

**PFDJ Statement on the Golden Jubilee
of September First
1961 - 2011**



Half a century has elapsed since the beginning of the armed struggle of the Eritrean people for the right of self-determination and liberation on September 1st, 1961.

In human history, time is numerically measured by the normative and conventional yardstick of years, centuries etc.. In other words, time is standardized in a notional sense. But in a more profound sense, what is relevant is not its sheer physical dimension in terms of the years elapsed, but the specific human activities, experiences, changes and developments that transpire in the given interval of time as a result of willful human action. In other words, what is relevant is not the duration of the time elapsed but the particular impact or footprint that time leaves behind. Equivalent time intervals in history may thus produce fundamentally distinct and incongruous outcomes. In this vein, the past fifty years have been years of epic struggle and progress and, to that extent, unique in the annals of the history of the Eritrean people. And as we commemorate half a century of the beginning of the armed struggle – to be more precise, 70 years since the beginning of the political struggle – we need to go beyond reminiscences and celebrations to appraise, in a profound manner, its historical significance and import.

Seventy year is not a short time even by the standards of the history of nations. The transformations that transpired are not minor too. Internally, this period spans three generations who had to grapple with three critical phases: peaceful political struggle; armed political struggle; and, post-independence nation-building. Externally, the period covers British colonial administration; the federal arrangement with

Ethiopia; Ethiopian colonial rule that was alternately propped up by the huge support that both super powers – the United States and the Soviet Union – lent to the successive imperial and military colonial regimes. It also includes the war of aggression and hostilities that were perpetrated against Eritrea after independence.

The historical significance of the last seventy years can perhaps be better measured through a comparison with the events of the preceding seventy years. In the first period, Eritrean history was largely shaped by its colonial master as the Eritrean people came under the yoke of Italian colonial rule deprived of their basic national rights and dignity. But the second period was different in many respects. True, colonial rule was not uprooted at the end of first period as it continued in altered forms. But this was precisely the time when the Eritrean people rose in unison to determine their own destiny and for national liberation through heroic struggles against colonialism and imperialism. This was the period in which the Eritrean people triumphed over their adversaries to achieve national independence. This was the period in which the Eritrean people metamorphosed from an object of history into a subject of history; into owners and makers of their history through their own conscious and willful endeavours. The key historical significance of the last seventy years lies, in short, in this monumental transcendence of the Eritrean people – from raw materials of history to makers of history.



To appraise the historical significance, importance and experience gleaned in the struggle for national liberation struggle and nation-building conducted for seventy odd years is an immense task that is beyond the scope and objectives of this statement. Accordingly, we shall only underline the importance of the task here while focusing, at this propitious occasion of the commemoration of the Golden Jubilee of the launching of national liberation struggle of the Eritrean people, on some crucial and

fundamental historical aspects and lessons that merit profound attention and emphasis.

- The history of the Eritrean revolution underscores that a conscious and organized people who rise up in arms to defend their inalienable rights and who believe in a just cause will never be vanquished by, and will ultimately triumph over, a huge force of colonialism and oppression abetted by global powers. This is irrespective of their small size and meager resources. However, as it is usually the case with all human history, this astounding achievement was not always smooth but replete with ups and downs, intricate challenges, acute contradictions and internal struggles. In this regard, the following two historical instances may be invoked:



First: In the initial phase of the launching of the armed struggle in the early 60s, the survival and continuation of the liberation struggle was put in jeopardy. The lack of an effective leadership, the absence of a clear political line, and the domination of the liberation front by reactionary forces engendered perilous divisions within the ranks of the organisation plunging the liberation front into an intractable crisis. The survival of the liberation struggle was guaranteed after a long and challenging internal struggle of rectification, well hinged on resilient endeavours and far-sighted perspectives, but which exacted precious sacrifices. Guaranteeing the mere continuity of the liberation struggle was not, however, sufficient in itself unless this was accompanied by the cultivation and articulation of a clear political line that would ultimately ensure victory; i.e. without establishing an organization that espouses revolutionary ideology. The latter objective in turn required various phases of struggle (a split from the ELF; internecine war between the ELF and the new front, the EPLF; internal struggles within the EPLF etc.). It is not difficult to imagine the potential outcome had the intractable democratic struggles carried out within the EPLF not succeeded. This realization alone amplifies the historical significance of those momentous events.

Second: The phase of strategic withdrawals that were effected in tandem with the ferocious battles to frustrate successive enemy offensives that occurred at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s was perhaps the biggest challenge that faced the Eritrean revolution. The balance of forces had tipped, to a considerable extent, in favour of the colonial Ethiopian regime as a result of the massive military intervention of the Soviet Union on the side of the latter. The new reality again revived the specter of the survival and continuity of the armed struggle. In the event, the revolutionary strategy charted out had to ensure the continuity of the struggle and confront the enemy with steadfastness, resilience and sacrifice to gradually and incrementally change the balance of forces in favour of the revolution.



Furthermore, it had to overcome, both in theory and practice, emergent tendencies of capitulation and defeatism that became prevalent especially abroad. In those trying times, to exhibit, with full confidence and defiance, an unflinching faith in ultimate victory despite the glaring imbalance of forces on the ground; to firmly and boisterously declare: "it is normal to lose or gain territory but the ultimate victory of the armed struggle of the Eritrean people is certain after a period of attrition"; to opt for and successfully implement the strategic withdrawals by relying fully on one's resources and objectives; to be prepared to confront the waves of enemy offensives, were indeed historical decisions with few parallels or precedents. Ultimately, it was the existence of a vanguard organization, the EPLF, that had the competency to take these decisions as well as implement them meticulously which ensured the continuity of the Eritrean revolution and guaranteed its final victory.

- The splendid dimensions of our history are not narrated for reasons of documentation or to nurture and showcase our "grandeur". The fact is the significance and ramifications of these events remain deep and relevant

indeed. Furthermore, a sober and profound appraisal of this history must inevitably constitute a vital element of our future path and progress. Like all societies, our history is the reference frame and initial point of departure as we set out to determine and shape our future. We cannot but invoke our history as a primary source of experience and wisdom. On the other hand, the continuity and relevance of history can only be ensured and invigorated through the making of new history that supplants the old.

- The political and ideological struggle that was waged in all the phases between the two protagonists - the national revolutionary line on the one hand, and the divisive and reactionary line on the other - became the main driving force for the internal development of the Eritrean revolution because all the elements and pre-requisites for success (vision, programme, organization, strategies, policies and tactics) were articulated and cultivated in the process. In the experience of the Eritrean struggle, the emergence and ascendancy of an independent ideology and political line under the auspices of a vanguard organization, which was crucial for the victory of the national liberation struggle of the Eritrean people, was not, by any means, a straightforward accomplishment for a variety of historical reasons and impediments. Indeed, the inexorable prevalence of the national democratic line embodied in the EPLF only occurred after ten years of a ferocious internal struggle. As a matter of fact, the victory of the EPLF signaled the advent of a higher phase of competency and organization that the armed liberation struggle of the Eritrean people had scaled as a culmination and climax of the national struggle that had begun in the 1940s. It was not, as aptly characterized in the political report of the Second and Unity Congress, "the victory of one organization over other groups".
- The basis of the strength and efficiency of the EPLF are the Eritrean people; the strong culture of perseverance and organizational capability of the Eritrean society. And, the EPLF, guided by its independent line; firmly believing in the conscious and organized participation of the Eritrean people; giving priority to and relying on the internal reality; formulating and developing practical strategies and tactics; leveraging and buttressing the limited resources of its people, led the national liberation struggle to victory. In this sense, the EPLF has accomplished its historical mission as the leading revolutionary organization.
- The historical experience of the EPLF underscores, primarily and in a tangible manner, the indomitable power of just causes and values; the power of a devoted person who struggles on the basis of these convictions; the power of a determined people whose capabilities augment through incessant struggle and toil; the power of a conscious, bold and defiant state of mind which makes the impossible ultimately possible; the power of independent thinking and self-confidence; the power of organizational competence that transforms weakness into strength and

few into many. Indeed, the liberation struggle of the Eritrean people would not have prevailed over the regional and international forces arrayed against it without a leading organization endowed with those critical ideological and political attributes.

- The EPLF means, first and foremost, its revolutionary principles and values. It means a conscious and devoted fighter who espouses, and predicates all his actions on, just principles and human values. It means the selfless freedom fighter prepared to sacrifice himself as epitomized in the popular adage: "ready to give primacy to the interests and well-being of the people over his/her own well-being". The secret behind the victory of the Eritrean people lies squarely on these principles and values. And as was the case yesterday, these pillars will continue to constitute the institutional framework for the attainment of justice and progress in Eritrea today and tomorrow.

- National unity was both an objective and a strategy for the Eritrean revolution. The national liberation movement and revolution were the first phase in the colossal task of nation-building. The achievement of national liberation was accordingly its central core. Nation building meant the cultivation and forging of a new unity out of the prevalent historical diversity. It meant the crystallisation of a unitary and cohesive national society from disparate and dispersed small communities. This could only be achieved through a long and profound historical process on multi-faceted dimensions: political, cultural, economic as well as social matrices. Indeed, one of the main historical contributions of the Eritrean national revolution to nation building was the foundations it paved for national unity. The strategy of national unity that combated against and triumphed over all narrow interests as well as parochial tendencies and acts of polarization, fragmentation and inter-communal confrontations, was one of the pivotal strategies that ensured the victory of the Eritrean revolution. To preserve and preclude any possible corrosion of this foundation of national unity achieved through a common struggle and much sacrifice, it is imperative to bolster the ideological and political work that must be maintained to counter perhaps remnants and latent sub-national and sectarian notions and activities. These efforts will surely culminate in the full realization of our cherished objective of a modern and civilized nation that belongs equally to all its citizens.

- The Eritrean revolution was a popular revolution deeply rooted and entrenched in the organized participation of the whole population. Our liberation struggle became victorious because it charted out, and effectively implemented, the strategy of prolonged people's war that was pertinent to, and workable in, the specific reality of the Eritrean liberation struggle. In spite of their limited resources, the Eritrean people were able to achieve victory by shouldering the onerous burden of the armed liberation struggle for thirty odd years precisely because they were able to create a revolutionary leadership that was capable of galvanizing and

leveraging their resources and initiatives; enhancing their full participation; and, that was faithful to and ardently defended their interests and aspirations. The national movement for liberation was, in essence, a democratic movement that had deep roots in the population and that managed to mobilize as well as secure the active participation of almost the entire Eritrean people, including those residing in the most remote villages and hamlets. As a consequence, the national struggle could not survive and triumph by earning and marshalling the support and participation of the population without a social and democratic forum that promoted their interests; without a political outlook that espoused social justice. The preservation and enhancement of this legacy to place the active and all-round participation of the population as a cornerstone of the strategy of nation-building will accordingly continue to be vital for irreversible and continual progress.

- The genuine support of the population can only be secured by striving to promote, both in theory and practice, as well as by embodying their fundamental interests and aspirations. The EPLF managed to earn the goodwill and unflinching support of the Eritrean people because it fervently safeguarded their equality and dignity; because it vigorously worked to advance, without wavering, the national interest; because it did not degenerate into, or, form an interest group that was detached from the broad population. Indeed, as it was eloquently stressed in the National Charter: "...it is because we struggled by living among the population, eking out the same or even more severe life, that we were able to: comprehend their outlook as well as the problems that they were grappling with; to be interested in and passionately endeavour to resolve their problems; to know their heart beat and to inspire their struggle and ensure its victory". In its post-independence experience too, the PFDJ has not betrayed these attributes to become an alienated group that pursues narrow interests or that compromises the national interest in order to cater to selfish sectarian or individual benefits. It has resolutely combated wayward interests, tendencies and values that purported to adulterate its avowed line. This is its highest political victory in the post-independence period. Needless to stress, it is imperative to conduct a continuous and conscious struggle to cultivate and develop national institutions so as to safeguard and augment this monumental achievement.

- The national liberation struggle and the revolutionary experience have left their indelible imprints on the Eritrean national identity. But their historical contribution, significant as they are, will be limited in the ongoing task of nation building. Indeed, irrespective of their depth and expanse, revolutionary struggle and experience alone cannot go beyond paving the way and lending impetus to the new task to become a substitute for the cultivation of national political, cultural, economic and social tasks and processes. In this respect, it is incumbent upon us to invoke the spectacular achievements of yesteryear to ensure continuity,

and, to transform the history of the Eritrean national liberation struggle and the EPLF, which had few parallels among the liberation movements of the 20th century, into an equally successful endeavour of nation building that few Third World countries have managed to achieve to date. This means, essentially, in order to successfully consummate its historic mission of nation building, the PFDJ has to persist in its struggle by marshalling the support and participation of the Eritrean people. This means that the PFDJ has to ensure that the young generation will preserve its heritage and carry the revolutionary torch in order to continue as well as make new history.

This decisive question of ensuring the continuity of history; of making new history by taking past history as the point of departure is best described by the following slogan in very simple words but that convey a profound message:

“independent Eritrea is the gift of our martyrs; but the building of a modern and civilized Eritrea is our gift to our martyrs!”

Joyous Golden Jubilee of September First!
Glory to our Heroic Martyrs!
Victory to the Masses!

People’s Front for Democracy and Justice!
September 1st, 2011