

## **Interview with President Isaias Afwerki on Global, Regional and National Issues**



*Providing key insights into current affairs, President Isaias Afwerki sat down with national media outlets on July 19 and 23, 2025. The wide-ranging interview delved into timely global, regional and national issues.*

***Q. Mr. President, in your Independence Day address, you stated: “The global situation provides an opportunity for Africans to change the oppressive regimes that have been governed by aids and subsidies”. What specific opportunities and challenges does the current global landscape present for Africa? Additionally, what policy shifts and structural reforms are needed for the continent to move beyond its hindered/fettered state and meaningfully contribute to a more just and equitable global order?***

**PIA:** Throughout its history, Africa has faced injustices and external interference at every stage. It is, therefore, understandable that we often lay the blame on outside forces. And indeed, those responsible must be held accountable. However, continuously engaging in a cycle of blame will neither yield results or move us forward. The more urgent question is: What have we done for ourselves? And more importantly, what must we now do?

Africa possesses an estimated 60% of the world’s natural resources, an extraordinary endowment by any measure. Yet, the continent remains in a state of low socio-economic development, largely confined to a primary or nascent economic structure. This must change. Rather than lamenting that we have been violated, robbed, and denied justice, we must take ownership and bring about the process of transformation ourselves. There is no form of bondage more degrading than dependency – living on subsidies and hand-outs. To rely on aid instead of working, producing, and utilizing one’s resources to achieve a higher standard of

living is, in effect, a modern form of slavery. It is as the specter of the possible deaths of many in Africa that they are raising now because of the shutting down of US aid programs for HIV/AIDS. Why should this be so?

Africa adds little value to the global economy beyond raw material extraction. These resources are exported, often under exploitative conditions, only to be imported as expensive finished goods. Why should that be the case? Take Niger, for instance, one of the continent's richest countries in uranium. For the past five decades, France has extracted and benefited from Niger's uranium through its corporate ventures. And yet, Niger has not been able to build a single Reactor to generate electricity for its people. This is perhaps at the highest end; but opportunity lost in Niger in the last 80 years is not inconsiderable. The same pattern exists in Burkina Faso, Mali, Senegal, and Gabon. Despite abundant resources, what is the standard of living in West Africa. The question remains: How can Africa chart a new path of progress within an evolving global order? The answer lies in discarding debilitating dependency and building internal capacity; that is, in developing indigenous knowledge systems, harnessing human potential so as to fully exploit our natural wealth.

One of the gravest obstacles to this transformation is the systematic depletion of Africa's intellectual capital. Skilled professionals and scholars are lured away with promises of better pay abroad, while their home countries are left unable to develop the human resources essential for rapid economic progress. The Democratic Republic of Congo's untapped mineral wealth, for example, is estimated at over \$25 trillion. While this immense fortune continues to be ruthlessly plundered, the Congolese people stay trapped in a cycle of poverty. Should this be the fate of such natural abundance? Should Africa be confined to exporting raw materials while industrialized nations continue to benefit from it?

To alter this trajectory, Africa must invest in innovative resilience, especially in education and professional training. Besides the severe material extraction, the most insidious harm done to the continent is psychological. Aid and dependency breed resignation and debilitation. In this respect, Trump's recent policy shift in Washington may have unintended consequences. Many aid-programs are being cut. This can be considered as a blessing in disguise which will impel a quest for other alternatives – that will push Africa to think differently, to seek new solutions, and to build internal systems of support. There is now talk of new bilateral agreements that Washington is mulling to redirect assistance previously disbursed by USAID through other channels, ostensibly to mitigate the “deaths and hunger that will otherwise ensue”. This undercurrent may have been prompted by wider considerations in some cases; it does not, otherwise, constitute a wholesale policy reversal.

Africa's long-term survival and prosperity depends on its ability to industrialize and elevate its position globally. This means acquiring the capacity to process raw materials and to participate meaningfully in domestic, regional, and international markets. It means raising the educational and professional competencies of our people in order to transform and modernize our economies. This is not an easy task. But it is the only route for guaranteeing viable economic progress and status for future generations. The current state of social services throughout the continent is also troubling. In many countries, these programmes are for the most part run by UN agencies, and especially NGOs. The preponderance of NGOs, which runs into 400/500 in some countries, is disconcerting. These organizations function as intermediaries of global powers. For them, aid distribution has become a business, which makes it all the more difficult to dismantle because too many benefit from its perpetuation. Under the guise of relief and support, the cycle of exploitation continues. Can Africa free itself from this reality? It will not be easy. But it is absolutely essential.

Internal turmoil is still one of Africa's most pressing challenges. We are no longer living in the age of feudalism. The world is rapidly transitioning into a new industrial era; defined by speed, innovation, and transformation. In this context, Africa must prioritize and respect national sovereignty, nation-building, and the pursuit of greater unity across the continent. Unfortunately, divisive and discriminatory politics of polarization that whip up ethnic and other cleavages are rampant in many countries in our region and other parts in the African continent. Internal cohesion and stability of societies is disrupted when these dangerous policies, packaged in highly cosmeticized and decorated formats, are introduced. This issue must be addressed as a priority. The politics of division must end. Without social cohesion and political stability, there can be no sustainable development.

Stability cannot be achieved simply by copying Western political systems. Africa must build governance systems that are rooted in its own realities, and that are capable of lifting nations out of crisis and propel them towards long-term transformation. External interference has long been used to establish and deepen internal divisions. It is a well-worn strategy: divide a country internally, pit one group against another, or fragment regions in order to maintain foreign influence. Whether it's in Niger, Mali, Nigeria, or Somalia, the same pattern repeats where the "narrative of incipient terrorism" is invoked to justify external interventions and sow instability. Africa must break this cycle. Again, the first step is to establish strong, sovereign institutions. That begins by strengthening social cohesion, resisting division, and fostering inclusive citizenship to bring about national unity. Only then can nations hope to effectively harness their resources for development. These tasks are not easy and will not be achieved through mere policy declarations. It is a process and takes time.

The ability to create national unity cannot be outsourced. It must be built by Africans themselves. What naturally follows is regional cooperation. No African nation can prosper in isolation. In this highly interconnected world, partnerships across neighbourhoods, sub-regions, and the continent as a whole are essential. Regional collaboration is where synergies and enhanced capacities are created.

The positive policies (of cutting aid) currently pronounced by Washington offers timely stimulus for Africa to extricate itself from structural dependency. There is no time for complacency. And, history offers us compelling examples of transformation. Let us recall that China, now a leading economic power globally, was part of the Third World not long ago. The US and Europe too, followed their own historical paths to growth which had its own specific dynamics in those times. Africa cannot replicate these models exactly. We need a distinct process for more rapid socio-economic development as well as institutional and regional stability. This does not evolve as a consequence of dependency and helplessness, we have to reject hand-outs and rely on our own efforts, toil and resilience. Even in times of hardship, we must strive to learn, build, and grow on our own terms. That spirit, when it takes hold among citizens and communities, can reverse external influence and strengthen internal sovereignty. The politics of fragmentation and relief dependency that have reigned in Africa must end.

The essential parameters for a path forward are not mysterious. Meaningful development will remain elusive in a climate of internal social polarization and internecine conflict. Each country must assess its own situation honestly, identify what needs to change, and begin the transition. African countries cannot be built by warlords and militias, but on the solid foundations of sovereign institutions. No stable society exists without stable political systems, and no transformation can occur without solid foundations. At the same time, regional integration and coordination must also be pursued. Development must be backed by infrastructure – roads, communication systems, and economic programs – that connect regions and facilitate growth. This may look formidable but in reality the challenge is surmountable and a matter for appropriate professional experts to determine.

If Africa is to play a meaningful role in the emerging new global order, it must first resolve its internal crises. Without that we cannot effectively participate in shaping global, regional, or even sub-regional systems. The prevailing politics of hand-outs and exploitation will plunge us deeper and deeper into the abyss of poverty and crisis. This transformation will not happen overnight but it must begin in earnest. Each country must chart its political course with clear purpose and, over time, the cumulative result can change the continent's trajectory. But if the current course continues, Africa will remain on the sidelines. We cannot wait for others to draw our roadmap; we must take initiative in shaping our role in the new

world order. Our priorities must be worked on through clear, strategic programs and political frameworks, not through rhetoric. Our regional approach must also be predicated on the same methodology. Africa's progress requires clearheaded and structured action. It demands a firm, united, and strategic approach, both within nations and across the continent.

***Q. Mr. President, with the return of Donald Trump to the White House, do you foresee any significant changes in the policies of the United States and its allies towards the Horn of Africa? Given the steps Eritrea undertook during President Trump's first term, what are the prospects for normalizing relations this time around, even if the current timeline for engagement has evidently been brief?***

**PIA:** This is a matter that requires extensive discussion. One cannot help but ask: is it truly beyond Washington's capacity to adopt sound, forward-looking policies in this region? Why must the same flawed approaches be repeated time and again over the span of nearly eight decades? The injustices that have been committed against Eritrea as a result of misguided US policies has been considerable indeed. Many efforts have been made to undermine and crush us during our protracted struggle for liberation. Nevertheless, upon achieving independence, we made a deliberate and conscious decision to put the past behind us. Since 1991, Eritrea has pursued a policy of constructive engagement. Not in the hope of securing subsidies, handouts, or protection from them, but rather in the belief that past mistakes should be corrected and that new constructive relationships can be built.

We are fully aware that our calls may fall on deaf ears, and that there may be those in Washington who would dismiss them. But, despite this, we have continued to reach to explain the damaging consequences of these policies, and to offer a better path forward. In 2016, with the election of President Trump, we recognized an opportunity, because the circumstances at that time had matured and accumulated to a point where a substantive and open conversation might be possible. It was not a matter of asking for special favours or urging the United States to review its policies on account of Eritrea. Rather, we believed that the time was ripe to address the devastation and instability brought about by decades of flawed policy in our region. The suffering inflicted as a result of these US policies is not minor, nor is it confined to one episode. In this respect and while fully addressing our domestic agenda and simultaneously striving to foster a cooperative and stable regional environment, we felt it was timely and appropriate to voice our concerns to them on their misguided policies.

In this spirit, Eritrea took the initiative for constructive engagement in 2017; the details of which I prefer not to elaborate at this point in time. The initial response was, in fact, positive. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, this engagement

was not sustained. Three years of President Trump's first term passed without progress. This was then followed by the Biden administration – four years in which the situation deteriorated further. Those years were marked by an onslaught of sanctions, restrictions, threats, and overt hostility. The hostile measures were numerous and wholly inexplicable. It became impossible to meaningfully continue the process of engagement under such conditions. It is important to emphasize here that our aim was never to dwell on the past, nor to assign blame in retrospect. Our focus continues to be on the future and on restoring a functional and constructive relationship based on mutual respect and understanding.

As I have noted, the three years under Trump were effectively lost, and the four years under Biden compounded that loss. Now, during Trump's second term, we intend to resume the initiative we had once begun with the firm conviction that the fundamental flaws in US regional policy must be addressed. If those policies remain unchanged, there is no basis for engagement, at least not the kind that leads to meaningful outcomes. Eritrea's engagement has never been about narrow interests or isolated demands. Our primary concern is the destabilizing policies that have affected not only Eritrea but the Horn of Africa and the wider region as a whole. We believe that a reorientation of US policy is essential for the collective wellbeing of the region. It is not a task that Eritrea can pursue alone. It requires a concerted effort among neighbouring countries and peoples, a spirit of dialogue and solidarity between them. Our message, then, is not confined to a single nation or grievance. It speaks to the urgent need for a significantly more rational and just approach to international engagement in our region.

Our region is defined by four interconnected geopolitical components: the Nile Basin, the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and the Gulf. It is essential to critically examine the policies of Washington across these spheres. What strategic posture has the United States adopted toward each of these zones, and what are the most fundamentally misguided policies we have witnessed in this area throughout the past three decades? It is necessary to establish a clear appraisal of the most detrimental policies, in order to identify which ones urgently require correction. Our efforts must be collective in order to create a platform that allows Washington to re-evaluate and, where necessary, recalibrate its current policies towards the region. This raises several issues that need detailed examination: what is being rectified, if anything? What concrete steps must be taken to correct past misjudgments? And importantly, what consequences, intended or otherwise, will these policies engender?

The key imperative is engagement. The seven years that were lost provide us with the opportunity to draw appropriate lessons. We should not be dismayed by the missed opportunities. Instead, we acknowledge them and recognize that opportunities for engagement still exist. Our approach to re-engagement is not

born out of grievance. We are not appealing for empathy because sanctions were imposed on us, or because we were wronged through illicit measures. We are fully aware that unless there is a fundamental shift in the overarching policy framework, there can be no tailored or adaptable approach specifically applicable to Eritrea. In this regard, the coming three or four years under the Trump administration may offer an opening to address not only regional concerns but also broader global dynamics. However, this must be understood within a larger context: it is not solely a matter of Washington's policy choices. One must not overlook the negative influence of forces operating in our neighborhood who are actively lobbying against our cherished objectives, propagating distortions, and seeking to obstruct meaningful engagement.

We are committed to building a platform for constructive cooperation with our neighbours. Our intention is not to vie against each other, but to cultivate relations that serve our collective progress and regional stability. In this perspective, our plan is to resume engagement with the Trump administration starting from 2026 up to 2028. The themes of engagement are not new; they are the same issues that we have been discussing in the past. Moreover, these topics are interlinked with the bigger question of the emerging global order. Our focus is not exclusively geared towards US policy. We must also consider our diplomatic stance toward Russia, China, the EU, India, Latin America, Japan, South Korea, and other partners around the world. While each bilateral relationship may require specific strategies, the overall orientation does not differ. Engagement with the United States is one of several important priorities. We do not anticipate that a change in US administration alone will deliver miraculous outcomes. Whether or not we achieve the results we seek, it is our responsibility to present to Washington our views and ideas clearly and consistently.

Our engagement has to expand with time, fully realizing the role of other players and that the aggregate outcome will not depend on US policy choices alone. We must also recognize that the situation remains fluid, influenced as it is by many uncertainties, and that it will require objective and continuous assessment. In as far as the current political climate in Washington is concerned, I would characterize it as in a state of flux. Nonetheless, we must work to re-establish the engagement that was interrupted during President Biden's tenure. We should not rush to premature conclusions, whether based on hope or doubt. Our task is not to engage in speculative analysis. Engagement must continue – and continue it will.

***Q. Mr. President, is the time frame you mentioned for resuming constructive engagement in 2026 not a bit late?***

**PIA:** Indeed. But considering that the current year is already halfway through, we have to strive to accomplish meaningful progress in the period from 2026 until

2028. We are not asking to be prioritized before others. In realistic terms, we consider 2025 as a year for laying the groundwork. We recognize that the United States has its own internal and external priorities. In the event, we will finalize our preparations this year and vigorously pursue our policy of constructive engagement in the subsequent three years. In parallel with our diplomatic efforts, we are also carefully monitoring and assessing the lobbying campaigns and disinformation efforts that aim to dissuade the Washington establishment from engaging with us in good faith. These campaigns are designed to misinterpret our intentions and to obstruct constructive dialogue. However, these will not inhibit or alter our approach.

As I underlined before, Washington is currently preoccupied with a range of global concerns: the situation in Ukraine, the tension with China, and even more peripheral matters such as those involving Panama, Greenland, and Canada. But as these issues begin to settle and the noise surrounding them subsides, there will inevitably be a recalibration of priorities within the US administration. We anticipate that this will create for us the space for substantive engagement. Our posture remains one of patience and preparedness. We are confident that the moment for meaningful dialogue will come, and when it does, we will be ready to engage with clarity and purpose.

As for the disinformation being recycled (by Ethiopia) claiming that Washington is one of the key supporter of their quest for maritime access, these are misleading narratives quite divorced from the actual position held by the US. There is no reason for us to issue premature statements, affirming or dismissing the veracity of this absurd claim, at this point in time. We will continue to observe, prepare, and wait until the conditions for responsible engagement materialize in the coming year.

*Q. Mr. President, amid the ongoing political and security crisis in Ethiopia, accusations have been leveled against Eritrea to divert and externalize the country's domestic turmoil. In what seems to be a repetition of history, a campaign has emerged promoting unrealistic ambitions under the guise of access to the sea. In spite of these campaigns, the Eritrean government has refrained from engaging in unnecessary media acrimony. However, the Ethiopian government has recently sent official letters to the UN Secretary-General and several Heads of State and Government accusing Eritrea. What is the purpose of this campaign?*



**PIA:** These statements are infantile and difficult to fathom; one wouldn't expect even a child to speak in such a way. Fabricating and spreading cheap lies is both disgusting and unbecoming. The question remains: why are such childish tactics being employed? Why is Eritrea being falsely accused? This is not just immature – it is a calculated diversion, a pre-emptive way of avoiding responsibility. We will address the so-called “preparations” later. But why target Eritrea now? On what grounds? With what evidence or facts? Is there something hidden from the world? And to what end is this being done? It is possible to raise many matters. The current challenges in Ethiopia defy simple descriptions or clear assessment. The chasm between the euphoria and optimism that was created at the beginning and the disillusionment that prevails now is striking.

When the war ended, the expectation was to move on to other matters. We can delve into details of that period that were revealed or that still remain unrevealed. In the end, however, the internal situation in Ethiopia became a challenge in itself. The Pretoria Agreement was signed. But why was it not implemented? It was stated that they needed to eliminate the Amhara FANO prior to the implementation of the Agreement. By what was the logic behind this policy choice? We are witnessing the situation in different parts of the country. Today, there is ostensibly a Prosperity Government in Ethiopia. But it is a waste of time to discuss whether it can really achieve its pronounced objectives. The hopes and aspirations of the Ethiopian people have been shattered. Therefore, the PP needed to devise diversions to escape from the situation. The crises in Ethiopia are endless. The existing security and economic crises cannot be easily solved by disjoint tactics of political cherry-picking. The allegations that Eritrea is aligning with Tigray and FANO stem from tactics designed to deflect attention from self-induced internal crises.

The preparations for war are openly and blatantly evident. War has been declared in effect through insidious saber-rattling and other utterances. Lodging a complaint with the UN Secretary-General to accuse Eritrea of provoking conflict is a duplicitous and shameful act designed to cover-up the actual declared war. In the event, we can only urge them to desist from these diversionary ploys and focus on resolving their own internal problems.

We had embarked on numerous cooperation initiatives in good faith and with sincerity in previous times. We worked diligently so as to surmount the centuries of adversity and move towards a better future. Unfortunately, this has been discarded and they have opted to accuse Eritrea while they are actually the party which is preparing for war? This kind of lies, evasive deception, and duplicity have never been seen in the history of Ethiopia. This is not directed at Eritrea only; it also affects all the peoples in Ethiopia. The propaganda that they are spreading claiming that their scheme has earned the support of France, the US, the UAE and others is meant to deceive the Ethiopian people. This must be rectified since it is designed to hoodwink the people of Ethiopia and the wider region. We are not going to blame the US or Europe. We are not also bothered by what the pronouncements that the UNSG may make. difference what the Secretary-General says or not now that he has received the complaint.

For our part, we are not really perturbed due to our experience in our long history. We should not be derailed. We need to move forward along the path that we have charted. The critical question is what will transpire next as the prevalent optimism has been shattered. This is not indeed a matter that concerns Ethiopia only. It is an issue that affects the wider region as a whole, i.e. Somalia, Kenya, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Sudan and other Red Sea countries.

***Q. Regarding access to the sea, they have maintained on many occasions that they have a population of 130 million and a population of this size cannot be a nation without access to the sea...***

**PIA:** The concept of a “sea corridor,” ports, or a naval base, as some describe it, has more profound implications that extend beyond casual discussion. This is not a new topic; it must be viewed from various geopolitical angles, especially given the region’s strategic importance. For instance, after World War II, when it was declared that “Eritrea does not serve our strategic interests,” the Red Sea and sea access were key considerations. This time around, some parties that claim to be regional hegemonies are attempting to leverage similar tactics. We were told by the current Ethiopian government, that Djibouti makes 3 to 4 billion dollars; and that we could take half, or even all of the revenue. This implicitly suggested crippling Djibouti by having Ethiopia use the port of Assab only. This notion is a moral

taboo to us. We harbor no such intentions. We do not envy Djibouti's revenues, whether it is \$4 billion or \$5 billion. We do not take actions to undermine or compete with Djibouti. This was policy from the onset and remains fundamentally unchanged. We have followed the overtures in Somaliland. While such reckless notions are not new, they are covert messages aimed at the current Ethiopian administration so as to foment chaos. Achieving this involves significant financial outlays, influence peddling, and outright purchases; the source of these detrimental investments are well-known.

It would be inappropriate to lay the blame broadly on the UAE. It is the UAE president who specifically bears responsibility. The notion of controlling ports from the Suez Canal to Dar e Salaam – including Jeddah, Hudaydah, Massawa, Assab, Djibouti, Berbera, Mogadishu, Lamu, and Mombasa—can only originate from an audacious mindset. There is not much that one can do when this ludicrous idea is backed by financial appropriation. The funds pouring into Ethiopia to buy influence and incite various crises are limitless. Furthermore, the financial expenditures in Kenya; the money allocated to exacerbate the civil war in Sudan, and the situations in Djibouti, Somaliland, and Yemen are far from secret.

The allegations peddled these days accusing Eritrea of preparing for war are not Ethiopia's agenda. This is not a new issue; it has always existed, and has recently resurfaced by new, self-proclaimed, "hegemonies" with their own agendas. You cannot attribute this to the Ethiopian government or a single politician, as it threatens their very existence. People will indeed say why digress into other agendas instead of solving internal problems. The wider agenda of establishing naval bases and creating problems in Somaliland, Kismayo, Mogadishu, and Dar es Salaam can only result in spiraling destabilization.

Overall, however, this is not an agenda of the Ethiopian government or the Prosperity Party. It is the agenda of others, and should be viewed in connection with various upheavals and crises that have and continue to afflict our region. European countries, American intelligence agencies, and various other global, regional, and neighboring parties—all claiming regional hegemony and seeking to increase their influence—have been interfering.

We need to understand these matters profoundly. With deep insight, all peoples in the region must act wisely to prevent these actions from inculcating collective damage.

Therefore, as I underlined in the outline of our engagement policies earlier, we must discuss such issues through our engagement with the United States, European countries, Asian nations, and other influential forces to ensure regional stability and peace. Attempts to plunge this region into endless chaos and turmoil must cease. We need to focus on a constructive path and avoid being drawn into various campaigns trying to pull us in different directions. Overall, however, this issue does not reflect the true situation in Ethiopia or Ethiopian politics. It is both childish and adventurous; and, potentially fraught with dangerous consequences.

***Q. In your speech last May, Mr. President, you stated that everybody is aware of the technology and weapons that are being purchased to ignite war; the saber-rattling and psychological warfare peddled constantly to hide the truth and spread disinformation, as well the various subversive schemes plotted against the people and Government of Eritrea. How would you characterize the role of external forces in these subterfuges?***

**PIA:** We have no interest, whatsoever, in waging war. If in the past 80 years, Eritrea has ever entered into war, it has done so by compulsion, not by choice. This country has never waged war to seize the land of others, to pursue expansionist ambitions, or for any other ulterior motive. We have been dragged into conflicts in the past, but we can also say that we have emerged from them with important lessons. Eritrea and its people abhor war. But, when and if war is brought to our doorsteps, we know how to defend ourselves. The wars we have experienced over the past three generations were never of our choosing. And we have no intention of entering into new ones. But if war is imposed upon us, there is no option but to confront it.

Those who accuse Eritrea of warmongering or of harboring ambitions of military aggression are either ignorant of history or deliberately misrepresenting it. Such allegations are not only unfounded but infantile. No rational person could make them, or take them seriously.

We hear obstinate statements such as: “We are 130 million strong.” But what does this mean? Whom do you intend to intimidate with such rhetoric? The very tone of these declarations reveals how infantile and absurd they are. We hear talks of drones being deployed to presumably obliterate designated targets; kill and eliminate at will; and, demolish certain areas. And at the end of the day, what

comes of it? Is there anything more immature than this kind of posturing? We hear boasts of newly procured weapons, including missiles with a range of 3,500 kilometers, tanks and artillery. The weapons purchasing spree on a constant basis is indeed well-known to everybody. The intransigent pronouncements include their plans to invade Assab, the pincer assaults they intend to launch along the Gash Barka area, and advance through Sudan to achieve certain objectives. Can any rational person contemplate these war plans? It is, quite frankly, childish.

A network of propaganda institutions are engaged in constant disinformation, distorting facts and misleading public opinion. The diplomatic support that they claim they have garnered is part and parcel of this psychological warfare. These are not serious institutions; they are infantile outfits by every standard. They speak of drones, but how many? Where are they stationed? Regarding the aircrafts, how many are there; where are they deployed and what is their payloads? On artillery, how many pieces, and where are they positioned? We hear boasts of GIS mapping, reconnaissance, and satellite technology to identify any target precisely and launch attacks rapidly. Similar, what is configuration of the military force deployed in Semera, or in other regions? Where is it all headed? The entire discourse is akin to a game of make-believe.

Whether with drones and aircraft or without them, these aggressive discourse is not new to us. I can only repeat vehemently again: all this is sheer folly. Our message remains simple: stay put in your place; steer clear of this nonsense; abandon the infantile folly. Their presumption that a population of 130 million can overwhelm Eritrea, irrespective of the costs that they may sustain, through sheer force or wave of attacks belie arrogance and ignorance. What do they intend to achieve with wave attacks? This kind of thinking risks dragging the Ethiopian people into a senseless and unwanted war, into a dangerous political dead end. Ethiopia must first solve its internal problems. It has no conceivable reason to stumble into such mayhem. These reckless schemes and propaganda campaigns are conceived as diversionary ploys from key internal problems.

The Eritrean people have no desire for conflict. And while all the bluster we hear is shortsighted and infantile, it does not mean that we will not continue to be vigilant. One must always be prepared for the possibility that recklessness and desperation by a rogue party may trigger uncalled-for conflict. But no actor should overestimate their capabilities. What is often presented as psychological warfare is, in truth, little more than therapy, an attempt to soothe one's own panic, to mask fear and confusion behind a veil of bravado. Such antics may serve to reassure the architects of these schemes themselves, or to rally domestic sentiment. They have no impact on us. They neither shock nor intimidate us. There is no justification for such dangerous confusion. And if all this talk is simply intended to boost morale or deceive the public, our message remains: Abandon this folly!

**Q. Your Excellency, the abrupt treachery and deceit by the Ethiopian government, which stands in stark contrast to Eritrea's goodwill and initiatives, has taken many by surprise. Furthermore, provocations and inflammatory rhetoric aimed at neighboring countries have extinguished the hopes that had emerged. What additional efforts are required to counteract the steady erosion of the long-term strategic vision and realize the desired objective?**

**PIA:** Fostering integration at the regional and wider neighborhood levels remains a matter that we continuously strive for through political goodwill and sound policies. This is a task that cannot be set aside, even amidst the crises and obstructions created by global power politics. If we look at the global level, the prevailing trend is towards alliances or integration. We cannot be oblivious to this reality. Regional integration is crucial. As an idea, it is not a new invention. It is something that has been worked on for a long time. For instance, the idea of establishing IGAD predates the current unipolar world order. After securing our independence, we set out to create a conducive atmosphere at the regional and neighborhood levels. This, in turn, requires a mechanism or an apparatus. Departing from this objective, an attempt was made to transform IGAD into an intergovernmental forum for cooperation. Today, IGAD does not exist in any practical sense.

On a larger scale, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) was initially created with the goal of transitioning us to African unity. The aspiration of the peoples is always the same: peace and development. However, goodwill or aspirations alone are not sufficient. There must be a mechanism to create that integration. Yet, all the mechanisms attempted in the past have failed. There was the OAU, and then the African Union (AU) came after it. If we ask, "does the African Union truly exist today?" the answer is no, because it failed to carry out the tasks it was entrusted with. If we ask "Why?" we can primarily point to Africa's own weaknesses. But that is not the only problem. The external interferences perpetrated to paralyze it were boundless.

Creating integration at the continental level in Africa may be a broad issue. There are organizations like IGAD, SADC, and ECOWAS that were formed in various regions. They were established under the umbrella of the OAU to consolidate the regions. Did that work? What did it produce? In practice, it has not worked. But the fact that it did not work is not a reason for despair. On the contrary, it engenders the impetus to persist with greater commitment for stronger institutions. This is because we cannot move forward in the current global situation without achieving it. We must work with greater intensity, especially at our neighborhood level. It is not feasible to proceed with the current situations in Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. An approach where Somalia is separate, Puntland, Benadirland, Jubaland, and Mogadishu all separate—scattered like checker pieces—is not viable. It must change. When we secured our independence in 1991, our mission was not, in a sense, fully realized. Because regional stability and mutual complementarity are important for the consolidation of our independence.

We can look at the situation in Ethiopia over the past thirty years and the conditions that exist now. The problems are not simple, but neither are they hopeless. While the primary responsibility for the positive developments that must occur in Ethiopia lies with its own people, the infantile recklessness we are currently discussing, which is fraught with inducing fragmentation, should not be observed in silence. A situation that leads to unnecessary friction and crises with neighbors must not be created. We must work on this. We must have constructive engagement and active diplomacy with the peoples of all neighboring countries. It may take time, the nature of the challenges may vary, but ultimately, we must create one integrated region.

It is only after we have secured regional peace and stability that we can proceed to development. Our development path will have momentum and sustainability only when it is cumulative. Actions taken in isolation might bring some progress, but in the end, they cannot bring about tangible, sustainable results.

We can take Sudan as one example. Before 2011, Sudan was one country; the people of the South, the North, Kordofan, Darfur, and Blue Nile all together as one Sudan. The efforts made to unify these different parties were not insignificant.

But the plots to fragment Sudan proliferated, and the efforts made were squandered. Ultimately, the secession of South Sudan occurred. It was a matter driven by external interference and conspiracies, which the people of South Sudan themselves did not want. Now, we also see the situation in the north. Who is fueling this ongoing war? Why are we descending into this chaos? And as this happens, should we remain silent observers? Is it viable? Is it right?

We have a long experience with Somalia. The games played with numerous checker pieces, the conflicts instigated by warlords, have not benefited Somalia. The role a united Somalia can play in the Horn of Africa is not insignificant. Therefore, stability must come to Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, and others. Internal problems must be resolved. Since these problems are a major obstacle to regional stability and integration, we must work concertedly to change them. This is not something to be abandoned in despair under any circumstances.

To solve the existing problems, the awareness of the peoples is essential. But that alone is not enough. National institutions must also be built. On our part, the reason we trained ten thousand Somali soldiers was to help create sovereign defense and security institutions in Somalia. However, because there are continuous plots to fragment Somalia, we have faced various challenges as they work to break it apart. But this is not an issue for despair. The complementarity and integration of this region is not a task that cannot be sidelined under any circumstances. While managing our domestic affairs, we will not set it aside. To achieve this, we must work closely with our neighbors. Beyond our region and neighborhood, we must also align with influential regional and global powers further afield. This is work we must carry out in parallel with nation-building.

Therefore, what we call regional complementarity is something we view broadly; have worked on as much as we could in practice; and will continue to work on with diligence. So far, our efforts have not succeeded. It is not something we should lose hope over, saying we have not succeeded. The existing challenges only make us more resolute and impel us to strengthen our initiative for partnership. Therefore, in the coming years, before we speak of Africa and other parts of the world, we must be more active regarding the situation in our immediate neighborhood. We are not going to meddle in the internal affairs of



countries and advise them to do this or that. Our aim is to assist in their efforts to correct the conditions that exacerbate internal problems, thereby steering toward the desired broader integration. This is a matter we cannot set aside. That it could not be accomplished under the banner of IGAD is not a problem. That it was not accomplished under the African Union is not a problem. That it was not accomplished under the UN is not a problem. While acknowledging the problems and conspiracies in each country, we must continuously work to create a truly conducive environment and foundation, ensuring the participation of everyone in the neighborhood, to counter the existing challenges. We cannot proceed by saying “what does it matter to us,” focusing solely on our own domestic situation without creating a secure regional environment.

What invites us into such predicaments are not only external conspiracies but primarily internal weaknesses. Preparing the ground to counter this is, for us, a part of nation-building. We do not see it as separate from nation-building. The efforts we made in the past did not yield the results we desired. However, this only strengthens our conviction and compels us to develop our collaborative approach with greater depth and breadth. As we ensure the collaboration of surrounding countries like Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti, Yemen, and others, we must ask what kind of new apparatus or mechanism we can create, or even what can be done by patching up the existing ones. All options are on the table. The path that can best take us forward will be tested, and thereafter, you can continue by making improvements. As I mentioned earlier, even if the challenges intensify, the awareness of the peoples is rising to a higher level. This in itself is a strength. If we look at the situations in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen collectively, awareness is growing stronger. Therefore, without being discouraged by the current situation, we must develop our partnerships. Integration is an irreplaceable choice.

*Mr. President, in the first part of our interview, you provided an insightful explanation of the global and regional situation. Our questions today primarily focus on domestic matters. Before delving into these issues, allow us to pose a question regarding Sudan. The Sudanese civil war remains unresolved, with many attributing its complexity to the involvement of foreign forces, particularly emerging regional powers like the UAE. The Sudanese government has also made similar accusations; and initiatives by neighboring countries have not*

*progressed as anticipated. Why have regional initiatives failed? And how would you describe Eritrea's relationship with the Sudanese forces?*

**PIA:** The question you have raised is important. Indeed, it should have been addressed earlier. For purposes of clarity and on the basis of concrete evidence, first and foremost, there is no civil war in the Sudan or a war between the two generals, for that matter. Why would war erupt between two Generals; which segments of the Sudanese society does the purported civil war represent? For those intimately familiar with the situation, there is no civil war. What has actually unfolded is, in many respects, tantamount to an invasion. When the popular uprising erupted in the Sudan, the primary question was how it will pan out? For our part, we began, from the outset, to closely monitor developments, and seek ways of engaging positively with our Sudanese partners and brothers – a practice that was not new to us. We maintained similar contacts with our Sudanese counterparts even before the question of South Sudan was solved. We had since long developed the norms for regular consultations whenever new issues arose. When this current situation unfolded and although we had no foreknowledge or inkling about it, we promptly set out to appraise all its dimensions for proper interaction. In this spirit, and in order to consolidate the existing bilateral partnership, we prepared a ten-page concept paper that outlined our perspective on the unfolding events. We proceeded to discuss our perspectives, which may not have captured all the nuances of the event, with all the political entities who were active in the Sudan after the popular uprising. Our position remains still the same and the concept paper submitted then is available as a reference point.



For greater insight, it is crucial to revert to history and examine the political trajectory of Sudan since its independence in 1956. What were the country's political configurations during the initial period, from Abboud to Nimeiry, and

then after Nimeiry until the National Islamic Front (NIF), or “Jebhah Islamia,” seized power in 1989?

It must be recalled that the NIF came to power in 1989 having failed to influence policy during Numeiri’s rule in spite of their efforts from within from 1983 onwards. The NIF’s accession to power coincided with the end of the Cold War and Eritrea’s assertion of its Independence. Over the subsequent 30 years of NIF rule, and with the advent of the “Uni-polar order”, Sudan went through an anomalous political development. This was in stark contrast to Sudan’s political culture in the preceding periods, which was in fact more developed and advanced in comparative terms than the countries in the region and the rest in Africa.

It is important to clarify that the NIF did not genuinely represent Islam as a religious conviction; their agenda revolved around Political Islam. As mentioned, they had already infiltrated the Nimeiry government, steadily increasing their influence through the adoption of Sharia law. The movement has a long history, dating back to 1956, even further to 1927 within the broader Moslem Brotherhood movement. Throughout their roughly five-decades existence, their political influence on the Sudanese populace remained insignificant; never exceeding four percent. Their seizure of power through a coup was largely unpopular, in spite of their organizational capabilities, and they lacked broad popular acceptance across all parts of Sudan.

The most detrimental consequence of the NIF’s rule was the unhealthy developments that unfolded in South Sudan. The secession of South Sudan can largely be attributed to their instigation, as they began introducing divisive Arab/African and Christian/Islamic political narratives that had no basis in reality. Such politics were rejected even by the so-called “Islamic” segment of society, being seen as extreme and unacceptable. However, they pursued a fundamentalist agenda to reshape the entire region beyond Sudan. Until 1996, Osama bin Laden operated from eastern Sudan—a fact that profoundly illustrates their mindset and ambition. The emergence of Al-Qaeda created a dangerous source of instability. The origins of Al-Qaeda, its formation, and its entry into Sudan, is another complex story in itself. In brief, NIF’s conduct never genuinely represented the will of the Sudanese people.

As stressed earlier, one of the greatest historical disasters stemming from the NIF’s fundamentalist agenda was the secession of South Sudan in 2011. How did this separation come about? Looking back, the South Sudanese popular movement had no separatist agenda. John Garang famously argued that Sudan’s unity was 99 percent probable, with only a one percent chance of secession. The entire movement advocated for unity. Yet, the Islamists actively pushed for division. The current South Sudanese conflict between Riek Machar and Salva Kiir is a tragic continuation of this legacy. During the struggle, Machar, unlike figures

such as John Garang, expressed a desire for secession. Ultimately, he returned to Khartoum, bringing talk of “peace from within,” which only destabilized the situation further. They began to inflame non-existent animosities between South Sudanese Nuer and Dinka tribes. Moreover, the impetus for South Sudan’s secession in 2011 was largely driven by the Islamist movement, with involvement from external forces as well.

Would this outcome have occurred if the NIF had not come to power? Prior to this situation, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), incorporating all the forces, had been established in Asmara. The Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) held regular meetings in Asmara to collaborate with other Sudanese political forces. The direction was promising, but the Islamists thwarted all these efforts. The problem could not be resolved by the secession of the South; the issue of Abyei was postponed, and the crises in Darfur, Kordofan, and Blue Nile also continued unresolved. The agenda they boasted about, “Temkin al-Musteda’fin” (empowering the weak), was neither fair nor just. The economic damage and looting they caused were immense.

As a result of these accumulated problems, a popular uprising erupted in 2019. It was spontaneous, and was not led by any specific political entity; organization or political movement. The people were grappling with enormous and spiraling hardships, the economic crises were endless, and these drove them to the streets. Sudan is a rich country; it was once known as the “breadbasket” of the region. However, and in spite of its natural endowments, its people became afflicted with hunger and poverty. Economic devastation stemming from resource plunder and corruption, coupled with political instability, ultimately compelled the people to rise up and overthrow the NIF regime.

Against this backdrop, the central question was what will happen next? This required a well-thought out roadmap. In this spirit, we embarked on preparing concept papers that would facilitate and become a basis for the consultations that were envisaged. The fact is the crises inculcated by the NIF was not entirely confined to the Sudan. It also entailed severe ramifications to the whole region. As such, we chose to become actively engaged rather than observe developments passively from the sidelines. And, to act effectively, we needed to define our engagement strategy.

The next phase consisted of fulfilling the needs and aspirations of the Sudanese people. One can draw appropriate lessons from the tribulations of the past to chart-out a proper plan of transition that ultimately leads to a new, cogent, environment. The transition would in effect fulfill the requisite tasks and serve as a bridge to “the gate of safety”. In more explicit terms, these tasks consist of the establishment of a citizenship-based system that genuinely represents the will of the people without racial, religious and other divisions. It would build its own

sovereign institutions; rectify the damage caused by the NIF; and create the conditions for Sudan to move forward.

Once these desired objectives are achieved, those currently in charge of the transitional stage would hand over the lever of power to the people. Because, they are merely custodians of the legacy entrusted to them in the aftermath of the popular uprising. Otherwise, they have no other mandate. The people can then pursue the nation-building path they cherish. How long would this transition take? Perhaps two or three years. Looking back, three years have already elapsed since our paper was submitted in 2022. It could have been accomplished with broad public participation within that timeframe; without significant hurdles.

What we are witnessing now—the so-called “war of two generals”—has been deliberately engineered to disrupt this process. The situation is being complicated, managed as a “crisis management” scenario. If we ask why this came about, Sudan became a victim due to its geopolitical significance. The problems we are seeing are primarily caused by external forces. Those operating internally, speaking against the army, against General Burhan, against specific tribes, are paid agents. They have no specific goals, which they are supposed to achieve. We have shared these ideas with all the parties, not just one side, because it’s not a unilateral issue. After the massive uprising, the direction was clear, and there was no one else by default, besides the army, to shoulder the responsibility.

Who was spearheading the popular uprising? “Huriya Wateqiyer” (Freedom and Change) – where did it come from? How did the old parties fare? The army had to shoulder the responsibility with which it was entrusted because otherwise, the vacuum could lead to unnecessary squabbling and derail the whole process. The question was not whether the army is good or bad, strong or weak. Our view was that there was no other option; so the army should shoulder the burden of transition, whose duration would not be long. But this could not materialize. Our views reflected the goodwill and aspirations we held in good-faith. Given Sudan’s geopolitical importance, unnecessary external interference has taken the matter out of the hands of the Sudanese.

People often point fingers at the UAE, claiming they are behind all these mayhem. This is not a matter that needs proof. One can invoke not only what is happening in Libya but also what is being done through Chad, the Central African Republic, and through Kordofan. And what about (the weapons supply) from the Ethiopian side? What has been unfolding is not something ambiguous or blurred. But the big question arises: Why the UAE? This is particularly worrying for us now. Why would the UAE do this? One cannot comprehend it. Others might be able to interpret their motives; I cannot.

I first met Sheikh Zayed in 1972, 53 years ago; when the UAE was first established. Our relationship goes back to that period. He was an honorable man; a truly great Statesman. When people speak about what the UAE is doing these days, I remember Sheikh Zayed. My last meeting with him was probably in Geneva in 1996. Endless stories can be told about Sheikh Zayed, about the great things he did for the UAE. For a country founded by such a noble man to be embroiled in such acts: Why? Ascertaining the full facts on UAE's involvement; where the weapons and drones are coming from; the source of disinformation that is misleading others in the region, is another topic. But it remains unacceptable by all standards. The intervention in Libya is another story. The interference in Chad is endless. Even the situation in Ethiopia is not of the making of the Ethiopian Federal Government or the Prosperity Party.

If someone or one Government is contemplating controlling the Suez Canal and building a major port there; controlling Jeddah, Port Sudan, Hodeidah, Djibouti, Assab, Aden, Berbera, Mogadishu, Mombasa, Lamu, and reaching as far as Dar es Salaam; setting up a base in Berbera to control the Gulf of Aden... how can one find a rational explanation for this ambition? How can one explain this elusive dream of creating a great empire of ports?

Influence peddling is obviously an integral part of this scheme. Billions of dollars are spent on issues like "climate change" to fund political parties here and there. There is no end to the billions that governments in this region receive from the UAE. Similarly, many programs are launched to promote different agendas. They claim to "develop ports" but are these no-man's land? Are there no governments? Are there no people there who wish to develop their own investments, industries, and infrastructure? The intervention in Sudan is not different from such elusive dream. The interventions in Libya, Chad, the Central African Republic, Sudan, and South Sudan are all driven by this overarching purpose. The agendas in the Red Sea are endless. The complications that transpired in Yemen recently are numerous.

Finally, I would say that all these missteps do not truly represent, in any conceivable way, the UAE. The UAE is acting as an agent of others. This is extremely worrying; especially what is happening in Sudan. The drones that have recently been landing in Addis Ababa, Debre Zeyit, and Bahir Dar—where did they come from? Who is bringing them? The weapons that are being unloaded daily from huge transport planes are not hidden. What is the purpose? What is happening in Yemen is another a topic in itself. The pattern is the same in Libya and Chad. There are forces behind all these schemes; forces that have been active for a long time. They have ramped up these acts recently; especially with the return of President Trump to the White House. The ultimate aim seems to create a conducive environment for Israeli control in the region. Indeed, as alluded to in our discussion the other day, the Federal Ethiopian Government is claiming that

their main supporters (in their quest for sovereign sea access) are: Israel First; UAE Second; France third, and US as fourth.

What are the interests of these forces? What do they want to achieve in the Gulf of Aden? Why are they singling out and propagating the Somaliland issue? What is the purpose of the interventions in Somalia? Where could the situation in Yemen be headed? How does it relate to the broader regional situation? Why are these so-called Red Sea ports—Hodeidah, Assab, Port Sudan, Jeddah, Suez—being targeted? What real benefit does the UAE derive from this? What does the UAE want to do there?

These are many issues that can be discussed on another occasion. Overall, however, the situation in Sudan should be understood within this broader context. Why was the solution, which should have come easily, delayed? Why is it becoming complicated again? The answer lies in the broader context that I have raised before.

There are also UN and other interventions. Why is the UN getting involved in unnecessary matters? Why was food shortage in Sudan highlighted more than others? In any UN descriptions, the problems in Sudan are described in generic terms without delving into its complex dimensions. There are many interventions, supposedly for reconciliation but which only exacerbate the problem. Who are being reconciled? What is the reconciliation for? What is its purpose? Is it merely a two-person problem, and is the goal to solve only that? Is there truly a plan for reconciliation? Many questions can be asked.

But to revert to what I said earlier: the Sudanese problem is one of the geopolitical problems of the region. It is not separate from the broader regional issues, although Sudan is being targeted first. Many forces are being targeted in this area. As such, we must all contribute because we cannot remain passive. Contribution, however, must start from a proper understanding and solid assessment of the situation. It must also be consensual. These are the fundamental parameters that guide our action.

It must be emphasized that the stability of Sudan has a major impact not only in this region, but also beyond in terms of the broader geopolitical issues I have discussed earlier. So contributing to the solution of the prevailing problem is a necessity, not an optional choice. Everyone must act on it. To remain silent while such a danger looms, becomes more complicated, and deteriorates further is not a choice that we contemplate. So, we need to understand the issues of Sudan in greater depth. We need to monitor developments closely: the delivery of weapons from Dubai or Abu Dhabi to various destinations in the region etc. and related movements. We should not remain silent while witnessing all these transgressions. Everyone should join hands in solving Sudan's problem.

## Domestic issues

*Q. Mr. President, we will now shift our focus to domestic issues. You had repeatedly emphasized that development is Eritrea's highest national priority; under any circumstances. You also mentioned a new phase of national development programs is set to be launched in the second half of this year which will be implemented through extensive public participation in all the six regions. Can you elaborate on these plans?*

**PIA:** The subject is broad and multifaceted, but let me begin by emphasizing the importance of defining our national priorities clearly and pragmatically. Over the years, we have launched a range of development initiatives with varying degrees of success and complexity. We have gleaned valuable lessons from these experiences which will, in turn, guide our current approach.

At the forefront is agriculture. Increasing agricultural production across all categories such as cereals, pulses as well horticulture is a central pillar of the programme. The objective is not just to increase output, but to do so in a measurable and impactful way. This is anchored in the fact that Eritrea already possesses substantial natural potential: vast arable land, ample water resources, and access to modern technologies. We need not go into lengthy details on mapping out specific crops in accordance with ecological advantages of each region here; but it is the foundation upon which our development efforts rest.

We are also working to revive and expand cotton cultivation, a long-standing initiative dating back to colonial times. The goal is to establish a chain of integrated industry—from cotton farming to textile production and garment manufacturing. Areas such as Kerkebet, Marsa Gulbub, Marsa Teklai, Asra, Teseney, and Ali Gidir are well suited for this purpose. The approach will be incremental starting from small projects which will expand to extensive programs with time. A similar integrated approach will be taken, in due time, with other key crops, such as sugarcane, each tailored to specific regional conditions. All these programmes will be pursued within specific and quantifiable output indicators as well as rigorous implementation timelines.

Another major area of focus is our marine resources, which remains significantly underutilized. The Red Sea's rich fish stocks, particularly in Eritrean waters, remain largely untapped. Indeed, the annual Maximum Sustainable Yield in Eritrea for all the different species of fish is estimated between 80,000-120,000 tons. Perhaps, most of these may not be the most expensive or high-value species. What we have harvested in the past years may be minimal in contrast to the latent potential. Indeed, although various facilities were built in areas like Edi, Tio, and Gel'alo, these centers have suffered from critical shortages: water, electricity, and



transport facilities. The challenge now is not to dwell on the past but to look forward to increase overall productivity. In this perspective, upgrading and furnishing these areas with reliable utilities is now a key component of our broader plan to develop the fishing sector on a national scale. Scaling up our agricultural and fisheries productivity will have vital impact on economic growth, which transcends food self-sufficiency or a narrow interpretation of food-security that we have never entertained as an end in itself in philosophical terms. Our objective has always been and remains augmented surplus production that goes beyond the requirements of national consumption. These programmes will require rigorous and functional ecological data accumulation and analysis; building of dams of appropriate sizes across all the country; as well as vigorous afforestation and catchment-area treatment through an integrated and comprehensive national plan of action.

## **Water Storage**

Water storage is an indispensable enabler of both agricultural productivity and land restoration. Our strategy involves the construction of large, medium, and small dams, and extensive water harvesting systems, both in highlands and lowlands, to enrich groundwater and capture seasonal runoff. This includes managing floodwater, exploring the use of seawater, and even recycling wastewater. To make all this effective, modern and efficient distribution systems are critical; for agriculture and livestock, all household consumption etc.

We are also moving towards modern irrigation. Traditional rain-fed farming practices consume far more water and are inefficient. Pilot projects using water-efficient irrigation systems are already underway. What is important is that we are not simply importing technology – we’re innovating and adapting systems to our own context, using natural gradients and gravity, where feasible, to maximize water-use efficiency.

## **Energy Development**

Reliable electricity supply is crucial across all sectors. The prevalent energy supply system consisted of a national grid in Hiriya with 120MW aggregate output supplemented with several, localized, power supply installations. The current expansion plan does not envisage a new nation-wide grid. We are developing 12 regional mini-grids, a hybrid system, powered by a mix of thermal and renewable sources, primarily solar energy. Each grid will initially have a capacity of 30 megawatts (MW), amounting to a combined starting capacity of 360 MW. Over time, these grids will transition to predominantly solar-based systems, especially in regions with high solar potential. The distribution network must also be modernized to ensure continuous and reliable service for agriculture,

industry, and households alike. In doing so, we aim to complement imported technologies with domestic innovation to increase reliability and reduce costs.

## **Housing and Urban Planning**

The central kernel of national development is raising the standard and quality of life of the citizens. In this respect, housing remains a critical challenge, particularly in urban areas. Sub-standard and make-shift housing structures in various rural areas must be replaced by appropriate facilities while also addressing acute housing shortages in urban areas. This is being pursued in tandem with job creation and infrastructure development. Previous housing projects – some of which were delayed or left incomplete – are being reviewed and reactivated, with a focus on design, sustainability, and access to essential services. Implementation of these programmes will be expedited henceforth as part and parcel of our short-term national developmental priorities.

## **Social Services**

Equally vital are education, health, and social welfare. We are undertaking a comprehensive review of the education system – from kindergarten to higher education – to improve both quality and relevance. Human capital is our most valuable resource – more so than land, water, or technology. The health sector must also be strengthened. Even though facilities exist in many parts of the country, including Referral Hospitals in all the regions, their coverage and effectiveness need to be significantly improved, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Emergency preparedness, public health networks/preventive care, and the cultivation of trained professionals must be prioritized.

With regard to social welfare, support will continue for those unable to work due to disability or illness. However, and even if the magnitude remains small, we must move away from policy precepts and models that perpetuate dependency. The focus will be on expanding employment opportunities, so individuals can lead dignified and self-sufficient lives. Longstanding programs such as “food for work” have been helpful, but they too require restructuring and a longer-term perspective

## **Transportation Infrastructure**

A functional transportation system is indispensable for effective implementation of all development programs. Without reliable roads and transit networks, economic activity falters. Many of our roads are narrow, winding, and heavily burdened. There is an urgent need to upgrade major highways and expand road access, especially in remote regions. The transport of people and goods, particularly agricultural produce, is essential for market integration and price

stability. We have already procured a significant number of buses, but more are needed. Efficient freight transport is needed to prevent supply bottlenecks/artificial shortages, inflated prices, and other barriers to economic growth.

More importantly and as I emphasize earlier, all our projects must be carried out within a measurable framework and clear timeframe of implementation. In this connection, Regional Administrations will take responsibility to implement the national development projects within their respective regions. Community participation is critical for the success and ownership of these programmes. The Defence Forces will contribute in the implementation of large infrastructural programmes. The Diaspora can also participate in the development programmes through investment in accordance with appropriate modalities.

***Q. Mr. President, tangible measures are being taken to address shortcomings and bottlenecks in the energy sector. You have also mentioned the programmes underway to address housing as well as transport issues. Could you elaborate further on the delays and current implementation status of transportation projects?***

**PIA:** Transportation, both public and freight, is a complex and essential component of our development strategy. When we talk about inner-city mobility, we are not referring solely to taxis; a functioning public transport requires a diverse fleet of buses, suited to different terrains and road conditions. Reliable, around-the-clock service demands a robust support system: garages, spare parts, maintenance facilities, and logistics coordination. Freight transport is even more urgent. Farmers must have affordable and reliable means to get their goods to market. At present, due to inadequate transport, prices skyrocket as goods move from rural production centers to urban markets. Areas like Haykota and Teseney face near-complete transport shortages, further straining livelihoods and limiting economic opportunity.

We must also strengthen our capacity to modify and assemble vehicles locally, especially four-wheel-drive models suited for a rugged topography. This initiative is taken seriously and is already underway. But it is not a simple task. Effective transport requires the coordination of many elements – vehicles, roads, trained personnel, and long-term equipment sustainability. As for efficient transport networks related with export, it does have the same urgency at this point in time. Our immediate priority is to guarantee domestic distribution of goods at fair and stable prices. Until we bridge the transportation gap, advances in production will not translate into tangible improvements in the lives of our citizens.

***Q. In your Independence Day message, you placed emphasis on diplomacy, media, and politics in navigating today's fluid global and regional environment.***

***How do you assess Eritrea's current diplomatic and media engagements, especially in the region? What steps are envisaged to strengthen it more?***

**PIA:** Let us start with preoccupying problems close to home. As I emphasized earlier, Eritrea has no desire for, and has never been a proponent of, war. Indeed, it has no reason whatsoever to be embroiled in war. We believe in addressing provocations early before they spiral. True diplomacy begins with clarity of purpose and principle. Real diplomacy means avoiding escalations, and refusing to be drawn into reckless rhetoric or conflict. As I have said before, foreign interference – whether from the UAE or others – does not benefit anyone. Our position remains that the people of Sudan, Ethiopia, and neighboring countries must be the ones to resolve their own internal crises. Too often, external actors, under the guise of humanitarian intervention, pursue economic interest, influence, or control, and only end up exacerbating conflicts rather than resolving them.

We believe in constructive, cooperative, and proactive diplomacy. Needless to emphasize, Eritrea has its own road-map of diplomacy for constructive engagement in the wider neighborhood as well as the world at large.

In this respect, we must nurture a shared understanding across the region: the Horn of Africa, the Nile Basin, the Red Sea, and the Gulf. This is predicated on promoting overall stability and enhancing the common agendas of complementarity and integration. Our neighbors – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Somalia, and South Sudan – must be part of a broader strategic framework. Regional organizations like IGAD and the African Union have roles to play, but our efforts must also focus beyond these institutions to cultivate direct bilateral and multilateral engagement.

We must also reassess continuously how we interact with global powers: the United States, Europe, China, and Russia. Take Italy, for instance: our relationship has evolved steadily, and a government delegation is expected to visit soon. An agreement on which we have been working for a long time could be signed. Needless to emphasize, international partnerships must move beyond bilateral transactions; they must contribute meaningfully to regional stability and development.

### **Media and Strategic Communication**

Diplomacy today is intertwined with, and cannot be separated from, media. Unfortunately, the global media landscape is dominated by disinformation, distortion, and propaganda. We are bombarded daily by campaigns designed to confuse, defame, and provoke. Responding to these attacks is necessary, but mere reaction is not enough. We must transition from a defensive stance to an active, strategic communications approach – one that clearly and assertively articulates

our vision and priorities across both traditional and digital media platforms. We need to evaluate the impact of our messaging, enhance our technical and human capacity, and build a media network that functions in parallel and enhances our diplomatic efforts.

This requires serious institutional support: dedicated research and strategic centers that monitor international developments, analyze misinformation, and guide our strategic positioning. Our media institutions must evolve from being reactive defenders to proactive drivers of our national narrative. Assertive and principled media will have its dividends and reinforce our diplomatic engagements. In this acrimonious and highly competitive environment, we cannot remain complacent. These are not peripheral issues. They are core national priorities that must be pursued with seriousness and sustained focus.