

The Historic Eritrea-Ethiopia Peace and Friendship Agreement



The historic Eritrea-Ethiopia Peace and Friendship Agreement was signed two years ago, on 9 July 2018, in Asmara. The tumultuous reception accorded to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed on his arrival in Asmara on the previous day; the jubilations and euphoria that were visible on the radiant faces of the Eritrean people both inside the country and abroad were beyond anyone's expectations. Similarly, Ethiopians flooded the streets of Addis Ababa in their millions, for a pompous reception without precedent in the annals of its history of hosting foreign leaders, when President Isaias Afwerki arrived in the Ethiopian capital a week after the signature of the Peace Agreement.

For the Eritrean people, the Peace Agreement is endowed with two attributes of profound significance. First off, it is a huge victory; a victory against the all-rounded war – military, political, economic, social, media, psychological, diplomatic, UN-imposed sanctions – that major powers waged for twenty long years to subdue and obliterate Eritrea using the TPLF as a Trojan Horse. It is indeed a second victory, both in temporal and hierarchy terms, to our hard-won Independence victory. Secondly, it heralds enduring peace with a neighbouring country that unleashed war and embroiled us in interminable and vicious conflicts for 80 years – i.e. for three generations – with the support of major powers.

This is a peace agreement that has enabled Eritrea to extricate itself from war and the threat of war to funnel its undivided potential and energy towards peaceful development.

The peace agreement between Eritrea and Ethiopia has remained in force for two years now. The two countries that were mortal adversaries yesterday are consulting each other and working together today instead of conniving to undermine and weaken each other as was the case before. The peoples of both countries are interacting with each other in a normative mode after 20 years of utter separation. Resources and capabilities that were squandered in war and conflict are now marshaled and leveraged towards reconstruction. The bilateral peace agreement has spurred a wider momentum for peace, stability and cooperation in the turbulent Horn of Africa region. Sudan and Somalia, which had joined the ranks of Eritrea's arch-enemies, are now cooperating with Eritrea.

The benefits that accrue from the peace agreement to the two countries and their peoples are enormous indeed. At the same time, it is evident that the progress achieved so far is not fully congruent with the expectations and aspirations. Two years after the signing of the Peace Agreement, Ethiopian troops continue to be present in our sovereign territories. Trade and economic ties of both countries have not resumed to the desired extent or scale.

The reasons are palpable. In the first place, peace is a heavy undertaking that cannot be achieved overnight. Its maintenance and consolidation require greater effort and time. And in any case, two years is a relatively short period in the context of the complex path that must be trodden in nurturing sustainable peace between two countries. Moreover, Ethiopia is undergoing through a complex phase of transition at this point in time. Sporadic conflicts have not been fully eliminated. There are forces inside the country that crave for, and are frantically working to, scuttle the peace agreement and instigate renewed hostilities between the two countries. The TPLF clique remains the main proponent of this scheme. But there are also other forces – in the region and beyond – who perceive the peace achieved between the two countries as a major obstacle to their

selfish and narrow interests. These regressive forces too are toiling day and night to undermine the peace process. The fact that Sudan is similarly entangled in a difficult transition process while Somalia and South Sudan are also grappling with challenges of consolidation and full stability have further compounded the problem. In a nutshell, the Eritrea-Ethiopia peace process is treading along in a complex domestic, regional and international climate that is fraught with risks and threats. This is further compounded by the looming threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and other ephemeral malaises.

But neither the magnitude and enormity of the objectives that we are pursuing, nor the daunting challenges that we are encountering, will dampen our resolve and confidence in any way. We will strive to recoup our sovereign territories under occupation with the requisite patience and determination. We will not spare efforts to bolster the peace process and the cooperation frameworks we cherish with Ethiopia and Sudan as the latter overcome and transcend current challenges of transition. We will strive to broaden our cooperation with South Sudan and Somalia and work with higher vigour for robust regional cooperation in the Horn of Africa. We will continue to confront - with time-tasted and effective instruments in our tool box - the forces of inertia that still wallow in hostility; who loath the prevailing peace; and who bear ill-will to Eritrea. And first and foremost, we will continue to funnel our efforts to rebuild and strengthen our nation in the political, developmental, social, cultural, and security sectors of nation-building. Indeed, a strong and prosperous Eritrea is not only the embodiment of the lofty aspirations and cherished wishes of the Eritrean people; but it will also add impetus to meaningful and vital regional cooperation.

Thus as we celebrate the 2nd Anniversary of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Peace Agreement, let us be keenly aware of the huge opportunities and considerable challenges that it holds; confront our adversaries with the requisite fortitude and ingenuity; and, march forward on the path of peace, development and region