

An Interview with Dr. Tony Locker and Isabella Maria Locker

“Wherever You Go, Go with Your Heart”



By: Sabrina Solomon

Our guests today are Dr. Tony Locker and his wife, Isabella Maria Locker. A longtime friend of Eritrea, Dr. Tony has visited the country several times and has appeared twice on Eri-TV to discuss his humanitarian field trips to Barentu. A gynecologist by profession and an advocate for Eritrea by conviction, he returns to the country he has admired for decades—this time accompanied by his wife on her first visit.

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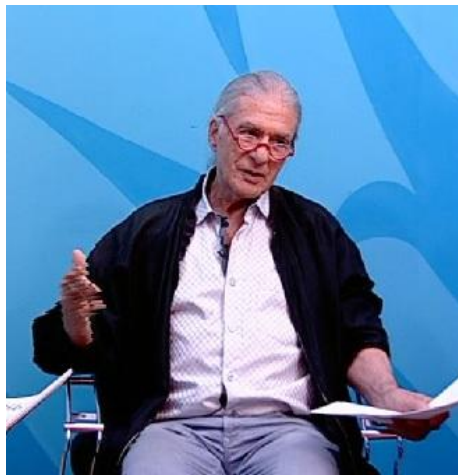
Welcome, Dr. Tony.

Dr. Tony: Thank you so much for having me. Eritrea is a country with a long, remarkable history, and I am proud to be back at the age of 77. I’m grateful for the invitation to do this interview. My wife is here with me, and this is her first time in Eritrea.

Dr. Tony, let’s begin with your early connection to Africa—and to Eritrea specifically.

Dr. Tony:

When I was born, my mother hoped I would one day become a priest. My father, however, was a poor peasant, and it was difficult for him to send me to school. Unlike in Eritrea, where education is free from kindergarten through college, we had to pay for education in Switzerland at the time.



My father sent me to a college run by the White Fathers— African missionaries— and that is where my interest in Africa began, around the age of 10.

Later, after studying medicine, I became very interested in the former Portuguese colonies. As a student, I attended a conference in Addis Ababa, met Eritrean students there, and even shook hands with Selassie.

My interest in Eritrea grew the more I interacted with Eritreans. I met them as students and taxi drivers. The stories they told drew me closer to the Eritrean armed struggle.

Then, in July 1977, just after the first liberation of Keren, I took my first trip to Mieda (the field). I met General Sibhat Ephrem and others, and we celebrated Keren's victory together. We visited Weki Zager, Keren, Afabet, and several other areas. It was an unforgettable experience.

I returned in October 1977 to do humanitarian work with SUKE (the Swiss Support Committee for Eritrea). Later, in 1987, I returned for the EPLF's second congress, where I met the veteran Eritrean nationalist, Mr. Weldab Weldemariam. And in 1988, I got married in the field. They prepared cakes, flowers, traditional

dances—so much joy—despite the bombs and war that continued the next morning.

What memories stand out from your days in the liberation struggle?

Dr. Tony:

So many. One vivid memory is visiting New Solomuna, a refugee camp at the time, with Mrs. Askalu Menqerios. We spent time with the children—difficult days, but filled with warmth.

As a doctor, I was especially drawn to the medical efforts. I met Dr. Michael and Dr. Nerayo. Dr. Nerayo would operate all night long, pushing through exhaustion. Even amid hardship, we shared jokes and laughter.

And of course, May 24th. I heard the news of the liberation of Asmara on the radio. I jumped around my house waving an EPLF flag. The joy was indescribable.

SUKE played a significant role during the struggle and continues to work in Eritrea today. Tell beginnings.

Dr. Tony:

SUKE began in 1977, focused on humanitarian aid. I remember the severe drought in Eritrea and Ethiopia around 1984. We collected one million Swiss francs on the streets to support Eritreans.

After liberation, everything became easier. In 1993, after the referendum, The Swiss government began supporting reconstruction through SUKE.

In 1994 and 1995, we worked on major dam construction projects in Areza—key contributions to Eritrea’s national rebuilding. Later, we expanded to solar energy projects, the Abraha Bahta School for the Blind, the school for the deaf in Keren, and others.

Isabella, how does SUKE secure funds for its support programs in Eritrea?

Isabella:

There were different phases. During the war, SUKE received government funds. Today, our funding comes mainly through our publication *Eritrea in Four*. We have sponsors, and we send the paper to inform them about our work.



We are not an NGO—we are a support committee. All of us are volunteers. We bring together our skills and knowledge.

Our philosophy is simple: most of the money we collect should go directly to the Eritrean people. They know best what their communities need. Dr. Tony always says, “Don’t tell them what to do— they know exactly what they need. Give them the means to realize their own ideas.” That is also the philosophy of SUKE.

Was it difficult to speak about Eritrea during the struggle years, when the world was unwilling to listen?

Dr. Tony:

It was difficult, yes. But after 1984–85, the EPLF grew stronger— especially after the victory in Afabet—and it became easier to show the world that Eritreans could prevail.

Today, unfortunately, the narratives in Europe make it challenging again. But we continue.

One of SUKE’s notable contributions is in alternative energy, particularly bio-gas.

Dr. Tony:

Eritrea is vulnerable to climate change, and the government's commitment to developing alternative energy sources— especially solar energy—is impressive. Bio-gas is a newer technology, and I'm pleased the government is embracing it.

Eritrea's reduced dependence on electricity is encouraging. Exploring new energy sources is essential in combating climate change.

Isabella, would you like to add anything?

Isabella:

Yes. We are working with war disabled communities, beekeeping projects, and more. What I love about SUKE is that we don't just start projects—we build them on solid foundations. We work closely with experts.

Whenever we implement a project, beneficiaries receive training from the Ministry of Agriculture. Eritreans combine knowledge with hard work, and that's how real change happens. Destruction is quick; building takes time.

And as I always say, "Wherever you go, go with your heart." I see that many Eritreans truly do things from the heart. An idea without heart won't go far—but if you lead with your heart, the people will support you.

Tell us about the SUKE focal person in Eritrea who recently passed away.

Isabella:

Werku was extraordinary— passionate, committed, and deeply knowledgeable. She worked closely with various sectors, including the NUEW, and helped us understand how best to support Eritrea.

She held a master's degree in gender studies and was dedicated to empowering women. She believed that when women earn money, their confidence grows—and she worked tirelessly for that cause.

Her passing was devastating. For us, she was like Mama Eritrea—the wisest woman we knew.

Dr. Tony, what is the purpose of your current visit?

Dr. Tony:

This time, we came to visit various projects. There are so many, and we are proud to contribute through SUKE. Eritreans achieve remarkable things with even the smallest support.

We plan to return in 2027 to celebrate SUKE's anniversary here in Eritrea.

Thank you both for your time.

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