

The Ministry of Justice
**Hosts Dialogue on Justice, Development,
And the Geopolitics of the Horn**



By : - Habtom Tesfamichael

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) hosted, from 4 to 6 September last week, a Dialogue Session focused on the theme: “Justice, Development, and the Geopolitics of the Horn.”

The event attracted scholars and academics from various countries, all gathered to explore critical mechanisms for bolstering Eritrea’s legal framework.

The primary aim of the dialogue was to discuss initiatives set forth by the MoJ as part and parcel of its ongoing efforts to enhance Eritrea’s legal framework for sustainable development. These measures are integral to the broader nation-building process, and involve strengthening the legal framework; expanding access to justice; improving the competence of justice personnel; maintaining institutional integrity; and, fostering active public participation.

The Minister of Justice, Ms. Fawzia Hashim, underlined at the opening of the Dialogue Session that the task of building a strong Eritrea was intensified from the outset since the country’s independence, driven as it was, by a clear vision where peace, development, and justice prevail. This vision aims to fortify national harmony, encourage socio-economic development, promote social justice, enable

meaningful public participation, and enhance regional and international cooperation.

Minister Fawzia emphasized that justice in Eritrea was not merely an abstract notion but a principle enshrined in the nation's core values. It is a social concept deeply rooted in the country's ethical viewpoints and beliefs, anchored on the sustainable wellbeing of its citizens and fostering the nation-building process.

Mr. Sium, Director of the Legal Services Department at MoJ, pointed out that the justice system in Eritrea is under continuous reform. The Ministry's reform process encompasses revising laws, expanding access to justice, enhancing the overall competence of personnel involved in the administration of justice, maintaining institutional integrity, and ensuring active and effective public participation.

In October 2023, the Ministry introduced an Action Plan that incorporates a dialogue mechanism divided into three interconnected clusters: values, geopolitics, and geography.

The first of these dialogues, centered on "Values and Justice," took place from April 29- 30, 2024, and yielded significant insights into Eritrean values and their relevance to the reform process. During this initial session, participants reflected on the principles, values, and realities surrounding the concept of development.

Following this reflection and extensive dialogue, the MoJ recognized the need to adopt a more pragmatic approach to the idea of development.

A taskforce was established by the MoJ in October last year to elaborate on the Action Plan for greater articulation of the Eritrean legal framework for sustainable development. The taskforce determined that the most effective way to implement the Action Plan would be to proceed phase by phase. Each phase is designed to address specific areas of regulation, acknowledging that not all areas can be reformed simultaneously. Particularly, some regulatory areas require socio-economic assessments, which informed the taskforce's decision to adopt a phased approach.

The dialogue session conducted in April 2024 was part of the first phase. The Action Plan finalized in October 2023 covered regulatory areas focusing on investment, mining, environmental issues, maritime security, and labor concerns, identified as key priorities in this initial phase. After elaborating on the Action Plan, the taskforce realized the necessity of engaging in dialogue regarding the values, principles, and objectives that should guide the reform of Eritrea's legal framework for sustainable development.

Professor Makane M. Mbengue, a lecturer on International Law at the University of Geneva and the Director of the Department of Law and International Organizations, was among the key speakers and moderators of the dialogue. He noted that one of the challenges African countries face is “legislative inflation, where governments engage in continuous reforms of legal frameworks that do not align with their actual needs, leading to ineffective legislation”.

The MoJ was cautious to avoid this issue. This caution led to the establishment of mechanisms for dialogue to clarify the objectives, values, principles, and the context in which reforms should occur. Three major aspects were considered essential components of the dialogue mechanism: the values that reflect Eritrean identity; how these values operate within the broader African context; and how they inform the reform of Eritrea's legal framework.

During the initial session of the dialogue mechanism on April 29- 30, 2024, the MoJ convened discussions to explore how to integrate these values into the reform of Eritrea's legal framework for development.

While the reform of the justice system must be based on national values and domestic realities, it must also consider regional dynamics. This approach ensures that Eritrea's national justice system can positively affect regional peace and security, facilitate cooperation among neighboring states, and reduce the risks of conflict and environmental degradation.

Under the action plan for operationalizing the dialogue, the discussion on geopolitics covered a wide range of topics aimed at understanding the geopolitical challenges and opportunities in the region. This included a critical examination of the geopolitical dynamics in the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea region, and beyond,

along with their historical contexts. The dialogue also sought to foster regional intellectual collaboration, creating consensus on an alternative theory of development and mechanisms for synergy among countries in the Horn of Africa and the continent at large.

In line with these objectives, distinguished academics and legal experts presented research papers on various issues; delved into roundtable discussions as well as expert presentations. Topics raised included a historical account of Eritrea's engagement in the geopolitics of the Horn and beyond, the implications for the socio-economic and political landscape, historical and geopolitical dynamics of the region, changes in international relations and their effects on Africa, and assessments of regional economic integration processes in Africa.

Mr. Sem Eyasu and Amir Hassen illuminated how Eritrea has evolved from a victim of geopolitical struggles to a pivotal player in the dynamics of the Horn of Africa. Their presentation provided a historical overview of Eritrea's journey in state and nationbuilding, emphasizing the lessons learned from past experiences.

They discussed how Eritrea's historical context can inform its future developments and engagements in regional geopolitics. They highlighted the collaborative efforts Eritrea has made with neighboring countries to foster better cooperation and development. Furthermore, they addressed Eritrea's active role in resolving regional conflicts, which is essential for paving the way for sustained development and regional security.

Mr. Sem and Mr. Amir elaborated on Eritrea's commitment to redefining the concept of development; emphasizing the importance of establishing and reconfiguring regional institutions that support these efforts. Their insights underscored the potential for Eritrea to shape a more cooperative and secure regional landscape, reinforcing its status as a key actor in the Horn of Africa's geopolitical arena.

Fawaz Gerges, a Lebanese- American professor of Middle Eastern politics and international relations at the London School of Economics, emphasized the shifting global dynamics of international relations and their implications for the Horn of Africa. He described the current global landscape as undergoing a

“tectonic change,” which he conceptualized as an inflection point where geopolitics converges with geoeconomics.

In his remarks, Gerges articulated how this convergence could significantly impact the region, urging attendees to consider the broader context of these changes. He underscored the importance of understanding the intersection of political and economic forces as critical to navigating the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for Eritrea and its neighbors. His insights highlighted the need for strategic engagement in multi-lateral platforms in light of these evolving dynamics, reinforcing the relevance of the dialogue session in addressing contemporary geopolitical issues.

He also highlighted how important it is to take an independent path in the current development where economic and national sovereignty have never been as important as before. In today’s world, many countries are not economically independent that hinders them from taking independent political standings. Therefore, it’s very important to consolidate national interests with like-minded states that look for independent path and navigate the future. Other topics addressed during the dialogue included the integration of values, with Professor Makane M. Mbengue providing an assessment of the African experience. Professor Salvatore Mancuso contributed insights on customary laws, land, and development in Africa, supported by a detailed historical context. Dr. Rahel W. Sbhatu focused on decolonizing the concept of development and integration in Africa; while Prof. Harry Varhouven explored the evolution of synergies in development across the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea region, and the Nile Basin.

Roundtable discussions were integral to the session, allowing participants to engage in dialogue about the historical and geopolitical dynamics of the Horn of Africa and beyond. The discussions included assessments and reassessments of Africa’s integration processes—evaluating what has succeeded and what has not—as well as fostering a common understanding of development synergies through shared experiences.

Participants also engaged in roundtable discussions, actively sharing their opinions and experiences, fostering a rich exchange of ideas aimed at enhancing the future of justice and development in Eritrea and the wider region.

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