

Eritrean Democratic Alliance (EDA): A Partner or a Foe?

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“Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Albert Einstein

A friend of mine pause me with a question recently that says; is EDA a partner of EPDP or foe? I responded to him with a question of my own saying; what do you think? He went on to list his laundry list of all the negative campaigns waged by EDA member organizations and their cadres against EPDP in general and its leadership in particular. After I was done talking to my friend on the phone, I started analyzing the hype and reality of the “umbrella”. How do we define “umbrella”? Is EDA in a constraint status?

EDA is an umbrella organization of thirteen organizations. It came to life in 1999 to bring the sporadic forces into one powerful opposition to lead the Eritrean people in fighting the hideous dictatorship regime. The member organizations could be classified into three major groups according to their political programs; secular, religious, and ethnic. While the journey was full of turbulence, they came long way in agreeing to have an EDA charter. One also can say they stick together in appearance while the essence tells otherwise. What is the hype of EDA?

As the Eritrean people are addicted with absolute unity, the convergence of thirteen plus organizations under one umbrella gave hope to fulfill that dream. The word umbrella was perceived as united and expected to perform at a higher velocity. The raw truth is beside the umbrella name and scoring a charter, the bond of member organizations has been fragile. It is obvious these days to some of them the primary target is not PFDJ but EPDP. One might wonder why would a sister organization taken as a target of negative campaigns. Before I delve into the intent of the negative campaigns waged by some EDA leaders and their cadres, it is of a paramount to know who the member organizations of EDA are and how they perform.

EDA to me didn't live to its hype and the people's expectation. It is simply a comfort zone for the do nothing and expectant organizations. In fact it ended up being a new welfare system for some. It is simply embarrassing to witness leaders of organizations who only are seen to collect their ration from coffers each month and never seen in diplomatic activities or mass mobilization for that matter. There are many “organizations” in the umbrella that don't have grass root members beyond the leaders' name. The formula that created EDA was totally irrational and very shaky. It is that shaky foundation today that is damaging the umbrella from progressing anywhere.

While the Eritrean people were looking for leadership in fighting against the barbaric regime, many EDA organizations were engaged in multiplying and waging negative campaigns against each other. The negative campaigns intensified after the

announcement of the unity of the three organizations that formed EPDP. At the center of the attack and negative campaign against EPDP were tedamun, the four Islamic organizations, and awate.com. Saleh Gadi who so far has refused to answer as what he did with the \$36,000 plus money he collected from citizens for lawyer fees but ended up not using them and his shadow character Ali Salim charged the attack in the early stage of the unity process of EPDP. They tried to insight the region, religion, and ethnic poisonous pills to no avail. The twins even threatened with a religious war if they don't get what they want as if they deserve the power. It is very interesting to learn that some are fighting the dictatorship for justice for all but others are doing it because they think the Eritrean people owe them the power.

It is not surprising to see the children of "The Exponential Newsletter", awate.com, and their link at tedamun Beshir Ishaac to beat the same drum against EPDP. Immediately after the unity journey was announced to the globe they painted it as the unity of highlanders and linked it with PFDJ. Just check for yourself what the pen name Ali Salim wrote in his first article "Nation in Labor, awate.com May 16, 2009", "*It might actually be twins and one of the embryos might well be the one described by Desbele beginning with the EDP-EPP merger and subsequently a bigger basket that orbits around the PFDJ*". On the same line of attack recently we have witnessed even from an organization I consider closer to EPDP's programs than anyone in the opposition. Members of ENSF borrowed the line from awate.com and tedamun and are circulating rumors that EPDP had capitulated to PFDJ. Can anyone in their right mind tell me who would oppose unity of sister organizations and how would elements who claim to be in opposition dare to link sister organization to PFDJ?

The Islamist organizations and top EDA leader, haw Beshir Ishaac, are accusing Woldesus Ammar, EPDP's chairman, for calling Eritrean Moslems as Taliban which he never said it. They also accused EPDP for not allowing them to implement Shariya in some parts of Eritrea. This is very true. EPDP's political program is secular and doesn't allow religion to mingle with politics. EPDP believes politics is our common ground where religion is a personal matter.

On March 5, 2010 haw Woldesus Ammar and haw Ahmed Nassar were guest speakers on paltalk. When an audience member asked the question as who should drive diplomatic relationship for the opposition, haw Ahmed said diplomatic activities should happen only by EDA not by member organizations. Haw Woldesus on the other hand answered it; EDA's charter allows member organizations to conduct their independent political and diplomatic activities. Can anyone tell me when was the last time you have seen EDA diplomatic activities in your neighborhood?

One of the few diplomatic engagements we witnessed was the letter that was written by EDA's chairman haw Tewelde Gebresselassie to the EU in regards to the Brussels conference (BC 2009). The Brussels Conference 2009 was hosted by The European External Policy Advisors, an independent non-governmental organization. Haw Tewelde didn't only address his letter to the wrong entity but his letter was a diplomatic blunder and displayed incompetence in his part. Haw Beshir Ishaac, the foreign affairs person of EDA, visited Australia in 2009 supposedly for EDA business. Instead of conducting the

business of EDA he ended up conducting the tedamun business through an individual link. He came back to Addis with a report that members of EDA refused to co-operate with him. Later that false accusation was verified as unfounded by EDA but the chairman did nothing and Bashir was never reprimanded. Is this the kind of diplomatic drive that haw Ahmed Nassar was talking about?

In the last few weeks the Eritrean cyber media was jammed by the national conference faulty effects and at the center of this were the chairman of EDA haw Tewelde and Abdella Mahmud. Again the two high ranking leaders of EDA failed miserably to show leadership characters. They failed to rally the opposition instead they engaged in a grudge and divisive politics. No matter how one perceives national conference it is not a destination but a process. It is in the process that leaders establish a foundation of winning strategy. Again, what both leaders display that day was the typical norm of EDA leaders that has been hunting the umbrella since its inception. This shows you that EDA is suffering from lack of competent and visionary leaders.

So, why are some EDA organizations engaged in smear campaign against EPDP and its leadership at this crucial juncture of journey? Is it because EPDP successfully completed a unity journey? Is it because they are against unity? Is their priority to weaken EPDP or save the Eritrean people from the systemic cleansing by the dictator? This is what I know in the business world, weak and incompetent leaders are afraid of competition. At the moment they can't compete, they take refuge in disruptions and negative actions. Most of the leaders at EDA don't realize that competition is the cornerstone of development.

EDA's fundamental problems are the leaders in each organization. Many of them have been in power for thirty plus years. Their relationship is founded on long history of hate and vengeance. This reality won't take the umbrella an inch towards progress. In politics hate and vengeance are the recipe for disaster. On the other hand, engagement, networking, making deals, building trust, and making alliance are the pillars of winning and solution finding.

The second fundamental problem of EDA is the politics. As I mentioned previously, EDA's politics is divided into three groupings: secular, ethnic, and religion. Any politics that involves religion is imposing someone's doctrine onto others. Let alone in a country like Eritrea with multiple religions, it is very hard to implement religious politics in a country with one faith fellowship. EDA's main issue is tedamun's political objective. Tedamun is an alliance of four Islamic organizations where two of them openly campaign for implementation of shariya in Eritrea. How can one imagine any progress without any common ground?

The question is not about whether EDA is a partner or foe; it is whether the umbrella is true or deceptive. In politics there is a saying, "the enemy of your enemy is your friend". Therefore, EDA cannot be a foe but it is not a true partner either. It is impossible for EDA to be a partner with its current course. A partnership is not about divisions, and negative campaigns but it is about collaboration and solution finding. For the Eritrean people the umbrella was a refuge of hope but EDA didn't give that hope life of support.

For the reasons above, the umbrella is not a true umbrella but a deceptive one. The umbrella for some organizations is simply a safety shell. For that reason organizations like EPDP who are the true voice of the Eritrean plight are simply giving life support to chameleons. Umbrella is a concept of bringing common interest together. Democratic forces cannot forge into an umbrella with hate mongers, forces that insight divisions, and with forces that openly claim jihad. The Eritrean people deserve to know what is waiting for them. At this junction a clear strategy is needed. A non-visionary journey creates more confusion and it is a non-winning formula. EPDP need to find a true partner that is willing to travel the same journey.

Since inception EDA has been circling in the same course. They have been doing the same thing again and again and expecting results. There are no metrics to measure this type of course. There are no key performance indicators to follow. EDA is simply a ship that is travelling without a compass. It is time to have a clear vision and course. Don't you think it is time?

The Eritrean People Deserve Leadership Not Power Mongers!