16th century, carving out an enclave from the realm of the Bahre Negash. For the next 300 years, they controlled large sections of the northern Eritrean shoreline, including the port of Massawa, which became the capital of what they called Habesh province, but they failed to sustain control of lands in the interior, despite several attempts to penetrate the plateau.

**Egypt (1846-85):** In 1846, Mohammed Ali's forces took control of Ottoman Habesh and enlarged it by annexing adjacent independently-ruled Eritrean regions in Bogos and Danakil. Egyptian forces also expanded into western Eritrea from the Sudanese town of Kessala, though they suffered major losses when they tried to drive further inland. After Egyptian rule was toppled in Sudan during the Mahdist uprising of 1888, Cairo's authority in Eritrea collapsed.

## MODERN COLONIAL RULE

**Italian Colonization (1881-1941):** The Italians established an outpost at Assab in 1881, which they used as a base to move northward toward Massawa as Egyptian power declined. Four years later, they annexed the province of Habesh. On January 1st 1890, the Italian king proclaimed the colony of Eritrea, with the port of Massawa as its capital.

Italy's attempts to drive south into Abyssinia were repelled by the Shoan King Menelik II at the 1896 Battle of Adua. Soon after this, Menelik and the king of Italy signed the Treaty of Addis Ababa, recognizing Italian claims in Eritrea up to the Mereb River. A year later, Italy moved Eritrea's capital to Asmara.



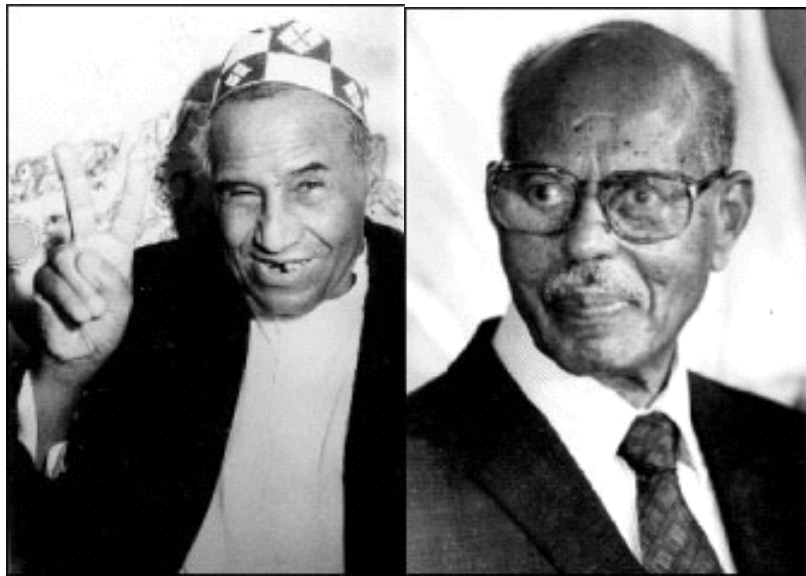
By the early 1930s, Eritrea was crisscrossed with new roads and communication networks. A narrow gauge railway linked Massawa with Asmara and inland areas west of Agordat. More than 300 small workshops and industries arose around the capital and the two ports, and many large labour-intensive farms and plantations were established in the countryside.

However, the Italians imposed strict colour-based segregation that sharply limited access to schools, jobs and social services for all Eritreans, including those of mixed racial backgrounds. In doing so, they encouraged a growing anti-colonial sentiment among the restive urban dwellers.

**British administration (1941-52)** : Italy's East-African empire collapsed quickly in the face of an assault by the British-led forces during WWII in 1941. In April of the same year, after reinstating Haileseilassie as the Ethiopian Emperor, the British established a Military Administration in Eritrea and redirected the colony's human material resources in support of the Allied Forces.

At first, the new rulers did little to alter Italian administrative structures, though some new clinics and schools were opened and Eritreans were hired in to the local police. After the end of the World War II, the British allowed new forms of organization that provided an institutional framework for political action- trade unions, publications and political parties. At this point, the responsibility of Italy's former colonies fell to the newly formed United Nations.

Eritrean nationalists organized Muslim and Christian-led independence parties, while some members of the local elite-joined by much of the orthodox clergy-opted for union with Ethiopia.



**Ethiopian annexation (1952-91)**: when the UN committee mandated with recommending a position to the General Assembly failed to reach a common resolution, the U.S. pushed for a federation between the two states under the authority of the Ethiopian Emperor. On 2, December 1950, the UN voted to accept this proposal, which went into effect on 15 September 1952. The UN plan granted Eritrea the right to self-administration with the authority over the police, local taxes and other domestic affairs but it gave Ethiopia control of Eritrea's defence, foreign affairs, currency and finance and international commerce and communications. Eritrea was given a constitution, a separate parliament, a national flag and two official languages (Tigrinya and Arabic), but the new state lacked the power to defend these externally imposed institutions. Soon after the imposed federation, Washington signed a treaty with Addis Ababa that gave the U.S. military bases in Asmara and provided access to naval facilities in Massawa in exchange for equipping and training Ethiopia's armed forces. Newly strengthened, the emperor quickly moved to dismantle Eritrea's limited autonomy.

Over the next decade, Ethiopia decreed a preventive detention law, arrested newspaper editors,

shut down independent publications, drove prominent nationalists in to exile, banned trade unions and political parties, replaced the Eritrean flag with that of Ethiopia, banned the use of indigenous languages in official transactions and in the schools, and seized Eritrea's share of lucrative customs duties. Entire industries were relocated from Asmara to Addis Ababa. On 14 November 1962, Ethiopian troops forced the parliament to dissolve itself, as the emperor officially annexed Eritrea as Ethiopia's fourteenth province.

### **The Liberation Struggle (1952-1991)**

**Early Resistance:** Throughout the 1950s, Eritreans protested Ethiopia's abrogation of the federation and its harsh repression of nationalist sentiments. However, there was no reaction from the international community. In 1957 students mounted mass demonstrations. In 1958 the trade unions launched a general strike. Ethiopian troops fired at the protestors, killing several and wounding hundreds. This convinced most Eritreans that peaceful public protest was no longer viable. In the late 1950s, after the crackdown, a group of exiles launched the underground Eritrean Liberation Movement to challenge Ethiopian rule. The ELM became a popular, clandestine national movement in towns and cities across Eritrea, but it lacked a strategy for armed resistance.



**Armed struggle:** In July 1960, a group of Eritreans in exile met in Cairo to establish the Eritrean Liberation Front, which declared the armed struggle to be the sole means to achieve independence. On September 1st 1961, a small band of ELF guerrillas, armed with antiquated Italian rifles, fired the revolution's first shots on police units at Mount Adal in western Eritrea. At the outset, there was a little agreement within ELF of transforming Eritrean society- only of freeing it from Ethiopian control. Some ELF leaders hoped that a symbolic armed uprising would push the UN to intervene. However, Eritrea's annexation generated little international attention.

The ELF grew steadily through the 1960s, but ethnic and religious division and internal rivalries severely weakened it. When Ethiopian forces counter attacked, massacring civilians and burning rural villages, thousands of people fled to neighbouring Sudan where some remained as refugees for decades. These setbacks nurtured a rising tide of discontent within the ELF. In 1968-69, the Front imploded as democratic forces fought to restructure the movement from within.

**The Birth of EPLF:** Three groups split off from the crumbling ELF with a few hundred fighters among them and began a dialogue that later produced Eritrean People's Liberation Front. The new movement's program placed a strong emphasis on overcoming ethnic and religious differences and achieving greater social equality. In doing so, it committed the liberation movement to social transformation along with national self-determination. However, ELF attacks on the new EPLF at first constrained the new front's ability to develop and grow. After the collapse of Ethiopia's Imperial order in September 1974 following a military coup led by the Derg, the two Eritrean Fronts reached a truce and turned their guns on the occupying army. By the end of 1977, they controlled most of rural Eritrea and all but a handful of the country's major towns and cities. Only the large-scale intervention of the Soviet Union on Ethiopia's behalf prevented the liberation forces from achieving a final victory.

Ethiopia and the Superpower powers: Despite its early weaknesses, the Eritrean revolution generated an escalating response from Ethiopia's global backers, starting with the U.S., whose strategic interests included an intelligence base at Kagnew Station in Asmara set up to intercept communication across Africa, the Middle East and the southern Soviet Union. As late as 1976, over two-thirds of all U.S. aid to Africa went to Ethiopia, including the first jet fighters on the continent.

However, once the Derg, headed by Lt. Col. Mengstu Hailemariam, was fully in control, the new regime severed ties with the U.S. and realigned Ethiopia with Soviet Union. Moscow quickly adopted Ethiopia as its eminent ally in Africa, sending its military and political advisors and billions of dollars worth of arms.

In 1978 Ethiopia launched a massive military campaign to reoccupy Eritrea. More than 100,000 heavily armed troops attacked EPLF and ELF positions from bases in Ethiopia, from government-controlled enclaves in Eritrea, from amphibious landings along the Red Sea coast. Soviet advisers played a key role in planning and executing four large offensives over the next six months before the EPLF halted the advance outside the town of Nakfa in the Sahel Mountains. A fifth offensive in July 1979 was beaten back at Nakfa with heavy Ethiopian losses.

Stalemate: As Ethiopia prepared for new rounds of fighting, disunity weakened the liberation movement. EPLF attempts to revive talks on unity with ELF were unsuccessful. When renewed civil war broke out in 1981, the EPLF drove ELF units in to Sudan where they splintered in to competing factions. Some ELF members later reconciled with EPLF and rejoined the war with Ethiopia. Others remained in Sudan or migrated elsewhere as refugees.

Huge but largely unreported battles took place in Eritrea during the early 1980s, involving hundreds of thousands of troops in campaigns that went on for months at a time. Ethiopia's sixth offensive-dubbed red star- lasted more than four months in early 1982 and involved round-the-clock-bombing of military and civilian targets, more than 120,000 troops engaged in repeated human wave attacks on EPLF positions and extensive napalm and chemical weapons before it was finally repulsed.





EPLF fighters, dug into a network of heavily fortified bunkers and trenches, inflicted over 31,000 casualties on the attacking forces while minimizing their own. They also captured large quantities of soviet arms and equipment. At the same time, mobile units operated behind enemy lines, not only launching military attacks but also organizing the people and providing badly needed social services.

Famine: In the mid-1980s, war and famine combined to create a humanitarian crisis of horrific proportions. Persistent draught seared the brittle land until the population of much of Eritrea teetered on the brink of starvation. But politics played a central role in the size and scope of this disaster, as Ethiopia prevented aid from reaching the hungry farmers in EPLF-controlled villages. Much of the donated food ended up in the hands of Ethiopian army, while the international community stood by (again) in silence.

By 1985, about 360,000 Eritrean refugees had fled to Sudan, most due to the war, but a growing number due to hunger. Several hundred thousand more were internally displaced, most subsisting with help from EPLF, whose humanitarian arm, the Eritrean Relief Association (ERA), carried out an under-resourced but highly efficient relief operation.

Liberation: Throughout the 1980s, the EPLF gained parity with Ethiopia on the battlefield. In March 1988, EPLF units hit the Ethiopians at their strongest point near Afabet, smashing the Nadow Command and, in doing so, shattered the ten-year stalemate and turned the tables on the Derg. In one 48-hour battle, Eritrean fighters wiped out three Ethiopian divisions and over-run the largest supply depot in the country, collecting enough heavy weapons, ammunition and equipment to supply it for the next year. In February 1990, using small but speedy motor boats to

surprise the Ethiopians from the rear, the EPLF captured the port of Massawa and sealed off Ethiopia's land forces from all but air-borne supplies.

The final battle of the war took place near Dekemhare in May 1991, in the midst of which Ethiopia's mercurial dictator fled to Zimbabwe. When the Ethiopian army in Eritrea collapsed, the EPLF marched into Asmara and began the process of constructing the new state. Four days later, the Addis Ababa government surrendered to the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, a coalition of anti-government groups controlled by the Tigray People's Liberation Front and assisted by the EPLF.

### **Independence (1991-present):**

**De Facto Independence:** With the end of the 30-year liberation war on 24 May 1991, Eritrea archived its independence in effect, if not yet by law. At once, the newly formed Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE) set about reconstructing the country's devastated infrastructure, while building a rudimentary state apparatus to manage the transition to internationally recognized sovereignty.



The war had left Eritrea in ruins. Water and sewage systems in the towns barely functioned. The few asphalt roads had been torn up by heavy military vehicles. Port facilities in Massawa were badly damaged by heavy bombing after the city was liberated in February 1990. And the rail system was entirely dismantled, its iron rails used to make bunkers.

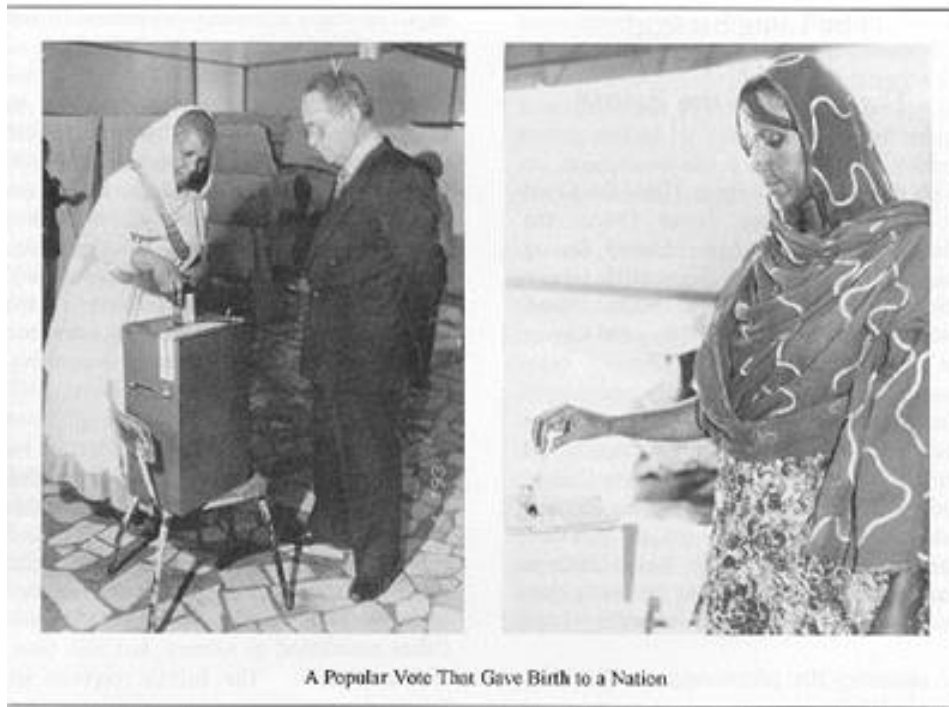
What remained of Eritrea's light industry had not been maintained or modernized in a quarter century, and urban unemployment exceeded 30% of the economically active population.

Meanwhile, persistent drought had kept the rural population on the brink of famine. At the end of



the fighting, 85% of Eritrea's 3 million people depended on donated food aid. The World Bank estimated Eritrea's per capita income at only \$70-150, compared to \$330 for the rest of sub Saharan Africa.

**Referendum & Recognition:** On 21-23 April 1993, following a year of extensive popular education, organization and logistical preparations in which nearly 1,125,000 potential voters were registered, an Independent Referendum Commission staffed by prominent Eritreans from wide-ranging background conducted a national referendum on Eritrea's political status. More than 98.5 % of those eligible participated at polling stations throughout Eritrea, in Ethiopia and Sudan, and as far away as the Middle East, Europe, North America, and Australia.



The balloting was monitored by the United Nations, the Organization of the African Unity, the Arab League, the Non-Aligned Movement and representatives of more than a dozen countries, including Ethiopia. When the results were tallied, 99.8 percent of the voters chose sovereignty. Sudan, Ethiopia, Italy, the U.S. and other countries with local diplomatic representation immediately recognized the State of Eritrea. On 24 May, the PGE officially declared Eritrea's independence. Soon afterward, Eritrea joined the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations.

**State-building:** Once achieving international recognition, the Government of Eritrea was recognized to manage the transition to constitutional government. Distinct responsibilities were assigned to the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the new government, and a fifty-member constitution commission was created to oversee the constitution making process.

Eritrea's ten colonial era provinces were reconstructed into six co-equal regions, which held elections for regional legislatures. The new regional governments took on many of the



responsibilities for administration and reconstruction and development in their areas, developmental ministries (all but the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defense, Justice, Finance and Information) developed their operational functions to the regional level.

The civil service was also streamlined and reformed. Its management structure was decentralized, and personnel were re-deployed to offices in the administrative regions. During this time, the public sector workforce was reduced by 30%.

In the midst of this reorganization, the new state had to design everything, passports, drivers' licenses and postage stamps to telecommunication system, school curricula, road and rail networks, and tax trade and investment policies. In effect, it had the task of creating a new country from scratch.

**EPLF/PFDJ:** In February 1994, the EPLF convened its third congress and voted to dissolve the Liberation Front, as it had achieved its basic mandate – the liberation of Eritrea. At this time, the delegates launched a new post-war political movement, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice to build on the EPLF's legacy and to lead the country through the post-war transition to constitutional government.

The PFDJ's basic goals, as summarized in the National Charter adopted there, were: national harmony, political democracy, economic and social development, social justice (economic and social democracy), cultural revival and regional and international cooperation.

At the core of its mandate was a commitment to engage the population in national reconstruction and to facilitate its full and active participation in the unfolding political process. In some communities, up to 80 percent of the adult population signed up in the year after the front was launched. By 1996 there were 6000 branches at the local level, with approximately 100 members in each.

The new organization began by holding monthly group seminars and later shifted to an

organizing mode focused on generating community-based development projects. Local organizers went through basic training courses where representatives of government ministries explained the support they could get for local development initiatives and asked them to serve as channels for communicating people's concerns back to the state .

Continuing the economic activities developed during the liberation struggle, the PFDJ became an important catalyst for the growth in the post-war economy. PFDJ enterprises inherited from the war for independence included construction, well-drilling, land transport, shipping, metal works, export-import concerns, foreign exchange operations and a housing bank. PFDJ companies took on many local projects which other private contractors declined, such as the construction of hospitals and schools in remote areas.

**Self-reliance :** Eritrea is committed to self-development with dignity, relying first and foremost on its own people to set the pace, direction and character of the country's passage from colonial subjugation to full economic sovereignty, as well as political independence.

In 1995 the government ended food relief in favour of the public works program that enabled impoverished Eritreans to meet their basic needs while rebuilding the country. A National Service program was enacted to bring young people into the nation-building process.

International aid agencies were asked to integrate their activities into national development plans, under Eritrean leadership. And major investments were made in fields of education and public health.

The results were stunning. In the first ten years after independence, the infant mortality rate was cut in half, child malnutrition rates dropped by nearly two thirds, and life expectancy at birth rose from forty six to fifty five years. At the same time, the number of schools in Eritrea more than doubled while attendance, particularly among girls, rose dramatically.

High levels of popular participation in the country's reconstruction and development are the hallmark of Eritrea's post-independence growth. At the same time, instances of crime or corruption have remained lower than anywhere else in Africa- and perhaps the world. This speaks of the high levels of social cohesion and civic pride that propelled the development process.

**Constitution-building:** The fifty members of Eritrea's constitution commission, set up after independence, were drawn from a wide spectrum of the society. They included representatives of nearly all 9 nationalities, as well as veteran leaders of the ELF. Nearly half were women.

In mid-1994, commissioners traveled across the country and abroad to convene discussions among Eritreans on key debating points. Among them were: the role of the state in promoting equity and social justice; how the new government could lead the nation in sustainable development; how governmental powers should be separated and what would be their relationship; whether to have a presidential or a parliamentary government, or a form that combined both; which officials should be appointed and which elected; what form the legislative body should take; what place the military would have; what role parties would play; what civil and political rights should be enshrined in the document; how the rights of minorities should be safeguarded; and how the rights of women should be protected. In early 1995 the commission hosted an international symposium on constitution-making with participants from many countries.

The constitution-building process was constructed to strengthen the existing national consensus on Eritrea's identity and to deepen the unity among its diverse constituents. Entire villages gathered under shade trees to debate fundamental rights and freedoms. Theater and music groups stages performance on these motifs, radio programs were broadcasted in several languages, and

highly publicized contests on constitutional themes were held for students to stimulate public interest and heighten participation.

After a draft was produced in 1996, there was another round of public seminars to give people the opportunity to respond to it. On 23 May 1997, a constituent Assembly comprised of 527 members from the provisional National Assembly, all six Regional Assemblies and representatives from the diaspora formally ratified the document, which became the legal frame-work for governing the country once national elections could be organized under its terms and provisions.

**Renewed War:** Throughout 1996 and 1997, tensions arose between Eritrea and Ethiopia over seemingly minor economic and political issues. However, they were aggravated by a series of armed incursions into Eritrean territory from Ethiopia's northern Tigray region. The significance of these incidents was made clear by the publication in Tigray in November 1997 of new maps that for the first time claimed significant areas of Eritrea.

When discrete diplomatic efforts failed to diffuse this deepening crisis, and after a series of armed incidents during which several Eritrean officials were murdered near the disputed village of Badme, Ethiopia declared "war" on Eritrea on 13 May 1998 and mobilized its armed forces for a full-scale assault on Eritrea. On 5 June, Ethiopia aircrafts bombed the airport in Asmara. International mediation efforts failed to halt the race toward war, and ground fighting soon broke out at several points along the border.



Three rounds of combat in 1998-2000 produced hundreds of thousands of casualties and displaced nearly 1 million Eritreans. Another 76,000 Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin were forcibly expelled from Ethiopia.

**Steps toward Peace:** With the war stalemated, Ethiopia agreed to a cease-fire in mid-June, and the fighting ended. On 12 December 2000, Eritrea and Ethiopia signed a comprehensive peace

agreement in Algiers, assisted by mediators from the U.S., the European Union and the Organization of African unity. Under its terms, a 25-kilometer-wide temporary security zone was established within Eritrea that was patrolled by UN peacekeeping forces, while an international boundary commission, whose members were approved in advance by both sides, delimited the contested border. A separate commission investigated civilians' compensation claims.

Once the commission issued its findings in April 2002 and both parties accepted the outcome, Eritrea turned its attention to the reintegration of the many war-displaced civilians, expellees from Ethiopia and returning refugees from Sudan and to the phased demobilization of combatants within a comprehensive, community-based reconstruction and development program.

**Campaign to re-build the Nation:** In 2003, Eritrea declared Warsay-Ykealo Campaign, a call to rebuild the nation. Eritrean youth turned from their guns and tanks to shovels and tractors. The once optimistic Eritrean economy that had been devastated by the consequences of the war, was once again awakened. Through this campaign the people of Eritrea are exerting their efforts to achieve the country's economic stability by working on all economic sectors. The results are tangible and generally speaking, the progress is on the right tracks.

## **Culture**

Eritreans are culture-bound people with a deep sense of pride of their identity. Cultural development was an integral part of the liberation struggle and has remained so since Eritrea's independence, both as an expression of national identity and as a crucial foundation upon which the nation itself is built. During the armed struggle for liberation Eritrean cultural values played an important role in strengthening the commitment towards national unity and freedom. Today, those same values highlight the country's sovereignty, as they determine the country's aspirations, for peace and prosperity for all its citizens.

Each of the country's nine nationalities has its own oral and literary tradition, its music and dance, its architectures, its arts and crafts, and much more. Eritrea celebrates this rich heritage at all major celebrations and festivals, with performances and exhibitions that showcase the unique contribution of each group.

***Festivals and Holidays:*** The National Holidays Coordinating Committee in all six regions in the country as well as in the Diaspora plans and organizes celebrations, commemorations and festivals. The three major national holidays are; May 24-Independence Day, June 20-Martyr's Day, September 1st-Commemoration of the commencement of the Eritrean Revolution. Other public holidays include Christmas, Epiphany, Id Al-Fetir, Good Friday and Ge'ez Easter, Id Al-Adha, and Mewlid Al-Nabi.

Regional and national festivals, youth fairs, and cultural competitions are held throughout the country, organized by the local administrations and other organizations. The Eritrean media play a major role in promoting them, with extensive coverage on radio, TV, and newspapers.

The annual Eritrea Festival is held in Asmara every summer, attracting nearly 600,000 people and is the cultural event of the year. The festival features songs, dances and dramatic performances from all nine nationalities and much more in a continuous exposition that runs for ten days. Among the featured events and exhibits are models of traditional homes, arts and crafts shows, traditional food and refreshments, rites and ceremonies, special exhibitions of artistic and scientific merit, and highly competitive contests. Similar festivals are organized by Eritrean communities in the Middle East Europe, North America and Australia.

The Raimoc awards, whose name is derived from the Hidarb word for the beauty and grace of the long neck of an antelope, are represented to the individual and groups in Eritrea who most excel at literature, music, painting, drama, traditional folklore and other categories. The annual prizes total as much as 400,000 Nakfa, and the competitions are fierce, from regional competitions that narrow the field to the finals held in Asmara in August

### *Some Important Features Of Eritrean Culture*

**The coffee ceremony:** Strong, aromatic coffee is often drunk in Eritrea in an elaborate ritual that brings families and their guests together in an hour-long ceremony at the close of a long work day. It is usually served in thimble-size, handle-less cups and accompanied by trays of fresh popcorn and raisins, Hmbahsa (bread) and other local specialties.



Typically, the woman of the household scatters strands of fresh grass on the floor to provide the freshness of the outdoors, as she roasts green coffee beans over a charcoal fire, shaking them frequently to prevent burning. Once they are blackened and are ready for grinding, she lets the fresh fragrance waft under the nose of family members and friends and then grinds the beans into a powder.

The coffee is repeatedly heated to a boil in a round clay pot with a thin, stem-like neck, as frankincense burns nearby. Participants are expected to partake at least three rounds of the full-boiled brew, between which tall glasses of the local beer, Suwa, are often served.

**Cuisine:** Traditional Eritrean cuisine is spicy and has distinctive flavour. Many tourists like to try the local cuisine and are encouraged to do so by the locals. Fortunately many local food cuisines are available in almost all restaurants accessible to tourists in Eritrea.



Typically, Eritrean cuisine consists of various stews (tsebhi) made from vegetables and meat, and served atop a large, flat sour-dough bread called injera or tayta. Many vegetarian dishes are available, since a majority of the population observe fasting at some time during the year. Eating is accomplished without utensils by tearing a piece of injera (strictly using the right hand), then scooping some stew, vegetables or salad with the bread.

On visiting an Eritrean household, it is polite to decline at least three times if asked to dine. Usually the host will say “bizay kelalem”, after which the guest may agree to dine. This process ensures that one does not seem too eager to eat at another’s household.

## ***THE ARTS***

**Architecture:** Eritrea’s major cities exhibit strong colonial influences, as with Asmara’s Florentine and art deco styles and Massawa’s Turkish and Egyptian styles. However, its smaller towns and villages each have a character of their own, drawn from the cultural heritage of the nationalities living there.

Asmara has a profusion of well-preserved office buildings, hotels, cinemas, residence and service centres that reflect architectural styles as varied as internationalist, futurist, rationalist and neoclassical. There are massive stepped towers and brick string-courses, Doric columns and hand crafted wrought-iron gates, curved corner entrances and porthole windows, gardens and elegant villas with marble staircase, louvered shutters, curving balustrades and shay porticos.



Asmara also houses the region’s first synagogue, built in 1905 , in the neoclassical style; the Kulafah Al Rashidin (great mosque), built in 1938 and combining rationalists, classical and Islamic styles; and a towering catholic cathedral, built in 1923, that is said to be one of the finest Lombard-Romanesque-style churches outside Italy.

Massawa is noted for its covered passageways and coral-block houses, with their trellised balconies and finely-carved wooden doors and shutters. In the heart of Massawa island is the 500-year-old Sheikh Hanafi Mosque. A short walk from there, on nearby Taulud Island, is the soon-to-be-restored 16th century palace of the Turkish Osdemir Pasha that overlooks the busy harbour, where brightly coloured, hand-crafted dhows furl their classic triangular lateen sails and offload cargoes.

In the cooler highlands, most rural Tigrinya-speaking families live in flat-roofed, rectangular houses, hidmo, with dry stone exterior walls and thick interior wooden pillars that define separate spaces for sleeping, food preparation and the stabling of farm animals. In the hot arid lowlands, most people live in circular single-room dwellings, constructed out of sun-dried adobe, dried sticks or grass and crowned with conical thatched roofs.

### **Music and Dance**

Every nationality in Eritrea has its musical traditions and its distinctive dances, usually performed to the rhythm of intricate, locally-produced instruments. These may include single-or multi-stringed (watas and kirars), flutes of varying lengths, drums, rattles and tambourines, sometimes played together with modern amplified instruments. Many mark major events in life, such as birth and marriage, or celebrate important religious or community festivals. There is also a growing popular music culture in the major urban centers, which draws on and reinterprets traditional themes.



**Literature:** The nation's rich oral and literary tradition ranges across all nine nationalities and includes a wealth of poetry and proverbs, songs and chants, folk tales, histories and legends. Until recently, most of Eritrea's written literature was religiously based. Since independence, however, new works of poetry, drama, narrative fiction and memoir have appeared.

**Painting :** The most common traditional painting, usually done on skin, parchment or event canvas, depict religious themes and fables or abstract designs and shapes in “storyboard” forms. Most church walls are painted with colourful and dramatic murals. More modern styles developed during the liberation struggle, varying from harsh realism to highly symbolic renderings of social and political themes. Portraiture and landscape art have also become common.

**Theatre:** Drama is almost always a reflection of Eritrean people’s history. Traditionally, it was used to celebrate religious festivals. It usually involved music, singing, dancing and acting. During the liberation of struggle, short skits and full-length plays depicted historical events and cultural practices, interpreted political and social issues, and entertained and amused large audiences throughout the country. Since independence, new works, some carefully scripted, others more improvisational have begun to appear. Many playwrights started to flourish some of whose work has even been translated in English and been performed in many parts of the world. Drama is mostly produced during the national holidays that would reflect the historical and social trends of the Eritrean society.

The young film industry is also boosting up. About 60 movies are produced annually. These movies reflect contemporary social life, true stories of struggle for independence and other affairs that concern the society.



### **Crafts**

**Pottery:** Ceramic work constitutes one of Eritrea’s oldest crafts, for pottery products grace nearly every household. Slender necked pots, djebena are parts of the classic Eritrean coffee ceremony, just as clay pots, tsahli, are integral to the spicy chicken stews served on most festive occasions. Also ubiquitous in rural households are the large ceramic water pots, known as utro, and the



brightly-painted irregularly-shaped incense holders. Today, in the urban centres, one can also find hand made ceramic flower vases, candle holders, ashtrays and other household objects.

**Weaving & Basket-making:** Much of Eritrean basketwork derives from its uses in the preparation, serving and storage of food- from breakfast plates and bread basket to” lunch boxes” taken by farmers and herders to the fields- but there is a growing trade basketry intended solely for decoration, such as colourful table mats, wall-hangings and centrepieces.

**Jewelry:** Finely-worked gold and silver earrings, necklaces, bracelets and rings are commonly given to women on their wedding day. While precious metals are more rare in the country-side, many rural women have jewelry strung together from beads and worn around their heads, necks, wrists, and ankles. Among the other highly prized traditional metal works are Orthodox crosses made of silver and brass.

**Leather work:** Traditional leatherwork is often decorated with beads and cowry shells, though locally tanned leather is often used to cover handmade stools, seats, baskets, and drums. There is also a growing trade of fashionable handbags, shoes, belts, and coats. As Eritrea has banned wildlife hunting and trade in wildlife products, all leather products are derived from domesticated animals.



**Wood-carving:** Many Eritrean carvers use the pale wood from the olive tree to produce picture frames, bowls, salt and pepper shakers, candle holders, small shields, and other house hold items, some functional, some purely decorative. Colourful porcupine quills are worked into the design. Other local wood is used to make rough-hewn chairs and tables, low –rise stools, camel saddles and t-shaped pillows intended to keep the head away from potential snake, scorpion, or spider bites.

## **Museums & Libraries**

The National Museum is headquartered in Asmara; it is in the process of establishing a network of regional centres as well. One is already established in Massawa. It includes exhibits on all the ethnic groups of Eritrea, the country's main archaeological site and the 30-year independence war.

The Research and Documentation Center (RCD) houses the archives from the liberation war and is a repository for many other historical documents, oral and written histories, photographs, maps, charts, and other visual records. It is negotiating the return of valuable lost documents and artefacts from individuals, government, and other institutions, and it is collecting recently published works of historical and artistic merit. In the future, the RCD will develop into an autonomous National Library and Archives.

## ***The Echo of the ancestors***

East Africa is rich in history and archaeological findings. Eritrea also has the blessings of these dazzling findings. There are many legacies the ancestors left behind. Many findings show that there was a great civilization in the area. A simple visit to the museum in Asmara, and Massawa, can teach us a lot about these facts. Some of the most important findings include:

**The Buya Findings:** the remains of the previous ancestors became a new venture in archaeological sites in Buya. This place is found 110kms south west of Massawa. A female skull and remaining of extinct types of elephants (*Elephas Recki*) is found in the area. The remaining of the elephant reduces the gap of one type of elephant found between Tanzania and Kenya. The remainings can be found today in the Museum in Asmara.

**Adulis:** During 2000B.C. this area was a gateway between central Africa and the Arab and Asia Lands. From 240 B.C. onwards the place became a hot spot for commerce. Later on, the Axumite kingdom used Adulis as its gate for commercial purposes.



**Dahlak Islands:** After the fall of the port Adulis in 8th century B.C. Dahlak islands rose as a new commercial route. Different materials such as turtle backs, elephant trunks, slaves and others passed through the islands to the Arab and Asian lands. It is



also identified as a source of development and expansion of Islam in the horn of Africa. We can find Kufian scriptures of 8th-12th A.D. in the grave stones in the area. There are also traditionally-built wells in the area by the ancestors as water is scarce in the area.

**Kohayto and Metera:** Perhaps the most popular archaeological sites in Eritrea are Kohayto and Metera found in the Southern Region of Eritrea. Kohayto emerged as a town in about 800-400 B.C. long before the rise of Axumite Kingdom (1st A.D). This place has an influence of three civilizations known as Da'amat from the Arabic land. Its exotic artefacts prove that it holds a rich history of a trade route connecting the highlands of Eritrea and Ethiopia to the coastal areas of Adulis.





### ***Art & Culture Organizations***

The Cultural Heritage Project (recently renamed the Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project) seeks to conserve monuments and heritage sites, conserve the environment and support living cultures. It works in collaboration with the National Museum, the University of Asmara and other community-based organizations throughout the country to heighten public awareness of Eritrea's exceedingly rich cultural resources, ancient and modern, and to help manage this legacy. Among the many new organizations nurturing and promoting modern art and music are the Asmara Art Club. The Eritrean Library is active in developing and stocking public libraries in all regions of the country.

International cultural organizations and agencies represents in Eritrea include the British Council, Alliance Française, the Eritro-German club, Casa Degli Italiani, the pavoni Library and others.

### **EDUCATION**

Eritreans are open-minded people. Now, with the recently upgraded curriculum and opening of five extra higher educations, Eritrea is a center of brain competition. Modern education was introduced in Eritrea during the Italian colonization. This was limited to elementary level, meant only for the citizens to serve the colonizers in administration level. During the British Administration, the level rose to Middle School in many places. This was however, short-lived when Ethiopia illegally annexed Eritrea and replaced the educational system by its own curriculum. And the chance for education was mainly preserved for Ethiopians. After independence, the Government of Eritrea sought to reform the inherited educational system of the colonizers to make it compatible and efficient with the country's progress to development. Education is perceived as fundamental human rights in Eritrea.

The goals of the reform of education are:

- To minimize a wastage of manpower, resources, efforts and time in the education system
- To open opportunities to all citizens to develop to their full potential, both professionally and personally.
- Set employment-oriented opportunities at all educational level
- Create a competitive both globally and locally standards and quality of education and training in the education system.

### **Primary, Middle and Secondary School**

The formal early childhood education is basically composed of four stages: Pre-school, Elementary, Junior and Secondary School. Children between the age of 4-6 years go to Pre-school. The Elementary Schools entertain from 1st to 5th grades. After passing to the Junior School, the students take general examination to join Secondary Schools. After completing 11th grade, the students go to Wairday-Ykealo Secondary School to finish their 12th grade. After taking their matriculation exam, those who got the right grades join the colleges of their choices. The rest are provided with the opportunity to join the Vocational School to develop their professional skills. Joining the colleges is highly competitive. The matriculation exam is carried out within and outside Eritrea to all Eritreans who choose to study in the colleges in Eritrea. The students are exceedingly motivated for competitions. During the 16 years of independence, the number of pre-university education students has increased from 200,000 in 1991 to 600,000. Those who score full GPA in their matriculation are provided with special awards by the youth organization.



### **Higher Education**

Higher education plays a great role in this age of globalization, information and communications technology. As a result, the Government of Eritrea has invested heavily in Higher Education. The only one higher education institution in Eritrea, Asmara University has now flourished to five Higher Education Colleges accommodating Degree, Diploma and Certificate programs. Before the opening of these colleges, only 10%-15% of the total Secondary School students were allowed to join University of Asmara. In 16 years, the University of Asmara graduated only 12,000 students. At the moment there are 8,000 students studying in the five colleges. These colleges are Eritrea Institute of Technology, College of Marine Science, College of Business and Economics, College of Agriculture, College of Health Science and College of Arts and Social Sciences. With the opening of these colleges tertiary education in Eritrea has increased to 45%. In the near future, these colleges will develop to full-fledged Universities.

### **Postgraduate Programs**

The Postgraduate Program is carried out in connection with the reputed universities around the world. This year about 30 students have been graduated with Masters Degree programs through correspondence. There is also a plan for the post-graduate program to be established in Eritrea soon, when efficient curriculum and facilities are provided.

### **Vocational Training**

After independence various vocational training services were opened to meet the post war reconstruction and development needs and to facilitate the re-integration of people disadvantaged by the decades-long conflict. The vocational training was given in three different certification levels. The Secondary School Certificate, Intermediate Certificate and Advanced Diploma Certificate. By 2006, the total enrolment in the Intermediate Level reached around 15,000 and the Advanced Level reached more than 2,000. The Vocational Training Centers were opened in Agordat, Barentu, Belewkelew, Mendefera, Haykota, and Mayatal to provide few-month courses

for elderly farmers on improving their lives by introducing them with modern farming and other necessities.

On January 2007, National Center of Vocational Training was established. This gives a chance to the students who are unable to join the colleges to develop various skills in this institution.

Currently, the NCVT holds four departments: Department of Agriculture which provides courses on Animal Science, Soil and Water Conservation, Plant Science and Farm Irrigation; Department of Commerce which provides; Accounting, Secretarial Science, Store Management, Library Science and Achieves, Department of Technical Skills which provides; Plumbing, Drafting, Survey, Masonry, Electric Installation, Carpentry, Metal work, Furniture Building, and Department of Light and Heavy Machinery.

These departments provide one year extensive training to their students and who then are provided with chances to work with different companies and ministries in the country.

In the near future, this training center will expand further and will host about 10,000 students.

This comprises about one-fourth of the total number of students in the whole country.

There is also a plan that all the ministries in Eritrea will also provide vocational training that will equip the staff members with necessary functional skills.

## **SPORTS**

Even though Eritrea has been a member of the world sport community since mid 1990's, it was from 2004 (in the Olympics) that it started gaining fame. Athlete Zerisenay Tadesse won a 3rd prize in the 10,000-meter race and enabled his country, Eritrea, to be named among the best in the athletics world. Following his steps, many young Eritrean athletes also won in many big competitions. Eritrea also won 2nd place in the 34th International Cross-country Race held, in April 2006, in Japan. On October 2006, again Athlete Zerisenay Tadesse grabbed the gold medal in the International Road-race held in Hungary, putting Eritrea on the 2nd rank. Eritrea also won the first prize in international mountain race in September 2006 in Turkey and was awarded two trophies and eight gold medals.



In the football arena, Eritrea also gained fame by defeating reputed teams such as Egypt, Zambia, Libya and other best football teams in the world, and moved to African youth football tournament

of 2007 held in Togo. This dramatic change enabled the country to elevate itself in the FIFA and CAF status.

Eritrea also has one of the best cycling teams in Africa. Eritrean cycling team won the 1st prize in the East Africa (zone-5), in the tournament held in November 2006 in Kenya.

Eritrea is also the first prize-winner in all African games held in July 2007 in Algiers. The icon athlete in Eritrea, Zerisenay Tadesse, grabbed the gold medal again in this tournament. The Eritrean cycling team ranked as 2nd, 5th, 9th and 10th individually, shooting Eritrea in the 1st position of all the countries in Africa.

## ***Health and Human services***

### **Health care**

Eritrea employs an exemplary approach to ensure the provision of health services to its citizens. Since independence the Ministry of Health played a great role in building and rehabilitating hospitals, developing its human resource, controlling vaccine-preventable diseases and the spread of HIV and, improved its emergency services. Like the rest of the country's sectors, this was in ruins during the colonization. At the time of liberation in 1991, the Government of the State of Eritrea inherited a health care system, totally inadequate in terms of physical facilities, trained human resource as well as an inequitable distribution of resources, availability of drugs and other medical supplies. In the past fifteen years (1991–2007), the Government and the people of Eritrea worked hard to reverse the health and health services situation that was prevailing at the time of liberation. Despite the country's engagement in active war with Ethiopia from 1998 to 2000 and during only relative peace (no peace-no war situation) since then, many of Eritrea's achievements in the health sector were exemplary even at the global level.



Since liberation in 1991, 13 new hospitals, 19 new health centres and 112 new health stations have been constructed, which made an increase of 56 percent, 61 percent and 156 percent respectively over the number of health facilities that existed before the liberation. Virtually 100 percent of the currently existing health centres were built after the liberation. Among the hospitals, a national referral and training hospital, the Orotta Surgical Medical National Referral Hospital and four new Zonal Referral Hospitals namely Barentu, Mendefera, Ghindae and Assab Zonal Referral Hospitals were constructed at a cost of around half a Billion Nakfa (equivalent to around 33 Million USD). However, this doesn't increase the number of hospitals as they were replacing the pre-existing hospitals in order to improve the quality of their services and to expand the functions they provide. Thus, the percent increase in the number of facilities grossly

underestimates the effort made in building, expanding and replacing health facilities.

The number of health facilities that were built in the past 15 years after the liberation is more than the total number of health facilities that were built in a full century prior to the liberation (an increase of more than 100 percent since liberation). Concomitantly the Ministry of Health faced a tremendous challenge of fulfilling the human, financial and material need for effective running of the newly constructed and expanded health facilities.

In the past fifteen years, since the liberation in 1991, the different schools of the current College of Nursing and Health Technology had trained close to 3,000 health professionals. Doctor to population ratio has increased by more than 100 percent from 1:37,500 in 1991 to 1:15:000 at the moment, while nurse to population ratio has also increased by more than 100 percent from 1:9,500 in 1991 to 1 in 3,400 at the moment. The ratio of health professionals to health facilities was maintained (remained almost the same) since 1998 despite of expansion of health facilities and increased demand.

The Ministry of Health is now in the process of founding a Health University consisting of the Orotta School of Medicine, the Asmara collage of Health sciences and the Asmara collage of Nursing and Health Technology, and other health training institutions in the country. The Health University will offer MD degree, degree and diploma programs in Nursing, Clinical Laboratory Science (Medical Laboratory Technology), Pharmacy, Public Health etc... The Orotta School of Medicine began its educational program with its first intake of 32 medical students; 6 females and 26 males on 16th February 2004. With a continuous intake in the past four years, the total number of medical students has now been fivefold, from 32 in 2002 to 150 at the moment (1st year 49, 2nd year 39, 3rd year 31 and 4th year 31).

Since liberation in 1991, as a matter of principle and practice the Ministry of Health was and still is working to improve availability and accessibility of essential drugs at all levels of services. Survey reports show that the availability of essential medicines nation wide was sustained at above 90 percent, with greater than 95 percent in 1995, greater than 92 percent in 1998 and in 2001-2005 about 90 –93 percent.

As the result of the concerted efforts made to build new health facilities and upgrade and rehabilitate the existing ones accompanied with the efforts made in equipping them with the necessary equipments, drugs, other supplies and most important of all with the necessary trained human resource, access to health care with in 10 Km radius increased from around 40 percent at the time of liberation to around 70 percent at the moment, while more than 50 percent of the population live with in 5 kms from a health facility.

Eritrea's success in controlling vaccine preventable diseases, controlling malaria and HIV-AIDS are among exemplary successes even world wide. Although Immunization program was began in Eritrea in 1980, until the liberation in 1991 only about 10 percent of children were immunized for the third dose of DPT. With a continuous improvement made since liberation, at the moment more than 85 percent of Eritrean children have received the third dose of DPT and were immunized against measles. As the result of the efforts made in vaccinating children, Eritrea has eliminated neonatal tetanus measles and there was no report of polio since 1997, except the single imported case that was reported in April 2005, which was fully controlled, indicating a strong routine and supplementary immunization program.



The overall malaria morbidity has been reduced by 90 percent from 1999 to 2006. Some of the programmatic factors which contributed to the success in malaria control include the high use of ITNs (Impregnated Bed Nets) and an improvement in the rate of reimpregnating, larviciding, source reduction and the improvement in early detection, treatment and follow up of cases and in controlling epidemics of malaria, improvement in public awareness as well as the availability of efficacious anti-malaria drugs



Examining the data on trends in the annual number of AIDS cases and AIDS deaths, as well as trends in available data on HIV prevalence among pregnant women, blood donors, and VCT clients suggest a stabilization of HIV infection rates at a relatively low level in the general population. The most recent (2005) estimate of HIV prevalence in the general population in Eritrea is 2.46 percent, which is likely to be an overestimate as the rural population is underrepresented in the survey.

At the time of liberation in 1991 only 19 percent of pregnant women received at least one antenatal care during their pregnancy. The 1995 EDHS data revealed that 49 percent of mothers were getting antenatal care in the three years prior to the survey (1995), more than double the percentage at the time of liberation. The 2002 EDHS findings indicate that at least one attendance for antenatal care has increased to around 80 percent at the moment. Over all antenatal care attendance has increased by four fold (400 percent) from 1991 to 2006.

At the time of liberation in 1991, only 6 percent of deliveries were attended by a trained health worker, which has now increased to 37 percent. Although attendance of delivery by skilled personnel at the moment, as compared with 1991 has increased by 6 fold from 1991 to 2006, the progress has been slow.

The annual trend of the met-need for emergency obstetric care (including abortion) has been rapidly improving from 12 percent in 1998 to 65 percent at the moment. The increase in the met-need indicates improvement in quality of maternal health care and/or improved health seeking behaviour of mothers. The increasing trends of the met need could be attributed to the



different interventions such as Life Saving Skill (LSS) and emergency obstetric surgery training undertaken and other interventions undertaken to increase access and care-seeking behaviour for emergency obstetric care. Availability, quality and utilization of emergency obstetric care is one of the most important interventions to decrease maternal mortality.

These and many other progresses made since liberation in health and other sectors, led to an unprecedented reduction in infant mortality from 72 per 1,000 live birth in 1995 to 48 per 1,000 live birth in 2002 and in under-five mortality from 136 per 1,000 live birth in 1995 to 93 per 1,000 live birth in 2002. A maternal mortality study undertaken in 2003 revealed a Maternal Mortality Ratio of 752 per 100,000 live births, for the period of 2002 to 2003, using a household survey on a nationally representative sample. The current estimate for maternal mortality ratio (752 per 100,000) is 25 percent less than the 1995 EDHS estimate (998 per 100,000). Crude Death Rate has decreased from 18 per 1,000 population at the time of liberation in 1991 to 11.8 per 1,000 at the moment, while the Crude Birth Rate has also decreased from 47 per 1,000 to 39 per 1,000.

Trends in Life expectancy are usually taken as a summary or resultant of trends of many other health indicators. Life expectancy at birth increased significantly from 49 years in 1991 to 59 years in 2003 (World Health Report 2005). While most other countries show a decline in life expectancy due to the rising toll in deaths related to HIV/AIDS, life expectancy at birth in Eritrea is showing a positive growth, among other things due to reduction of infant and child mortality due to measles, malaria and other communicable diseases as well as the reduction in adult mortality due to malaria and other communicable diseases.

## **Labor and Human Welfare**

The Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare aims at ensuring “Social Justice and Social Equity” for all citizens irrespective of race, creed, language, ethnicity and religion. It has a multi-faceted responsibilities such as, attaining full employment, promoting harmonious labour relations in all the sectors of the economy, ensuring safety, health and working conditions to the advantage of workers, besides social security, community development, rehabilitation of senior citizens and disabled persons, child care and protection, and family welfare.

**Employment:** Employment exchange services have been provided in the six regions and urban centres. As per statistical report of employment exchange offices, 193,171 job seekers have been registered. Out of the registered job seekers, 78,421 have been placed. On average 12,073 job seekers join the labour market annually, with an annual placement of 41%.

As part of unemployment alleviation program, the Ministry provides services by issuing directives to Eritrean nationals that are willing to work abroad and up to now 11,292 citizens were allowed to work in foreign countries.

To fill the gaps of varied skilled manpower, work permit is issued to foreign workers and through this approach 14,457 foreigners were given work permit. Annually an average 807 Eritreans are sent abroad to work and 1,033 expatriates arrive to work in Eritrea.

**Labor Inspection:** To protect the safety and health of workers and to maintain the minimum labour conditions, routine and follow-up inspections of establishments as well as special and emergency inspections were carried out. Since 1998, inspection of working conditions has been

carried out on 8,098 establishments.

In order to prevent industrial illness and accidents, studies have been conducted on basic industrial hygiene as well as on occupational safety and health of textile, tannery, and plastic shoe factories. Moreover, survey has also been conducted to identify the working condition where special groups such as young persons, women, and persons with disability are not allowed to work.

**Social Security:** In 2003 social security scheme has been introduced in Eritrea. According to the proclamation of 2003 the social security involves: (i) the National Pension Scheme, (ii), the Public Sector Pension Scheme, (iii) the Martyrs' Survivors Benefit Scheme. Furthermore, regular employees in civil service between the age ranges of 18-65 eligible to join the scheme. A rough estimate puts potential contributors at around 70,000 to 80,000. Registered number of persons to the new pension scheme is 22,500 and this does not include the military.

**The Eritrean Children:** The term “Our children are our future” is not strange to the ears. That is why children are the major concern in Eritrea. The Government of the State of Eritrea has signed and ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in August 1994. This shift was imperative in ensuring the protection of the rights, freedoms and dignity of children. In order to popularize the CRC among the public an English version of the CRC was translated and published in to six local- languages and distributed to all regions. There are several factors that have been given attention in the ministry labor and human welfare concerning children social problems. These include: orphaned children, street and commercially exploited children, children with disabilities.



The border war with Ethiopia has resulted in physical and psychological damages over the Eritrean society with the majority of the population left without shelter. In the Southern Region alone, 24,221 war-displaced children have been identified and registered. A canteen center has

been established at Senafe and provides services for 1,710 war affected unaccompanied children and more than 66,000 personal effects, such as clothes and shoes have been provided for displaced children living in camps, 7 generators, audio-visual equipment and amplifiers were installed in all temporary camps in order to educate and entertain the displaced people. Other programs also include supporting children with disabilities.

**Rehabilitation:** This is concerned with the parts of the society who has been victimized by various social problems with the view of enabling them to be self supportive and for those who are unable to support themselves to provide long term life security, these include: civilians and veterans with various types of disabilities and disabilities due to accidents, diseases and land mines. To support these sections of the society, a community based rehabilitation program will be implemented into 43 sub-regions and will cover 80% of the whole country. Since independence 22,579 persons with disabilities were provided various appliances such as prostheses, orthoses, splint, crutches, arch support, spinal corset, baby's trolley, collar, compensation and wheel chairs. And also during the previous years about 2,000 war-disabled combatants who were provided services at Mai habar institution were reintegrated in their respective communities through economic and psycho-social support.

Households headed by war-disabled veterans are vulnerable from poverty. In order to help them and their families to cope with the many risks that they face, the Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare is providing a monthly financial and medical assistance for 5,350 war-disabled combatants and 400 severely disabled war veterans in Denden Camp. The ministry also provided those who can't support themselves and their families with 500 houses at the cost of 365,000,000 Nakfa. Other associations, such as the Eritrean National Association of the Blind, War Disabled Combatants and National Eritrean Deaf Association are provided financial and technical support from the ministry.

**Care for the elders:** It is estimated that older people in Eritrea form 4% of the total population. In the Eritrean culture, older people are generally taken care by the extended families. Of the overall beneficiaries of the social protection program 40% are older people who are being provided Martyrs' Survivors Benefit, 40% of the orphan care taking older people were provided income generation scheme. 200 disadvantaged older people have been reintegrated in their communities.

**Family Welfare and Community Service:** Assisting the needy families in the society is also part of the responsibility of the ministry. These include: the martyr's family and HIV/ AIDS Affected Families. About 84,000 citizens gave their lives in the struggle for independence and defending their country after the independence. Beginning from 1994, these families are being provided a lump sum of financial support. About 62,000 families of martyrs whose total number of beneficiaries 103,732 are acquiring 368,344,500 Nakfa of martyrs' survivors benefit annually.

Reports show that about 4,000 HIV/ AIDS persons are living in various forms of families including households headed by, single parents, grandparents and other families. These families have been traced and offered a monthly financial support for children education and household facilities. About 4,000 families are beneficial of this opportunity and more than 1,300 were granted to start a small-scale income generating activities.

Community development: The two community centres in Asmara and Keren have provided skill

training to 800 disadvantaged women, which is helpful for gainful employment. The centres have also offered pre school education for 2,146 children disadvantaged children.

500 community change agents from the six Regions have been trained on the training of trainers' course in HIV/AIDS. Several seminars and workshops were conducted for community change agents to strengthen their capacity and create a favourable working relation in the community. An audio-visual cassette that deals on the causes and impacts of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS was reproduced and distributed to all regions for sensitization activities.

### **.Media**

Modern media was introduced in Eritrea more than a century and half years ago. It was first introduced by the European missionaries in 1866. It continued until the time of the illegal annexation of Eritrea with Ethiopia where the Eritrea media infrastructure lay in ruins. Now, Eritrean media is one of the most developed media in Africa that can be viewed and heard globally.



The media is comprised of Printing Press, various Radio Channels, two TV channels and online webpage. Eri-TV and the two Radio Channels ( the Dimtsi Hafash, and Radio Zara) cover almost every corner of the country, and are broadcasted with three satellites to cover most part of Europe (western and Eastern), Middle East and Far East, North America, Australia and some parts of Asia. The Channel II and the Radio Sawa local media with various target audiences.

The first Eritrean newspapers appeared post World War II in 1947 during the British colonization era. These publications were abruptly curtailed by Ethiopian authorities shortly after the imposition of the UN-sponsored Federation in 1952. Nationalist media did not reappear until the start of armed resistance in the 1960s and 1970s. By the early 1980s, the EPLF was producing

daily radio broadcasts in six languages and an average of eight periodicals and nine film documentaries each year. By the end of the liberation war, the EPLF crews had produced sixty-four films depicting the armed struggle, the condition of war prisoners and political rallies, as well as public health work, traditional songs and dances, and many other social and cultural themes.

Eritrea's main objectives in this field are to: develop free, responsible and credible mass media: to promote the democratization process and strengthen national unity: to provide the public with news and timely information, as well as entertainment and enlightenment: to enhance cultural values and traditions: to enhance public debate and discussion.

**The Press:** The Ministry of Information publishes three newspapers: the Tigrinya Hadas Eritrea, with a circulation that reaches as high as 60,000: the Arabic Eritrea Alhadisa, with a circulation in excess of 5,000, and the English-language twice a week Eritrea Profile, with a circulation about 5,000.

There are also Private magazines and periodicals aimed at specialized audiences also appear at irregular interval, as do publications from regional administrations, charitable groups and others.

### **Radio:**

Dimtsi Hafash (Voice of the Broad Masses), is a state owned media that broadcasts from the capital Asmara. This national radio service begun under the liberation front in 1979. The high illiteracy rate among Eritreans, particularly in rural areas, make this medium the most effective to educate and inform the general public. Its correspondents are stationed throughout the country. With a transmission power of 100 kilowatts, Dimtsi Hafash covers all Eritrea and it also available via satellite. It broadcasts in nine Eritrean ethnic languages, (Tigrinya, Arabic, Tigre, Kunama, Saho, Afar, Bilen, Hedareb and Nara), Amharic, Oromo and Somali languages and covers a wide range of subjects targeted at general and specific audiences. Children and youth, for example, broadcast their own shows each week.

**Radio Zara:** This is an FM channel in Eritrea, located in Asmara, with almost all of its programs is composed of music. It plays a significant role in preserving the cultural and social aspects of music and also serves as an outlook to other cultures and international popular songs around the world. It is also a source of income from advertisements. Radio Zara is also available via satellite.

**Radio Sawa:** This is also an FM channel, located in Sawa, which extends its coverage in the south western part of Eritrea. It provides various entertainment and educational programs to their target audiences which are mostly the students in Warsay Ykealo Secondary School.

### **Television:**

There are two state owned TV channels in Eritrea. Eri-TV channel began broadcasting from Asmara in 1993 with a one kilowatt transmitter that barely covered the capital city. Later it started to broadcast with five kilowatt transmitter to cover a wider range. However seeing the importance and the role it can play in this information age it is broadcasting with a ten kilowatt signal and goes through three satellites to cover every corner of the country as well as most parts of the world. The Eri-TV also has a mobile studio that can broadcast from any part of the world to its audience inside or outside of Eritrea. The programs in Eri-TV is broadcasted in six

languages (Tigrinya, Tigre, Arabic, Amharic, Oromo and English) with specialized desks for news and current affairs, politics and development, entertainment and sports and culture and the arts. Educational programs range from public health issues, innovative agricultural practices and environmental issues to household economy and the special needs of children. It broadcasts 24 hours everyday.

**The Channel II:** (A local channel) is also state owned TV channel that covers all corners in Eritrea. Its main goal is for educational purposes and also provides entertainment programs such as sports and music. It broadcasts for seven hours mostly educational programs.

**ERINA:** The government-operated Eritrean New Agency collects local, regional and international news and information and distributes it to the newspapers, the radio and the television. Its correspondents are spread throughout the 30 sub zones in Eritrea providing detailed and up-to-date news and information for broadcast. The correspondents communicate with the head office through fax, telephone, two-way radio and computerized radio transmission. With the growth of the internet facilities the communication has been digitalized and speeded up