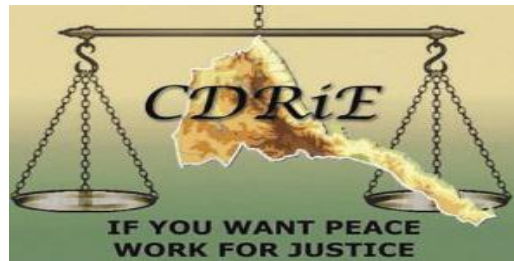


Editorial

ARTICLES - ENGLISH



The New Ethiopian War Rhetoric

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The recent history of the Horn of Africa region has been marked by incessant violent conflicts and recurrent famines. Although there is a tendency to attribute the recurrent famine to drought, famine is a result of political failure rather than adverse weather conditions. The principle that 'democracies neither fight against each other nor suffer from famine' is no longer subject to controversy. At the heart of the problems of war and the abject poverty prevailing in the region lies tyrannical rule.

The endless intra-and-inter-state wars have on the hand, weakened the ability of the populations to resist, cope with or if afflicted to recover from the effects of man-made and natural disasters and on the other, squandered huge resources with very high opportunity costs. Investment in arms rather than in the development of economic, social and physical infrastructures has been the priority of the governments in the region. This should not be allowed to continue.

When the thirty years' war of independence came to an end and the tyrannical rule of the Derg suffered a humiliating defeat both in Eritrea and Ethiopia nearly two decades ago, a great sense of optimism was ushered in and it was consequently hoped that the citizens of the two countries would live in peace with themselves and their neighbours.

In the first few years after the fundamental political changes that took place in the two countries, things seemed to move in the right direction and most people thought that the anti-politics of divisiveness, intra-state and inter-state violent conflicts that previously resulted in the wanton destruction of human, financial

and infrastructural resources were forever relegated to the dustbin of history.

As history is rarely made to order, the Eritrean and the Ethiopian peoples and their neighbours' dreams for peaceful coexistence, political stability, prosperity and democratic rule were shattered when violent conflict broke out between the Eritrean and the Ethiopian governments, under the pretext of a border dispute. The destructive war which lasted for two years came to an end after relentless efforts were exerted by the international community. However, whilst the underlying causes of the war still remain both unexplained and unresolved, the huge human, economic and political costs of the war are still having detrimental effects on the two countries.

In spite of the powerful sense of optimism the Algiers Peace Agreement engendered among the peace-loving peoples of the two countries, the state of no-peace-no-war prevailing between the two countries has not only prevented normalisation of relations between the two governments, but the risk of yet another destructive war has not been removed. This state of no-peace-no-war has provided the two governments with the opportunity to use as a pretext to violate the rights of their citizens and to hold democracy at bay.

In Eritrea, the economy which performed impressively during first years of the post-independence period is for a variety of reasons on the verge of collapse. The reasons for this are many but undoubtedly the threat of yet another war against its more populous neighbour has given the government an alibi to hold democracy at bay and to govern its citizens with impunity. The political process has stalled. In short, nearly two decades after independence and a decade since the Peace Agreement with the Ethiopian government, the country still remains under the grip of self-appointed rulers accountable only to themselves. This nefarious policy is pursued under the pretext of national security and external threat to sovereignty.

On the surface, in contrast to Eritrea, Ethiopia seems to be less affected by the state of no-war-no peace. The reasons for this are

varied but include advantages, such as bigger geographical size, resources, and almost unlimited international backing in spite of Ethiopia's flagrant intransigence reflected, inter alia, in its adamant refusal to comply with the principles of international law with no consequence. Ironically, lack of political will and resolve on the part of the international community which was supposed to be the guarantor of the Algiers Peace Agreement has been one of the major contributors to instability and the Ethiopian government's cavalier attitude and unbound intransigence. If one is to take recent threats of war seriously and one should, the fragile balance that has been prevailing under the state of no-peace-no-war is about to change for the worse. This should be opposed uncompromisingly by every peace-loving person not only in the two countries but far beyond.

Recently, Ethiopia has been embarking on war rhetoric. This began with PMMZ's speech to the Ethiopian Parliament followed by series of interviews and press statements by high level government officials. The war rhetoric is on the rise in a manner that has been unprecedented since the signing of the Algiers Peace Agreement in December 2000. PMMZ who in the past told his government, the Ethiopian people and the world that his government would never again go to war against Eritrea, has now declared to the world that his government has changed its policy towards Eritrea and will consequently actively seek to effect regime change in the country by every means possible which implies unequivocally a recourse to force to overthrow the government in Eritrea. His alleged justification for this bizarre new and blatantly beyond the pale policy is said to be dictated by the 'ambiguous' concept of 'national security.' However, it is an open secret by now that most governments hide behind the slogan of 'national interest' and 'national security' to legitimise their draconian and illegal actions without further explanation. The Horn of Africa has suffered enough from such fraudulent rhetoric and it is high time that citizens of the region say 'enough is enough' and 'no more bloodshed.'

When asked to explain his new stance, PMMZ gave a number of reasons, such as the Eritrean government's arming of the Ethiopian

opposition, Eritrea's alleged involvement in Somalia and its alleged threat against Djibouti in spite of the recent rapprochement between the two countries. Although the veracity of some of these allegations may be contentious, even if all were true, they do not justify declaration of yet another destructive war whose consequences may dwarf the one witnessed in the last two-year war.

Assuming the Ethiopian Prime Minister's allegations are true, in what way are they different from what Ethiopia is doing? Isn't the Ethiopian government arming and financing some Eritrean opposition forces allied to it? Didn't Ethiopia invade Somalia? Is it not his government's consistent refusal to allow the demarcation of the mutual border in accordance with the decision of the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission reached at The Hague that is the major contributor to the continuous tension between the countries? Whilst it is public knowledge that the two governments are engaged in mutually hostile policies, at the heart of this policy of mutual intervention in each other's internal affairs is the result of lack of progress in the process of peace making. However, there is nothing that justifies Ethiopia's threat of yet another violent war. The supreme question of regime change in Eritrea is the sole prerogative of the Eritrean people and no one else.

The two sisterly countries have nothing to gain but everything to lose by waging war against each other. The citizens of the two countries should instead build on their common resources and heritage—history, culture, geographical propinquity, interconnected livelihood systems and comparative advantages to defeat their enemies—poverty, political instability and tyranny. Herein lies their future. They should once and for all leave behind their troubled past and move on forward in the rapidly globalising world. They should aim to be part of the forces of change and transformation rather than being agents of destruction, stagnation and regression.

We hope that what we are witnessing is just rhetoric and not a reflection of the Ethiopian government's decision to go to war against Eritrea. No matter what the justifications are, war is not a

solution. Waging war against Eritrea by an external power with the aim of effecting regime change is absolutely unacceptable to Eritreans and the very notion is anathema to the fundamental principles of international law and the United Nations Charter. Undoubtedly, the Ethiopian people who will bear the cost will also find this unacceptable.

We call upon the international community to do whatever it takes to avert the threat of war, and guarantee the security and safety of the peoples of the region.