

Strengthening our implementation and resource utilization capacity will catalyze objectives of food security”; President Isaias Afwerki



President Isaias Afwerki gave a live radio and television interview with national media outlets on the 7th of October, focusing on various domestic and regional developments. Excerpts of the interview follow

Mr. President, while it was okay in terms of its coverage when it started, people were concerned that this year’s rainfall did not start at the expected time. In relation to this issue, how do you assess the general achievements associated with food security in Eritrea?

Indisputably, food is a very basic concern for every citizen and food security is an important priority. However, as food security may be associated with subsistence, we need to be strategic enough to think beyond food security. The ultimate objective in relation to this issue has to be the improvements in the quality of life of citizens. Further, instead of limiting our food security strategy to our current situation, we should think strategically in terms of what has to be done in terms of improving the quality of life of citizens in proportion or in response to population increase in five, ten, fifteen years. In our long term

strategy, we should also think in terms of producing surplus food that can be exported as there are potential opportunities to do so. Hence, our strategic goals in the agricultural sector and other sectors have to be designed and assessed from such a long-term perspective associated with improving the overall quality of life of our people. More importantly, we need to be much more concerned about the fundamental investments that serve as preconditions to food security. One such fundamental precondition is water resources management.

More emphasis has to be placed on irrigational projects considering the significant value they add to rainwater-fed harvest. For this purpose, preserving water becomes a key priority. Therefore, to make optimal use of the potentially available water resources in the country we need to have a comprehensively effective strategy for preserving and controlling water resources. In the last 25 years, as part of our endeavors to preserve and control water resources, we have constructed dams, check dams and water diversion canals in different areas and accordingly we have acquired significant cumulative experiences. For these efforts to be further fruitful, catchment areas and their sources need to be studied properly and our water preservation strategy needs to be comprehensive enough to incorporate terracing and afforestation activities. We need to focus not only on the catchment areas. We should also equally focus on the water source areas in our water resources management endeavors.

Making use of the water resources of the Barka, Gash, and Anseba rivers, as well as those eastern rivers extending from Qarora to the Assab areas, is a long-term process and requires substantial investments, resource mobilization, capacity, and sacrifices. However, without doing this, food security projects can hardly be achievable. When judged in terms of the challenges we experienced in the last 25 years, what we have so far achieved is promising and this will catalyze what we have planned for the coming 5 to 10 years. What comes next to preserving water is making optimal use of what has been stored. For this purpose, the traditional production system needs to be transformed by employing appropriate technology so that we can boost our agricultural produce; we need to be capable to harvest two or three times in a year by multiplying our production capacity effectively and efficiently. In addition to

boosting agricultural harvest, improving livestock conditions and our cash crops production capacity are important components of our strategy to ensuring food security. It has to be noted that our strategic orientation focuses not only on ensuring food security but also on producing surplus food to be exported. Therefore, we need to have strategic projects that are suitable to the varying situations of the three economic development zones of Eritrea.

Apart from the some minor projects associated with drinking water demands, so far major water resources utilization projects have not been part of our priorities in the eastern lowland. In the western lowlands the utilization rate is not more than 20 percent of the preserved water. Hence, the tasks ahead are very demanding. However, the experiences we have gained are adequately useful. To enhance productivity and improve the utilization capacity linked with the stored water resources, we need to invest substantially in technological facilities, equipment, chemicals, and the like so that we can have our mode of production transformed. It is encouraging that we have created an enabling environment that will serve as a stepping stone for further achievements in the future. Food security is not that problematic in Eritrea and we do not need to be that concerned about this issue. Given the enabling environment that we have created and the future strategic plans we have designed, strengthening our implementation capacity and our resources utilization capacity further is likely to effectively catalyze the efforts aiming at ensuring food security.

As you mentioned earlier, so far many large scale projects have been implemented, including Gerset, Kerkebet, Gergera, Gahtielay, and others, for the purpose of enhancing our capacity to store the water resources we are endowed with as part of the endeavor to overcome the problems resulting from the fact that our region is prone to recurrent drought and inadequate rainwater. What upcoming plans are there for making effective use of these completed projects?

We can claim that considerably adequate water has been stored in our dams. However, we have not been able to effectively utilize such opportunities. Consider the Kerkebet Dam Project. The water preserved there is about 200 million cubic meters. This dam is very advantageous when we consider the size of the plains surrounding it, which can be easily cultivated. While the dam was being constructed, there were plans to ensure an effective utilization of the

water resources there. However, apart from minor projects, given the potential benefits of this project, so far adequately enough land has not been cultivated. To make effective use of such dams, effective irrigational systems need to be established and adequate electric supply has to be secured for their proper operationalization. While at this time we may claim that the energy issue has been resolved, since it is advisable to have cost-effective practices, there is a plan to install 8 megabyte solar panels in the area. Another very important concern is that the water stored in the dam is more than what is required to cultivate the arable land surrounding Kerkebet. Hence, there is a need to expand the land that can be cultivated using the water resources of this dam. To realize this objective, that is to cover 40 to 50 kilometers towards the north, west, and south, a distribution system must be established.

All this is to indicate that our capacity to effectively utilize the completed dams has not yet developed to the required extent and this is our major challenge. As part of proper utilization of the resources we have created, we should also think of having a feasible option with regard to what can be effectively and efficiently produced (such as cotton, sugar or others) in the area given the comparative advantage associated with each option. Comparatively speaking, infrastructural projects that are useful for ensuring proper water resources utilization have been constructed at Gerset, Fanco, Alebu, and there are also Tessenei's and Aligidir's already existing infrastructural systems. The same is not true with the new projects in these areas. When judged in terms of the potential of the available water resources, there are similar underutilized dam projects at Gollij, Omhajer, and Bademit. Because the issue of a distribution system has not been resolved, only 20 to 25 percent of the water resources are being utilized. There are also similar issues that need to be addressed in relation to Asmara, as well as other small towns and villages. For example, the benefits to be accrued from the Gergera Dam Project should not be limited to the area and its immediate vicinities.

To ensure effective and efficient utilization of the available water resources in the area, the benefits need to be extended to such areas as Hazemo, Dekemhare, Korbaria, and other areas towards the east. As is the case with the other similar projects, the distribution system required for materializing the aforesaid objective has not yet been established. The Gahtielat Dam Project is

not yet completed. The intention of having this project is not limited to providing drinking water for the residents of Massawa. Thinking that, in the long term, the benefits of this project can be extended to other areas such as Laba, I'in, Felket, and A'get, certainly there will be other projects resulting from this dam project. As is the case with other projects, the issue of establishing a distribution system also matters with regard to these plans. There are also other rivers, to the south of Massawa, such as the Wia River, that have to be targeted as part of the water resources management projects in the eastern lowlands. In sum, we can claim that we have mastered preserving water resources. However, the degree of utilization of the potential benefits of such projects is being dictated by the need to establish distribution systems and other infrastructural issues.

If these issues are resolved in the coming 2 to 3 years, we will be in a better position and our 2018 plans are associated with these concerns. The challenge is that such projects require substantial investments and we will see how much they will move forward in 2018. Undeniably, there are sacrifices linked to the opportunity cost of placing more emphasis on these projects.

Mr. President, there have been some measures aimed at stabilizing our currency and preventing contraband practices. In addition to these measures, what other measures are there to fight illegal brokerage and speculation that distorts the economy as well as price controls?

This is a very difficult issue, which is significantly influenced by externally engineered conspiracies. The central issue with regard to the economic problems the citizenry experience in this case is mainly linked to the purchasing power of our currency. To determine whether the amount we pay as buyers is reasonable or not, we need to compare how much is required to pay for the same item in other economies. For example, we can compare the price of one liter of milk in Eritrea and Germany in terms of a common currency (such as the dollar). When prices increase from time to time and if the Nakfa is devalued, then the purchasing power of the money at our hands (which we earn as a salary or other forms) becomes weak. There is also speculation which worsens the situation. It has been assessed that the cost of production of one liter of milk is not more than 6 to 7 Nakfa. Hence, it is illogical and not reasonable to sell one liter of milk for 20 Nakfa or more. In the last 25 years, the regulatory

measures have been loose. The distortions are mainly caused due to the exchange and money transfer processes of various currencies entering Eritrea from other countries. These processes and transactions are not conducted through the formal banking system. While there may be multiple compounding factors devaluing the Nakfa, the aforementioned situation is a major cause of devaluation of the currency. The financial transactions associated with the money that is being remitted to Eritrea by Eritreans residing in the Diaspora are not conducted in the banks. The reason is that while the exchange rate in the bank is 15 Nakfa per dollar (if we take dollar as an example), it is 30 Nakfa in the black market. Such an organized crime has been common for more than ten years. The policy changes (including adjustment and control measures) aim to tackle these illegal transactions. There are organized operations blocking the money to be remitted from entering formal or legal channels of transaction. This organized crime is intended to undermine the Eritrean economy.

Those who engineer such a network are outside the country and any Eritrean citizen in the Diaspora who wants to remit money to their relatives and friends becomes part of these transactions because there are service provider shops outside Eritrea, which provide Nakfa in exchange for a foreign currency that has to be remitted to the country. They also take away Nakfa from Eritrea. All these service providers do not have business licenses to do what they do. Since they are outside Eritrea, these illegal service providers can hardly be controlled. In this case, Eritrean citizens are expected to realize that being part of this process is not advantageous to themselves as long as such a process devalues Nakfa and this weakens the purchasing power of their money – Nakfa that their relatives and friends receive in Eritrea. It is good to be responsible citizens and understand that strengthening our currency benefits each of us, not only collectively but also individually. We will be advantaged if we ensure that our actions strengthen the purchasing power of our money. The policy change introduced should serve this purpose.

Renewing our currency aims at controlling the Nakfa that was in circulation. It should also be related to the fact that basic consumption goods and strategic goods need to be either produced domestically or imported using the reserve of our hard currency. This is generally linked with improving the overall productivity in our economy. It is premature to talk about the results of the

recently introduced policy changes. Who knows, there might also be unintended consequences. It should also be noted that there are compounding factors affecting the process. However, as stated above, it has to be strongly noted that what matters more is that our focus should be to enhance productivity in all sectors of our economy. Regarding the issue of contraband, it has to be realized that even if we have the best policies aimed at controlling or managing contraband practices, what matters more is our implementation capacity. This is a major challenge. Nevertheless, we have learned important lessons from our cumulative experiences and such experiences will be useful in improving our implementation capacity gradually and cumulatively.

Excellency, the government has been importing essential/ strategic consumer goods for sale to the public at fair prices. Obviously, the public's needs are extensive. What are the prospects for the private sector to be involved and what should the government do in policy terms and other arrangements to encourage the private sector to invest especially in import substitution enterprises?

The question itself is based on a wrong assumption because Eritrea's imports are not so large to begin with. Otherwise, if you can answer the following questions, you are welcome to invest. Do you have the required capital? Can you satisfy the people's demands? Do you know the country's needs? What do you plan to bring to the market? Of course, as an investor, you should also prove that your capital is legally earned. In countries like ours, whose economies are rather primitive, the private sector acts more as an appendage or satellite of big overseas companies rather than an independent actor. To create a viable private sector, the government has established a number of policies in the last 25 years. Among other things, it returned properties nationalized by the Ethiopian Dergue regime to the owners and also invested in President Isaias Afwerki gave a live radio and television interview with national media outlets on the 7th of October, focusing on various domestic and regional developments. Excerpts of the second part of the interview follow: new ventures. There is no law preventing anyone who has money from buying whatever they want. The investor does not add an iota to the government. But the question is "is the investment driven purely by speculation or a desire to help develop the nation's economy and improve people's living conditions?" If

an investor engages in a business with the intent to gain a fair profit, people will support him or her without hesitation. In fact, our plan for 2017 is to allow those who have the capital and competence and genuinely understand the government's policy to invest in the private sector. We are used to hearsay that blames the government. Some say "The government has controlled everything. Had we been given an opportunity, we would have made miracles." Those who make such claims need to understand that this country is actually small and, as such, it isn't difficult to figure out what it has and what it needs. Therefore, if the private sector is to be operational, it is important to identify in detail the areas of industry and trade where it can function meaningfully and make its contribution to help grow the economy. Those who make a living by speculating and siphoning Nakfa to import food and other consumer goods should be questioned on where and how they imported the goods and whether the money they accumulated was legally earned. Also, any item that is imported for sale here should be measured in terms of its competitiveness both locally and internationally. In 2018, there is a plan to open some areas, which have been kept on hold in 2017, for investment. For example, one can now invest in a factory that makes clothes, which means adding a lot of values to the raw material, cotton. Such an industry needs to grow and its success is determined by the employment opportunities it creates and the contribution it makes to the national economy. Therefore, an investor needs to understand these factors and use them as a reference when he or she sets out to invest. In this rather primitive economy, there hasn't been a developed private sector to talk about. Policies need to be designed with a view to achieving sustainable economic growth and improving people's living standards. This requires continued efforts to maintain a balance between people's income and their living conditions. The government's import of basic and strategic consumer goods and others will increase. So far the government's food imports have been limited to wheat, sorghum, legumes, sugar, cooking oil and the like. But now in the second phase, we should be able to provide other essential goods, as well.

The environment is rife with speculation. Therefore, until the economy grows and reaches some level of stability, can't price controls be used as an interim solution to stabilize the market?

Sure, it is tempting to do that. But controlling prices is a daunting task. Of course, it's not very difficult to determine the prices of all goods and services. In today's world, the price of goods everywhere in the world is public knowledge. But still it's much easier to focus your energies on ensuring the availability of consumer goods within the local market, which covers not only domestic products but also imported goods, rather than controlling prices. Goods and services should be made available to customers at a fair price. By saying so, no one is suggesting that private businesses should not make a profit. A business person deserves a legitimate profit. But a business person who is out there to rip-off customers is like someone who jumps down a cliff. To such a person I say I have no interest in coming after you because there's no point in controlling someone who bumps against the wall.

Massive investment have been made in human resource development. How do you assess our skilled resources vis-à-vis the vast development programs ahead?

It is a culture or a value system we have nurtured for a long time. We have always promoted the importance of awareness, organization and equipping ourselves. These three are always there. Our organization needs to be reinforced to tackle any eventualities which we may encounter, but before that the awareness of the general public is important; besides, popular knowledge is a driving force. One may acquire knowledge through experience or in some other ways, but organization is of paramount importance to make proper use of the knowledge. These two should also be summed up with the necessary equipment or facilities to put them in practice. We need to be well- equipped and backed with the needed technology and machinery to implement the development programs or agricultural projects. First, we always need to be aware and well-informed so as to deal with challenges that could sway us from reaching our intended goals. Managing the resources at hand and the equipment are two different things but one cannot prevail without the other. Time is a factor when it comes to equipping ourselves because it is dynamic and ever changing, which needs continuous updating. On top of that, challenges are coming in different forms; hence, the strength and way of our organization needs to be molded in accordance. What did we learn from the past years of independence? What did we accomplish? What sort of resources

have we accumulated? Our organization equally needs to be reinforced to surmount the challenges ahead. What has passed is a process we needed to go through and the experiences we acquired in that account are important, but today is another stage we need to be organized for. In line with that, the dynamics of technology are at their fastest pace and its traits are changing rapidly. There is no way of relying on old technology these days. In this case, organization is the essence, between the resources, the knowledge and our intended goals. But the big question here is; can we execute the economic policies we have drafted? What is the status of our financial institutions? Do we have the capacity to implement the financial or fiscal policies we outline? We need to see the capacity in terms of the new competencies we get every year. 15,000 students complete their high school education annually, out of whom, some go to college and the rest are trained to go to other institutions.

But we need to be well organized to absorb the force and utilize them in a very effective manner. What kind of organization do we need in order to quantify the goals we hit and the accomplishments we make in the vast development endeavors including energy programs, new technologies of irrigation, infrastructure, and various other domains? Dynamics are important when it comes to organization and awareness needs updating every now and then. It is not the structure of the organization we need to underline here; rather, it is the efficiency. Most importantly, we focus on education and training, through which we intend to implement our agricultural, infrastructure, fisheries, industrial and various other related programs. The contribution of every individual's knowledge is important and organizing such resources in accordance is definite. We take such issues seriously. There may be some setbacks during the implementation of such strategies, but the organization should always prevail, because the rest comes with experience; and needless to emphasize, it is in our culture "Promoting the importance of awareness . . . continued from page 2 to be organized. And we are not referring to the top administrative level only, but every group which works together needs to be organized. Let's take the Ministry of Information for instance. Time is changing, and is your equipment changing accordingly? Are you introducing new modern technologies to your work? Is your organization being strengthened? Is the awareness of the staff extensive enough to contribute effectively? It is a topic which needs to be seen from every level. In a nut shell, organization is the core

factor here and the new structure of development fronts we have introduced is an example of the importance of organization.

Mr. President, do we have a compatible administration for our development programs? I cannot say there is. We say we have collected water for instance, but do we have the capacity to administer the dams we have built. How do we make proper use of the water we have collected?

How do we protect the cleanliness of the dams? Who is the beneficiary of these water projects? How do you organize all these factors and harness them properly? There are vast agricultural projects and we are introducing new advanced technologies we have never used before. Some of them cannot simply be done; we need to look at the experience of others in many cases. How many construction companies do we have and how is their organization? We plan to build a certain amount of housing complexes in a year and we prepare the resources for that purpose. But how do we organize and manage these resources? How does your organization fit with the way you manage your resources and implement projects? We use our experience to strengthen our organization, but experience by itself is not enough. So all the big plans we draft are based on vision.

Hence proper administration of resources, including human, material and others is important to achieve the established goals. You need to select the best administrative structure and system. You need to know your resources in the beginning. The biggest bottleneck I consider at this time is technically skilled human resource. You can bring machineries and technology. Discipline, knowledge, technique, and experience are also incorporated within the technical capacity of the resources. We follow a clear path in our structure, system and organization. Transparency in organization is by far a very vital factor. The working system should be smooth and multidimensional. There is no need for a long bureaucratic system. One individual can do three or four different tasks at a time, which in turn could help us save a great deal of time. The working system also needs to be efficient with an impact. There is no such thing as, 'one size fits all'. In fact, corruption has become a cause for destruction in Africa and many other countries that have built a developed economy.

Mr. President, the world appears to be morphing from a uni-polar to bi-polar international order. What is your take on the role of Africa in the unfolding international order? There is broad consensus that in the 50 years since its foundation, the African Union has not lived up to the expectations of the African people. The founding principles have not been crystallized. In view of these realities, the AU recently established a task force, led by Rwandan President Paul Kagame to revitalize the African Union. The task force enumerated eight points that amplify the shortcomings of the Union. Before we talk about the impending restructuring of the AU, we need to examine the overall international context.

We are not living in the middle ages or in the 19th century. We are living in the 21st century. If we depend on our individual resources only instead of developing mutual cooperation with our neighborhood, we will not be able to achieve the envisaged goals. The argument here is that regional cooperation is not a matter of choice but necessity. After 1991, IGAD, COMESA and the African Union embarked on promising transformations. However, the ultimate outcomes “Since we cannot live in isolation, we have to make our modest contribution for the stability and peace in our neighborhood: President Isaias Afwerki gave a live radio and television interview with national media outlets on the 7th of October, focusing on various domestic and regional developments.

Excerpts of the third and final part of the interview follow: fell short of expectations. In the 21st century, the only continent that remains marginalized is Africa. European, North American, Latin American and Asian countries are progressing while Africa remains in a perplexing situation. Without focusing at the continental level alone, if we could enhance cooperation at the regional level, we could have managed many of our challenges. The assessment so far is that Africa is in a dire situation. A conducive environment should be created for concerted action and for common benefits. We cannot forever live on managing crises and problems. We cannot be spectators only and expect solutions from others. We should do our homework. When many African countries gained their independence in the 20th century, there was an African euphoria and profound aspirations. These were embodied in the initiative of

the Founding Fathers. As a result, Pan Africanism was enunciated and later the Organization of African Unity established. But the OAU did not live up to the expectations in its 30 years of existence. Africa was in fact sliding back to neocolonialism. We were convinced from the outset that the OAU should be reformed to be a better organization. The restructuring initiative was led by the then Libyan President, Muammar Gaddafi. Unfortunately, the approach taken to restructure the OAU was not appropriate. Qaddafi had his own vested interests and ambitions, and he wanted the AU to be equal to the European Union. The thinking was that if there is a European Commission, why not an African Commission? He wanted the AU to be a carbon copy of the EU. In reality that was not viable. Europe has a developed economy while Africa is in a primitive stage. The comparison was not realistic or practical. What should be the role and place of Africa? We should first and foremost profoundly understand the unfolding world order; the economic, social, cultural and infrastructural transformations. Then we can identify the goals we want to achieve. Africa should be transformed. We should develop our industries and export processed items instead of raw materials.

We should introduce technology; and develop our human resources, education, and health facilities. These should be the main goals that we need to achieve. There were counterarguments that focused on short cuts as this process would take a long time. The transformation of the OAU to the African Union was indeed heavily influenced by these considerations. This approach in turn entailed enormous problems in terms of budget allocations, the charting out development programs, and financial management. Different studies indicate that Africa possesses 60% of the world's resources. And the question is why is it that a continent that possesses so much resources remains marginalized in the 21st century? Africa has the potential to help others instead of depending on external assistance. There is China-Africa Cooperation, Japan-Africa Cooperation, IndiaAfrica Cooperation, etc. Various forums have also been convened under different themes and labels; but they have generally failed to produce meaningful and tangible results. Maintenance of neo-colonial ties under different labels, such as Anglophone, Francophone and others, is only meant to exploit the national resources of the continent. The illegal migration of African youth to Europe and to other countries emanates from this state of affairs.

African Union Summits are convened every year and they adopt different resolutions. But who are the architects, who masterminds these resolutions? Security agencies from Europe and the US often meddle in these internal continental affairs. This cannot be beneficial to Africa.. The corruption that permeates the system is unimaginable. Instead of Africans exploiting their own resources, others are taking advantage of it. Hence Africa can only extricate itself from these trends that are fraught with breeding neo-colonial realities if the African Union and other regional institutions on the continent assume appropriate structures and mandates that promote the real aspirations of the African populations. We cannot, however, blame the external forces for the malaise that is besetting the continent. The problems are solely ours and we are responsible for solving them. This will transpire when we conduct a thorough assessment and map out tangible and viable programs. This is not emotional or floated for PR consumption.

The challenges are not, of course, easy. When IGAD was reformed, these issues were raised and thoroughly discussed. We proposed developing cooperation at the regional level. What happened to IGAD? IGAD which initially gave us a sense of hope for robust regional cooperation became counterproductive; inciting conflict and misunderstanding among Member States. It became an instrument for advancing the sinister agenda of foreign forces. Still, we cannot live in isolation; we have to make our modest contribution for stability and peace in our neighborhood. We need to demonstrate active engagement.

How do you think Eritrea benefits from the AU restructuring?

Without going far, had we established strong cooperation in our neighborhood - with Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and Djibouti - the negative developments that have transpired in these past years could have been avoided. We could have developed common programs in different sectors for the common benefit to our peoples. Above all we could have secured peace and tranquility in the entire region. We are interested in policy harmonization with our neighbors. If the policies of individual countries are not in harmony with others in the neighborhood, we will not realize the cooperation we aspire for. In the past 25 years, the opportunity lost due to unnecessary conflicts is immeasurable.

In this 21st century, no one can claim to have a strong economy while living in isolation. This applies equally to developed nations too. We need to create a conducive environment for mutual economic cooperation. And that is not an option but a necessity. Nation-building process requires resilience, perseverance and sacrifice. And with external hostility it becomes even more challenging. What are your comments regarding how a society may develop culture and values in order to challenge hostilities and realize its vision and objectives? How do you evaluate the resilience of the Eritrean people? There are two parameters. One is the internal or cultural force. The other is the force created by the objective situation. Going back to our case, why did we struggle? Because we were denied our rights to live as a people and country. The interference of external forces has been the main factor for us to develop our awareness and fight for our rights. No one envisaged that our legitimate struggle would take 30 years.

The influencing factor was the resolute aspirations for independence of the people. And that culminated in 1991 with Eritrean independence. The nation-building process was initiated during the struggle for independence and not in 1991. After the end of the Second World War, Eritrea was denied its national rights mainly due to the strategic interests of the superpowers. Eritrea was condemned to remain under the regime that they supported and all the infrastructure and economic facilities in the country were destroyed in order to illustrate that Eritrea could not stand on its own and become a viable state. As a consequence, the Eritrean people rose in unison to secure their independence.

Hence, the foundation for nation-building was there. The sacrifice paid for independence is immeasurable. The readiness to give life for a cause was immense. Facing and defeating one of the strongest armies in Sub-Saharan Africa was a formidable feat. That was the force that realized the independence. Nation-building is not an easy process. As you mentioned, resilience, perseverance and sacrifice are the main factors in today's nation-building process. External hostilities have tested us throughout our history. Speculation to undermine the currency exchange these past years is another manifestation and vivid example of the conspiracies we continue to face. The

strong resilience demonstrated by the Eritrean people inside the country and abroad is indeed a good example of the country's unity and steadfastness. We are now in a better situation than before. This is not for the sake of talking. The reality on the ground suggests that we are in a better condition.

Thank you very much Mr.President