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ERITREA THEN AND NOW

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Press and Information Department
Addis Ababa

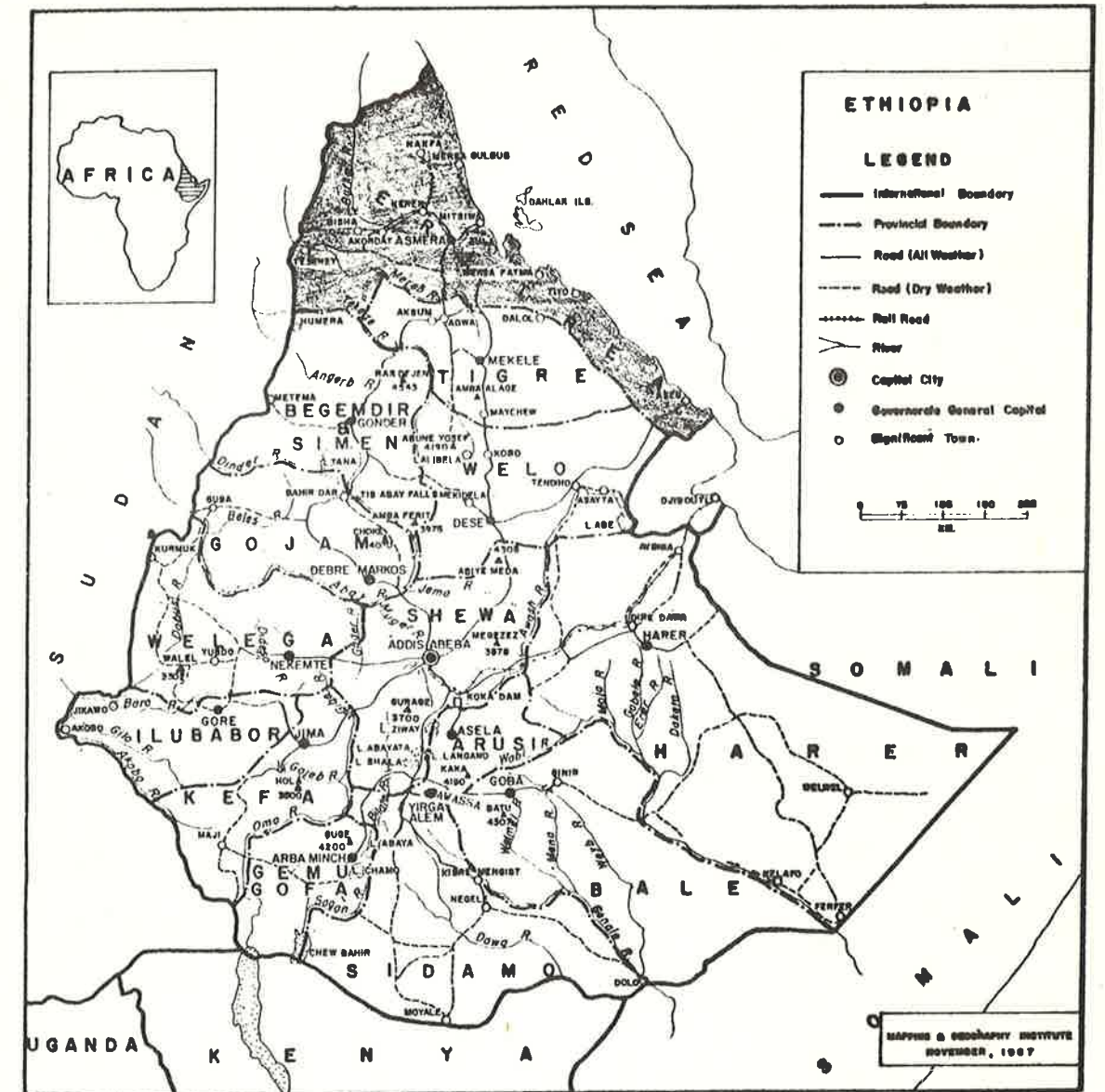


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May 1976

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COMMITTEE TO DEFEND THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION
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MAP 1. Location

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PART — I
PURPOSE OF THE PAPER
AND
THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

ERITREA THEN AND NOW

PART — 1

1. Purpose of the Paper

- 1.1 For over thirteen years a foreign inspired secessionist attempt has challenged the historic unity of the people of Ethiopia and the integrity of their land. Despite the sectarian beginning of this movement, for the greater part of this period, this disparate movement has succeeded to give the appearance that it is seeking secession in order to liberate Eritreans from the clutches of feudalism.

The last two years saw the demise of feudalism from the face of Ethiopia and the implementation of socialist policies. Instead of turning its face inwards and joining hands with all progressive and nationalist forces in building a new Ethiopia, on the basis of full participation and equality of all its constituent parts, this movement, has, on the contrary, increasingly turned its face towards the outside for inspiration and support, and has escalated the level of violence in Eritrea, in the belief that it could attain the objective that those outside forces have set for it before the Ethiopian people will have consolidated their revolutionary gains.

More than ever, the face and the designs of this movement as well as the role assigned to it by outside forces, have become very clear. The Ethiopian people have for long recognized it and they will have now to understand it for what it is.

- 1.2 It was clear from the beginning that in liberating the Ethiopian people from an oppressive feudal rule, which had been their lot for many years, the Ethiopian Revolution has adequately responded to the Eritrean problem as well. Moreover, on several occasions, in its declarations and actions, the Administrative Mi-

lilitary Council and its Provisional Government have particularly clarified Ethiopia's policies regarding the Eritrean problem.

With the further consolidation of the Ethiopian Revolution, the time has come to re-state the policies of the Provisional Military Government, in greater detail to impart precision to some of them, and to open new avenues. This has been found necessary in order to acquaint all Ethiopians, their Eritrean compatriots in particular, with the opportunities that the revolution has opened for the solution to the Eritrean problem, to leave in no doubt those outside forces that the Ethiopian people are determined to preserve their historic unity and the gains of their revolution.

- 1.3 With this in view, this paper sets out the policies of the Provisional Military Government, with particular reference to Eritrea, which it has started to implement.

To the extent that the Eritrean problem may be a genuine expression for the assertion of cultural identity, for the possibility of self-administration and equality of treatment for all Eritreans within the framework of national unity, the Provisional Military Government believes that the policies it is now implementing would provide all the elements for a just and durable solution.

But those, who, with the instigation of outside forces, are bent on pursuing the illusory objective of secessionism will find no comfort in these policies. By restoring and institutionalizing the basic rights of the Ethiopian people, their Eritrean countrymen included, this policy statement will unmask the secessionist elements for what they are: a group of dissidents who want to sell the interests of the Eritrean people to the highest bidder while making much noise about their rights.

2. The Setting and the Problem

- 2.4 With the announcement of the Programme for the National Democratic Revolution on 24 April 1976, the profound economic and social changes that have been taking place in Ethiopia in the last two years have assumed a definite orientation. This is the path of socialism.

Whatever the difficulties, the Ethiopian people are determined to persevere on this historical course of development until they have completed the construction of a socialist society wherein the exploitation of man by man will have been eliminated and production will be geared to satisfy the needs of the people as a whole rather than the capricious desires of the few.

- 2.5 Within a brief span of two years the Ethiopian people have taken decisive and irreversible steps on the road to socialism.

Agricultural land, which has been the most important factor of production as well as the pillar of the feudal structure, has been nationalized and the people who work on the land have become direct beneficiaries of their labour.

The system of urban landlordism, which allowed one person to profit from the misery of another, has been abolished, ownership of urban dwellings has been limited to one unit per family. All other dwelling units, buildings and urban lands other than those required for the operation of non-nationalized commercial and industrial enterprises, have been brought under public ownership.

Commercial and industrial enterprises with a significant impact on the economy, or which otherwise affect the basic needs of the people have been nationalized.

Production, exchange and distribution are being organized along socialist principles and on the basis of co-operative endeavours.

The programme for the National Democratic Revolution is now being implemented with the view to enabling the people to organize themselves politically and socially.

- 2.6 Fully aware of the difficulties that lie ahead, the Ethiopian people are looking forward with confidence to the opportunities awaiting them in the struggle to build a socialist society, while recognizing, at the same time, the challenge posed to their historic unity and the integrity of their land and to the further consolidation of their revolution by some elements, who, aided and abetted by outside forces, purport to speak and act for the people of Eritrea.

2.7 It behooves the Ethiopian people as a whole to analyse and address this problem. Only with a correct analysis of the historical origin and the evolution of this problem, as well as with an understanding of the changing motives of the forces that support and actively assist this attempt, could our people find a solution which is at once just and durable and also one that would be consistent with their interest and history.

2.8 In the belief that correctly identifying and analyzing the problem will determine the solution, this paper first traces the history of the Eritrean problem and then sets-out the policies of the Provisional Military Government.

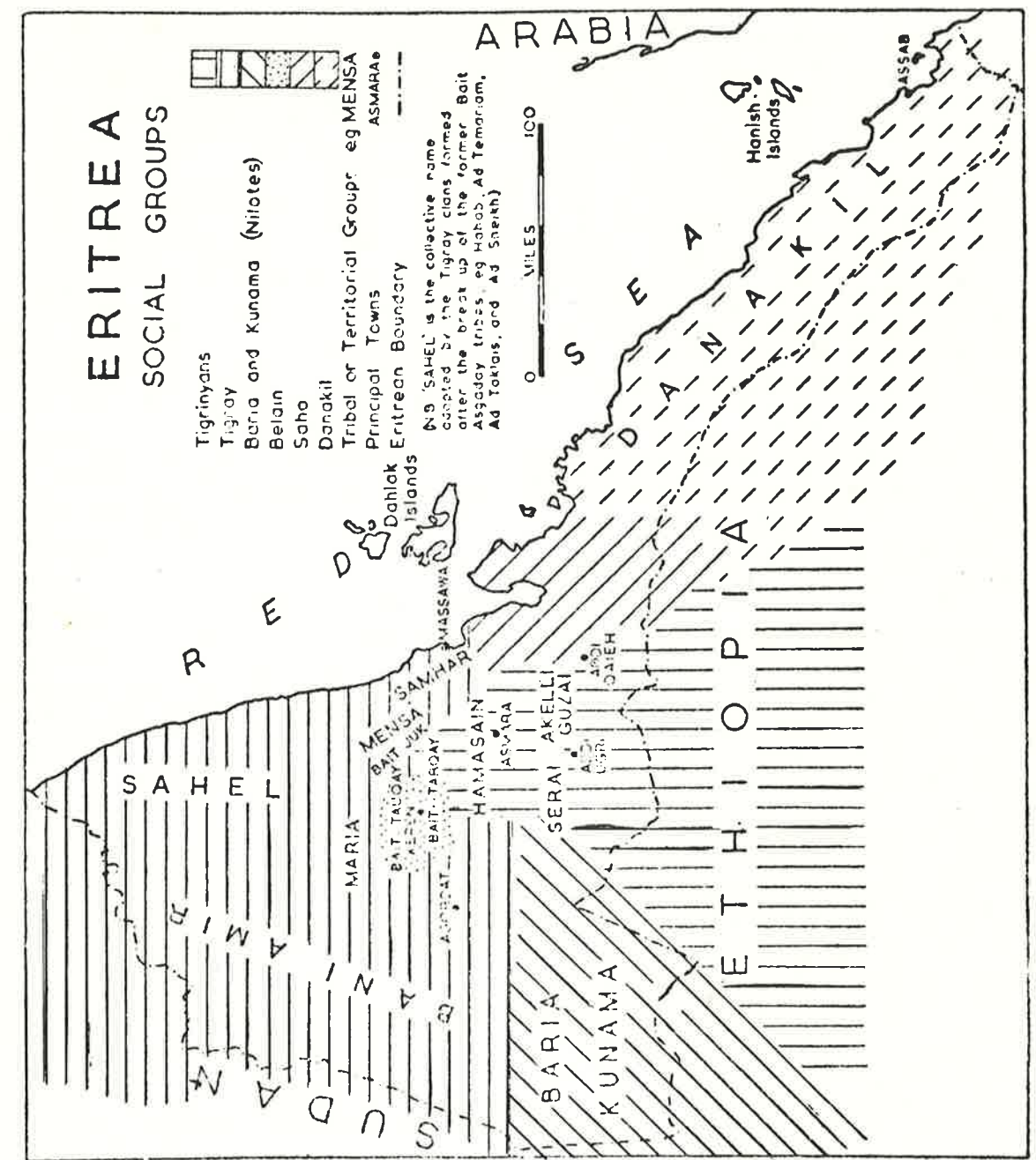
Otherwise the statement follows the pattern indicated here-under:

- It identifies what the problem is not.
- It asks how the Eritrean problem began.
- Why and how it has been kept alive for so long.
- The stage the secessionist attempt finds itself in now.
- The Provisional Military Government's policy for a solution.

3. WHAT THE ERITREAN QUESTION IS NOT

3.9 First and foremost the secessionist effort is not a liberation movement which aims to secure independence for a people that finds itself under alien domination. One need not reply to an assertion on the contrary, lest doing so should dignify it. Even those who have a cursory knowledge of the history of Ethiopia would know that the Ethiopian people, of which the people inhabiting the northern part of the country form an integral part, have had one history, sharing the same fate with the ebb and rise in the country's fortunes. The Ethiopian people have always lived in independence and even when the northern part of their country came under alien rule, colonialism never succeeded to sever all the organic links between this area and the rest.

3.10 Secondly, the secessionist effort does not represent the aspiration of a group of people belonging to one nationality, whose legitimate yearning for cultural and political expression has been stifled by another dominating national group. The fact of the



MAP 2. Social Groups (after G.K.N. Trevaskis)

matter is that Ethiopia is a poly-ethnic country, whose people show a rich profusion of cultural diversity but yet enjoying a common cultural heritage. In microcosm, Eritrea presents the same cultural, linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity that any one area of comparable size in most parts of Ethiopia would Show.*

3.11 Thirdly, whatever political validity some elements in the secessionist movement might have had at one time, even these cannot now with any justification believe to establish a progressive foothold in one part of Ethiopia in order to galvanize the rest into a revolution. For over two years the country has been in a state of continuous change which has culminated in the total restructuring of the Ethiopian society. Certainly for any one who professes commitment to revolutionise Ethiopia there cannot be a more opportune time than the present.

3.12 The question that may appropriately be asked therefore is this: If the secessionist movement is not one of the above, what is it then?

The answer, of course, is that by giving false pretences, it is many things to different interested parties.

To some it presents itself as a sectarian movement justifying its claims to their support on narrow religious grounds. To others, it puts on the mantle of Arab nationalism. When it finds it politic in certain quarters, it speaks the language of progressivism and revolution. But when it suits its own selfish purposes, it is ready to consort with imperialists and reactionaries.

The secessionist movement comprises of disparate political elements, professing different and contradictory strands of sectarian and political views. For thirteen years now this movement has been sustained by political and military support from well-known sources, in the Arab world. However forcefully it may be denied, to the extent it is supported by these outside forces, it is a creature of theirs and an instrument of their design. The simple truism applies here: "He who pays the piper calls the tune".

It is therefore necessary to proceed to the consequential question: Why has a situation, limited as it is, developed in the

* See maps 2 and 3.

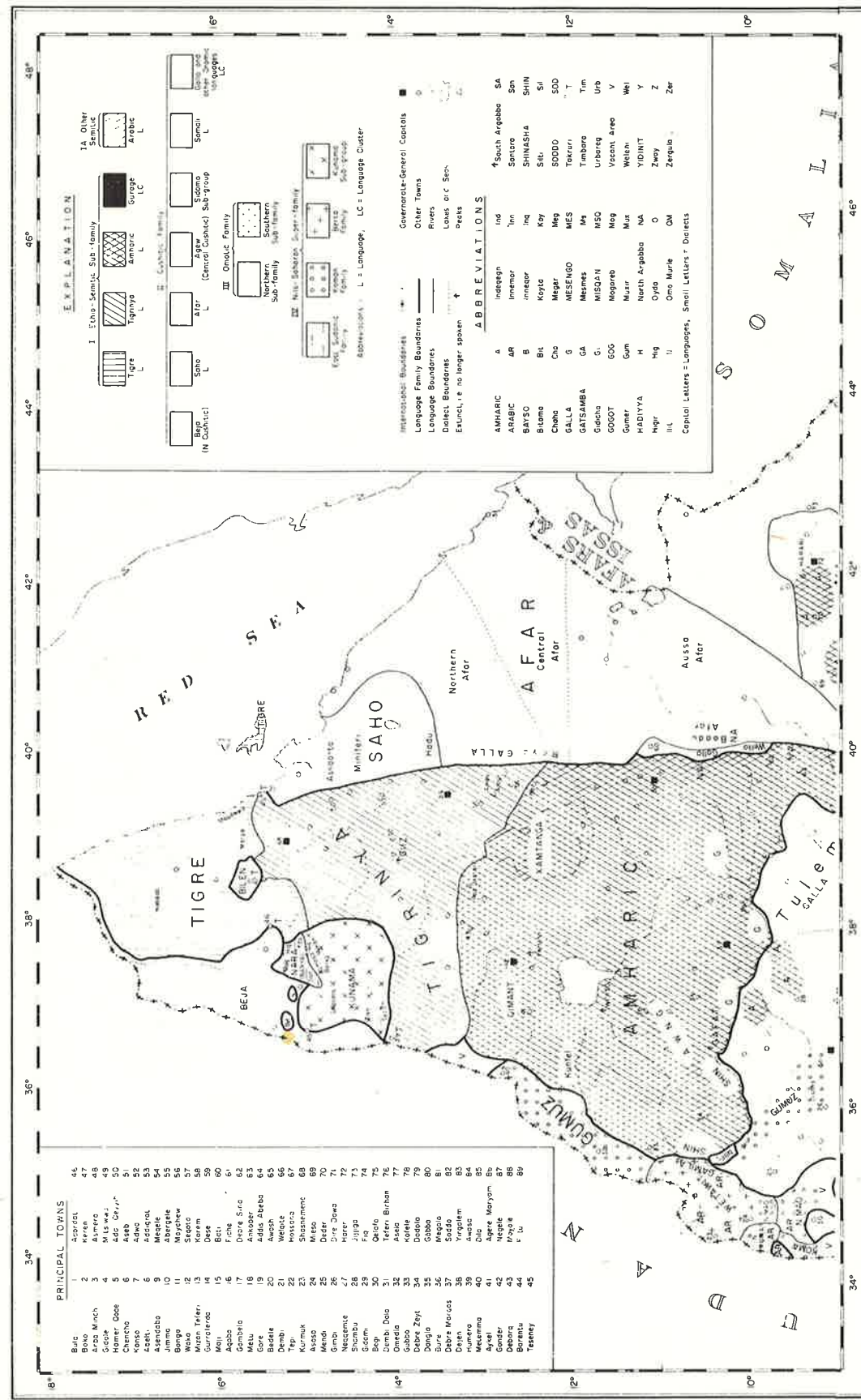
northern part of Ethiopia, which, unlike any-thing seen in other parts of Ethiopia, has not only been willing to let itself be exploited by outside forces but has, in fact, invited open intervention? The explanation is simple. It is to be found in the colonial history of this northern part of Ethiopia.

4. The Historical Background

4.13 Ever since Ethiopia emerged from the distant horizon of time as a body-politic, its northern part, including the area now called Eritrea, has been at the beginning and at the center of its development. Ethiopia has never existed without this northern part. Nor has this part ever been identified separately from Ethiopia. What to-day after so many years of continuous cultural and historical interaction we have come to know as Ethiopia, in fact, began there. When, to-day, we can properly speak of Ethiopia as one cultural area, despite its rich diversity, it is right to refer to Eritrea as the cradle of this common culture and civilization.

From at least the 5th Century B.C. until the 8th Century A.D., when the name Ethiopia was identified with Axumite civilisation, this northern part of Ethiopia, including Eritrea, was in fact the hub of that civilization. It was during the Axumite period and in this part of the country that Ethiopia's ancient script, Geez, was developed to such a great extent to serve Ethiopians as a vehicle for the advancement and enrichment of their language, literature and culture. Some of the oldest churches, monasteries, monuments, obelisks and steles still standing in the area serve as living testimonies to the contribution of this northern area to the building of a common fund of Ethiopian culture and civilization.

In the first centuries of the Christian era, the Axumite state was a prosperous, outward-looking polity with Adulis on the Red Sea coast as its principal sea-port. For much of this period, this northern area of Ethiopia was known as the maritime regions, and their governor under the Ethiopian crown had the title of "Baher-Negash" — literally meaning, the governor of the



MAP 3. Northern Ethiopia: Distribution of Mother-Tongues (after M.L. Bender)

Drawn by G. deSilva

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sea. It was Italy which gave the name Eritrea to part of the area when it occupied most of it between 1885 and 1890.

- 4.14 With the establishment of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th Century, and its rapid and extensive expansion in the following centuries to the Middle East, North Africa and to some parts of southern Europe, it was inevitable that sooner or later it would make an appearance in the northern part of Ethiopia. Unlike the early contacts of Islam with other peoples in its northerly expansion, its first contacts with Ethiopia were felicitous. Having given refuge and succour to the early followers of the Prophet Mohamed, when they faced persecution in their land, Ethiopia was held in special esteem by the early followers of Islam. Even the Prophet was moved to say to his followers: "Leave the Ethiopians in peace, because they are generous and hospitable."

The subsequent appearance of Moslem communities, on the Red Sea Coast of northern Ethiopia beginning from the 10th Century on was the result of peaceful contacts between the peoples of Ethiopia and the Arabian Peninsula. These early Moslem communities consisted mostly of merchants who carried on trade between the two lands. The islamization of the western region of Eritrea was a later phenomenon, mostly of the 10th Century, but again it also resulted from a process of relatively peaceful interaction.

- 4.15 After overcoming fierce resistance and a series of initial reverses, the Italians occupied by 1890* a great part of what is now called Eritrea. However, their ambition was not merely confined to this region. Eritrea was simply a springboard for further incursion into the Ethiopian heartland. Their brazen advance into the interior was joined at the famous battle of Adwa by Emperor Menelik II who in 1896 administered a crushing blow

*The Turks had established themselves at Massawa and Arkiko in 1557. With the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, control of Massawa and Arkiko was handed over to the Na'ib of Arkiko. In 1872 the Khedive of Egypt took control of Massawa and established garrisons in the Western Lowlands. After the defeat of the Khedive's forces at Gundet (1875) and at Gura (1876), and the rise of the Mahadists in the Sudan, the Khedive's position as a colonizer was weakened, and was eventually replaced by the Italians.

to their well equipped and well supplied army. But even Menelik, successful as he was in this encounter, could not exploit to the full his victory and evict the Italians from all Ethiopian lands they had by then occupied. As the records of the time show, the fire power of the invading Italian Army had exacted heavy toll on his army and a sudden outbreak of dysentery had also thinned its ranks. It was also a time of great famine in this area and Menelik's army could not be supplied from the region. From the West, the threat posed earlier by the Mahadists in the Sudan was making a resurgence.

Never abandoning hope to eventually liberate that part of the country which the Italians still held, but also recognizing the magnitude of the problem that confronted him, Menelik, the great tactician that he was, chose to exchange time for opportunity. However, the opportunity he looked for never came up in his life time, for soon after the battle of Adwa, Ethiopia was not only confronted with the threat of further Italian invasion but from the directions of Tajura and the Gulf of Aden other threats to its independence had arisen.

By the turn of the century what had remained of Ethiopia was seriously contested by the most powerful imperialist powers of the time. In order to avoid conflict in their rivalry over Ethiopia, these imperialist powers, in the spirit of the Berlin Conference of 1885, concluded in 1906 a pact, known as the tripartite agreement, by which, without the knowledge, let alone the consent of Ethiopia, they agreed among themselves to divide Ethiopia into spheres of influence over which each power would be allowed to pursue its economic and political interest with the ultimate objective of its colonisation without any challenge from the others.

So this land of Ethiopia, which the Italians called Eritrea, after the old Roman name for the Red Sea — **Mare Erythrium** — remained under Italian occupation until 1941. However, Italian rule in Eritrea did not end without another vain attempt to colonise the whole of Ethiopia.

- 4.16 Before the advent of Italian colonialism, Eritrea, even within the then Ethiopian political structure, did not constitute

a single unit. As a matter of fact, the area comprised a number of regions and principalities, each administered by an appointed official or a hereditary chieftain, who paid allegiance to the Ethiopian Crown. It was the Italians who brought under one colonial administration the various regions and ethnic groups. Eritrea, therefore, is an artificial creation of colonialism which, as a unit has only a history of barely sixty years, as compared to the timeless history of the Ethiopian polity as a whole.

- 4.17 Using Eritrea and its Somaliland possession as a springboard, powerful Italian Fascist armies, armed to the teeth with the most up-to date weapons which the technology of the time could produce, invaded Ethiopia in 1935. Resorting to a massive application of the then new technique of indiscriminate aerial bombing of civilian populations, and poison gas warfare despite its prohibition by solemn international conventions, the Italians occupied for five years the major cities of Ethiopia. But even in those dark days when Ethiopia was abandoned by the rest of the world, its people heroically resisted, never allowing the Italian fascists any respite.

Eritreans in large numbers fought side by side with the rest of their fellow countrymen, because more than anyone else they knew that if the rest of their homeland were to be successfully colonised, any prospect for the liberation of their region would also be lost. Some of the glorious pages of the history of the resistance of the Ethiopian people to Fascist occupation of their land are written by Eritreans, who, as soon as fighting broke out, fled Eritrea and joined Ethiopian forces.

Can any Ethiopian forget Abraha Deboch and Moges Asgedom, Eritrean sons of Ethiopia, who, as members of the resistance movement, heroically launched an attack on the very symbol of Italian colonialism in Ethiopia, the Viceroy Graziani?

Who can forget Zerai Deres, who, unable to bear any more the humiliation and the ridicule the Italians were putting to his people in a public ceremony in Rome by desecrating the Ethiopian national symbol, a statue of the Ethiopian Lion brought from Addis Ababa, attacked single handedly the assembled

Fascist officials. Rather than admit that he was moved to act as he did by nationalism and pride the Italians later declared him to be insane.

Italian rule over Eritrea came to an end in 1941 when the Allies' war effort was first directed at dislodging the Italians from their East African possessions. Ethiopian patriotic forces, which included Eritreans among their number, played a significant part in the liberation of their country. With the defeat of the Italians in Ethiopia in 1941, Eritrea came under the administration of Great Britain and by the peace treaty of 1946 Italy renounced her Empire. In the wake of the establishment of another alien administration in Eritrea, the Unionist Party of Eritrea began its political activities with the aim of the unconditional reunion of the whole of Eritrea with the motherland. This party was the oldest and largest single political party representing the majority of the Eritrean population. Other parties such as the Moslem League and the pro-Italy Party, representing views of small groups of people working at cross-purposes, were to emerge later with the entry of extraneous elements on the political scene.

4.18 The question of the future of Eritrea was first considered by France, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union in successive conferences they held to discuss the disposal of the former Italian colonies. These Four Powers sent a Commission of Investigation to Eritrea to collect information and ascertain the wishes of the inhabitants of the territory. While the commission could not agree on any solution as to the future of Eritrea, its report revealed the incontrovertible fact that the Unionist Party of Eritrea, which demanded the unconditional reunion of Eritrea with Ethiopia, enjoyed the broadest support of all sections of the Eritrean people.

4.19 Ethiopia submitted a number of Memoranda to the Four Powers Conference to prove the case for reunion. The Ethiopian thesis was based on the following broad considerations:

- the overriding need to comply with the wishes of the majority of the people of Eritrea to unite with Ethiopia.

- the union of Ethiopia and Eritrea constitutes a reintegration of historical destiny.
- the fact that the vast majority of the populations of Ethiopia and Eritrea are of one ethnic affiliation speaking either identical or similar languages and having the same social customs and religious patterns.
- the complementary nature of their economies and their geographic unity.
- the recognition of the need for an outlet to the sea for Ethiopia that colonialism has deprived her.
- the fact that Eritrea has been used by colonial powers as a base of aggression against Ethiopia.

4.20 Having failed to reach agreement on the disposition of Eritrea, the Council of the Foreign Ministers of the Four Powers, pursuant to the relevant sections of the Treaty of Peace with Italy, on 15 September, 1947, jointly referred the question to the United Nations General Assembly. Accordingly, the question of the disposal of Eritrea was considered by the third regular session of the General Assembly. The recommendation of the First Committee to that General Assembly provided, *inter alia*, "that Eritrea, except for the Western Province, be incorporated into Ethiopia" was subsequently rejected by the General Assembly.

4.21 In the course of the fourth session, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 289 (IV) which, in its section (c) established the United Nations Commission for Eritrea. By its terms of reference the Commission was requested 'to ascertain more fully the wishes and the best means of promoting the welfare of the inhabitants of Eritrea...', and to communicate its report and proposal or proposals to the Secretary-General not later than 15 June, 1950.

Having thoroughly studied all aspects of the Eritrean problem, including the wishes of the Eritrean people, the rights and claims of Ethiopia, the interests of peace and security in the Horn of Africa, the Commission reached the conclusion "that an overall majority of the Eritrean population favour reunion with

Ethiopia." Accordingly, the Commission transmitted its detailed report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations (General Assembly, Official Records: Fifth Session, Supplement No. 1285).

After a thorough consideration of the reports of the United Nations Commission for Eritrea, the General Assembly by Resolution 390 (V) of 2 December, 1950, recommended that Eritrea be federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian Crown. It also recommended broad guidelines of principle to constitute the mandate of the United Nations Commissioner in Eritrea to prepare a draft constitution to be submitted to the Eritrean Assembly. After all the Provisions of Resolution 390 (V) have been implemented, including the proclamation of the federation on 11 September, 1952, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 617 (VII) of 17 December, 1952 which approved the Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia.

- 4.22 The federal arrangement which prescribed for Eritrea to be once more associated with Ethiopia was at best a compromise solution. Neither the justice of Ethiopia's cause nor the perseverance and consistence of her plea could overcome the forces which were opposed to outright reunion and reintegration. In view of the alignment of forces of the times, war-exhausted and resourceless Ethiopia had no other option but settle for the least which could then be achieved.
- 4.23 Yet in another sense the Eritrean question demonstrates how colonial issues were dealt with in the United Nations some twenty years ago. Despite the fact that Eritrea was a classical colonial case, a territory forcefully severed by colonialism from its motherland, there was no disposition in the United Nations in those days to secure its decolonisation on the basis of the wishes of the majority of the people. Those were, of course, the days when Africa was only represented by Ethiopia, Liberia and Egypt, and the representation of the Asian continent consisted of only few states. Latin America, too, had not yet asserted an independent course, which identified it with the upsurge of independence that was to engulf Africa and Asia in the latter part of the decade. Such cries as "One man one vote" and "Independence on the basis of majority rule" — political slogans that were to propel most of Africa and Asia to independence — were cynically laughed out of any serious consideration.

When the decolonisation of Eritrea came before the United Nations it was, therefore, no surprise that the wishes of the overwhelming majority of its people, that the United Nations itself ascertained to its satisfaction, should have been ignored. Instead a compromise solution was mainly designed to guarantee the rights of small, factious, unpatriotic, and sectarian elements, some of which even advocated the return of Italy. This solution was a federal arrangement that frustrated the ardent desire of the Eritrean people to re-establish their historical unity with Ethiopia. In addition to being unjust, this federal arrangement placed a number of serious prescriptions on the rights of the Eritrean people to take the kind of political and economic measures best suited for their needs. For example, the U.N. General Assembly recommendation on which the Federal Act was based, if not *ex verbis*, in spirit and general purport, provided that foreign property, i.e. mostly the property of the erstwhile colonizers and settlers should be accorded special treatment. But, more explicitly, the same U.N. recommendation provided that the Eritrean people could not, even by democratic means, effect any significant changes regarding their internal administration. The framework for political and economic institutions prescribed under the Federal Act was thus extremely cumbersome and therefore unworkable.

- 4.24 The Federation was tried for about ten years but proved to be extremely wanting in many important aspects. For one thing, the system provided a complicated, cumbersome governmental machinery, which required a degree of administrative sophistication beyond the capability of any developing country with a serious shortage of skilled man-power. Secondly, the whole system was beyond the comprehension of the average Eritrean who thought federation meant unity, but to his surprise found out various impediments.

The subsequent reunion and reintegration of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1962 was, therefore, the definitive removal of a system which was cumbersome and did not satisfy the aspirations of the people but was first imposed, on the Eritrean people, in flagrant violation of their wishes, and only in deference to the views of minority groups.

What should be emphasized in this connection is the fact that it was the representatives of the Eritrean people voting un-

animously who gave fulfilment to this historic aspiration to reunite with the motherland from which they were separated by force 60 years before. By this act, the Eritrean people completed their decolonisation and removed whatever political restrictions that had been imposed on them.

In explaining this act of fulfillment, one should note the reverse logic applied by some people inimical to the interest of Ethiopia. They suggest that the Eritrean people did not have the right to modify the political institutions they inherited from colonialism, including the federal arrangement in which Ethiopia and the people of Eritrea acquiesced. Such suggestion cannot be considered to-day to be serious, when even at the United Nations there is now full agreement that the final act of decolonisation is in effect the complete freedom of choice to adopt whatever political and economic institutions the people wish to have. One need only refer to U.N. General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960 incorporating the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which provides for unconditional freedom of choice to colonial peoples to adopt the type of economic and political institutions best suited to meet their needs.

To give now an interpretation to the United Nations Resolution which recommended federation as establishing an immutable political arrangement, limiting in perpetuity the freedom of choice of the Eritrean people, is untenable, since it goes against the spirit of the Charter of the U.N. and the principles for which the people of the Third World have been fighting for during the last twenty-five years.

5. The Genesis of the Secessionist Movement

- 5.25 The seed of secessionism was implanted by colonialism. If Eritrea had not been severed from Ethiopia there could never have been any question of secessionism. Like the other parts of Ethiopia which did not suffer the misfortune of separation imposed by alien rule, Eritrea would have remained an integral part of the Ethiopian homeland. And whatever misfortunes Eritrea might have continued to suffer like the rest of Ethiopia, certainly a secessionist tendency, however, limited and foreign inspired it

might be, would not have been one of them. Because of this historical accident, of all Ethiopia's regions, Eritrea is the only one where alien forces could find to-day something they could use to foster the illusion of a viable separatist movement.

This seed was given every encouragement to grow by a deliberate policy the colonial power pursued in Eritrea by setting one group against another, especially Moslems and Christians. For example, in order to foster antagonism between the two confessional communities, the Italians would have churches built near mosques and vice versa. In many places Christian and Moslem communities were zoned apart from one another. Contacts between the two communities were kept at the minimum by reserving certain occupations for Moslems and others for Christians. In the Moslem communities, the Italians deliberately created the impression that they favoured them, while fostering quite the opposite illusion in the Christian communities. The truth, however, was that the Italians did not favour either. They deliberately limited the level of education that both Moslems and Christians were exposed to. No one was allowed to advance beyond the fourth grade during the Italian times.

- 5.26 Under the circumstances it was inevitable that some secessionist tendency should have manifested itself during the struggle for the decolonisation of Eritrea. Although, together, they represented a small minority of the Eritrean population, there were two elements in those days on the Eritrean political scene opposing any form of association between Eritrea and Ethiopia. There was, to begin with, a sectarian faction, which advocated outright separation and integration of some parts of Eritrea into Moslem communities outside the Eritrean border. Its adherents almost exclusively came from communities living on the Eritrean periphery and did not in any way reflect the views of the vast majority of the Moslem citizens of Eritrea. The other element, largely composed of Eritrean employees of Italians, Italian pensioners, etc., was a group which sought the re-establishment of Italian colonialism in Eritrea, known unashamedly by the name of the "Pro-Italian Party".

Apart from these two, there was yet another faction which, while pretending to seek closer economic and other ties with

Ethiopia, advocated a policy of separation from Ethiopia, even though it was clear that a separate Eritrean entity could not have become politically and economically viable and that it would have become dependent on some outside power constellation. This latter group was the one which was clearly favoured by the British administration in Eritrea.

- 5.27 Opposed to these disparate minority factions, who were deeply rooted in Eritrea's colonial past and were mostly inspired from without, was the Unionist Party. This was a liberation movement in the true sense of the word, representing a broad cross-section of the Eritrean population of all ethnic groups and religions. Its demand was simple and powerful: it was the total liberation of Eritrea and its reunification with its Ethiopian motherland from which colonialism had severed it sixty years ago. This liberation movement was supported by the great majority of the Eritrean people. All the other factions which purported to speak for one group or another could not show a following half of that aroused by the call for reunification.

Although the federal arrangement was established in deference to the wishes of these minority factions, it soon became clear that, spurred on from the outside, they continued their opposition to any form of link between Eritrea and Ethiopia. When in 1962 the Eritrean people through their elected Assembly chose to dissolve the federal arrangement, those same minority elements came out in the open with a demand for Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia. By so doing, in effect, they were continuing the struggle that they had waged against the decolonisation of Eritrea.

It may be asked what kind of people are those who oppose the total decolonisation of their homeland? Difficult as it may be for some to understand the minds of those who oppose independence, Africans and Asians who had fought for their freedom and independence in the last 25 years know full well that there were some people among their ranks, however small their numbers might have been, who did not want independence. They also remember that, because of these few and unpatriotic people, their struggle are replete with examples of acts of treachery, collaboration with the enemy and service in the army of the coloniser against their own people. Again, examples are many in African and

Asian countries of small minorities of religious and ethnic groups who, because of long years of colonialist propaganda, were afraid to look beyond the confines of their small groups and think in national terms. Among such peoples colonialism usually found recruits for its designs. Eritrea is not an exception to this general experience that all colonial territories passed through on their way to independence.

Whatever may be said to the contrary, there is no question that the founders and the core of the secessionist movement up to now remain those elements who had opposed during the struggle for decolonisation any form of association between Eritrea and Ethiopia.

6. The Secessionist Movement Now

- 6.28 It is a well known phenomenon that when any political movement begins, especially one that has a prospect of assistance from the outside, sooner or later it would attract other elements who may not sympathise with its objectives but might feel that they can use it for their own purposes. More often than not, however, the new elements end up by being used themselves by the originators of the movement, specially when the movement's purse-strings are in the hands of outside forces.

True to form, the early secessionists found new recruits from among disappointed politicians and opportunists who had built up narrow vested interests during the time of the federation.

In the late sixties the secessionist movement received yet another infusion of new recruits. This consisted mostly of idealistic young people who saw the unjust conditions, poverty and mal-administration that the Ethiopian people lived under and felt that nothing short of revolutionary change could improve the lot of their people. Some among such idealistic youth joined the ranks of the secessionists with the mistaken belief that anything that would weaken the hold of the old regime in the country should be encouraged. They also felt that some political base for revolutionary action should be found and they thought that they had such a base in the secessionist movement.

6.29 While one could understand and even admire the idealism of some of the young people who chose the revolutionary path of action, it was clear from the outset that their idealism was misplaced and that for that reason it would be misused by those forces, especially the forces from without, who had a clear idea of what they wanted. To begin with, it was a mistake for these young people to have isolated the Eritrean situation from the one that was prevailing in the rest of Ethiopia, for the injustices and the mal-administration of the old regime had affected equally all parts of the country. Certainly it was not realistic to save one part of Ethiopia from the misrule of that regime by working for its separation from the rest of the country. It was the height of irresponsibility to think only of one constituent part of Ethiopia and abandon one's obligation to the rest. The struggle to change the political and economic conditions of Eritrea should have been part and parcel of the common struggle of the Ethiopian people. The only durable salvation for what was perceived as Eritrea's misfortune was the common struggle of all Ethiopians.

Especially those who thought that they could establish a political base for revolutionary action within a reactionary secessionist movement could not have committed a greater error. The secessionist movement, as has been explained, began as an amalgam of the waste product of colonialism. And external forces who wanted to use it manipulated it for their own purposes. For any serious revolutionary with a commitment to change the economic and social conditions of his own people to ally himself with remnants of colonialism and reactionary forces, however temporary or tactical expedient he may consider such an alliance, shows either a total lack of commitment or inability to understand the revolutionary process.

The present state of confusion that one notices among the ranks of the secessionists in their inability to speak in one voice and act on the basis of one programme can be attributed to this marriage of convenience of the various political tendencies. Whatever nomenclature that the secessionist movement may use, it is clear that the sources of its finance are certain Arab countries in the Middle East. If there are some revolutionaries left in the ranks of the secessionists they have become prisoners of those who finance their activities. They cannot consort with imperia-

lists and reactionaries and hope at the same time, to preserve whatever revolutionary goals they might have had.

Many among the new recruits to the secessionist movement are now abandoning it. Especially the true revolutionaries have come to realise that the secessionist efforts which are now increasingly financed by reactionary forces in the Middle East could not provide a base for revolutionary action. Even if that were possible, there is no need today for such a base when revolutionary forces are effecting changes in the whole of Ethiopia. Several scores of cadres from the secessionist movement have now returned to Ethiopia and have offered to contribute to the building of a new socialist Ethiopia. Most of these young people are now engaged in revolutionary tasks in many parts of the country. Others are awaiting an opportunity to return to their homeland.

The Motive of Outside Support to the Secessionists

7.30 It is pertinent to ask why outsiders have supported the secession of Eritrea.

As has been pointed out already, the movement being sectarian at its birth in its inspiration and objective, it was able to attract the support of certain Arab countries. Although most of these supporters were notorious for their policies of narrow-minded religious fanaticism and intolerance at home, they did not find it inconsistent to support a sectarian movement in another country which has had a tradition of peaceful religious co-existence. In the name of supporting co-religionists against imagined persecution they were in effect pursuing an old policy of religious expansionism.

7.31 The support the secessionist movement in Eritrea received on purely sectarian appeal was soon replaced by a politically motivated objective, and by the mid 1960s, the movement enjoyed wider support from certain Arab countries on political grounds. The old regime in Ethiopia was seen by the Arab world in general as a close collaborator with Israel and as opposed to Arab interests. For this reason, some Arab countries felt justified in helping secessionism in Ethiopia with the avowed purpose of weakening and undermining its Government. These Arab sources

regarded their support as a legitimate weapon to be used against the former Ethiopian Government to exact from it concessions on its alleged collaboration with Israel. However, Arab support at that time for the secessionist movement was held within some bounds and was used as a bargaining leverage to be escalated in accordance with policy dictates.

7.32 When with Ethiopia's severance of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973, one would have expected the support of these Arab countries to the secessionists to cease, it was, on the contrary, escalated. Again, with the revolutionary change in Ethiopia in 1974 and the subsequent announcement by the Provisional Military Government of unequivocal policy of support for the Arab countries would see in this change an opportunity to work together with the Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia and to help it solve the problem in Eritrea. However, some Arab countries, refusing to recognize the changes that had intervened, continued their support in increasing measures.

7.33 Under the circumstances, it has been necessary to ask why certain Arab support to the secessionists has continued long after the reason for their earlier interference, justified or not, had disappeared.

There seems to be two reasons. One is that some regimes in certain Arab countries, instead of regarding the new situation in Ethiopia as an opportunity for establishing new and mutually beneficial relationships, have come to look at it as potentially inimical to them. These regimes now apparently believe that in order to scuttle the Ethiopian revolution before it consolidates itself, every opportunity should be used to weaken it. They are now using their old contacts within the secessionist ranks to introduce into Eritrea arms and supplies with a view to escalating the level of violence there, and thereby weaken the revolutionary process in Ethiopia.

Another group of Arab countries are helping the secessionist effort for a different motive and objective. Driven by a romantic vision of pan-Arabism and renaissance of Arab grandeur, they have come to believe that for this dream to be realized the Red Sea should become an Arab Lake. The only obstacle to this

dream, according to them, is the possession of a sea coast on the Red Sea by one non-Arab African country, Ethiopia. In order to get around the difficulty, this group of Arab countries have decreed that Eritrea be considered part of the Arab world occupied by a colonialist power. On this imaginary ground, which neatly fits their reverse logic, they have justified their continuing support.

As a result of the developments described above, the secessionist movement in Eritrea is now receiving support from two groups of Arab countries, who are opposed to each other within the context of intra-Arab politics, but who are pursuing, for motives which though varied may have a certain measure of coincidence, similar objectives as regards Ethiopia.

By playing alternatively to their respective political inclination, the secessionist movement is receiving money and arms from the most reactionary Arab countries as well as from those who hanker for Arab grandeur under false progressive labels. This basic contradiction in their orientation, has manifested itself in the inability of the leaders of the secessionist movement to resolve their differences and join hands with the Ethiopian Revolution. While it has become clear that there is no way in which secessionism could succeed in Eritrea, some of the elements in this disparate movement could not now liberate themselves from those who control the purse-strings for their own purposes. Some of these people have never cared for the welfare of their Eritrean compatriots, and if peace comes to Eritrea they know that they would lose every vested interest which they have built up by selling the cause of secessionism to outsiders.

7.34 The history of the Eritrean question is thus instructive. By severing Eritrea from Ethiopia, colonialism implanted the seed of secessionism. When following the Second World War and the defeat of Italy, the majority of the Eritrean people wanted reintegration with Ethiopia through direct union — a popular wish which the United Nations ascertained — in deference to the wishes of a few sectarian and pro-colonialist minorities, a federal arrangement which failed to satisfy the wishes of the majority was instituted. And when the Eritrean people through their elected representatives dissolved the cumbersome federal arrange-

ment, those same elements who had opposed any manner of link between Eritrea and Ethiopia began a secessionist movement. At birth, and even today, this movement is primarily sectarian in its inspiration and orientation. Some time after this movement became a reality — thanks to the support of some religiously motivated Arab countries — some young people from the region, who mistakenly believed they would find in the sectarian movement a base for revolutionary action, grafted themselves onto it. The whole movement would not have had a chance to survive as long as it has if it had not been for the active support that it has received first on religious grounds and then on political and specific strategic grounds.

The lesson of this history is that without colonialism there could not have been any tendency for secessionism in Eritrea, because prior to Eritrea's occupation by the Italians it was an integral part of Ethiopia. Unless one wishes to undo history, there cannot be any viable and durable solution to the Eritrean problem if such a solution does not conform to this history.

PART — II
THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION
AND
THE ERITREAN QUESTION

PART — II

1. The Ethiopian Revolution and the Eritrean Question

- 1.1 The Ethiopian Revolution, which began as a process in February 1974, and which has now evolved into a National Democratic Revolution, has come for the entire Ethiopian people, irrespective of creed, region or ethnic affiliation.

Moreover, the Ethiopian Revolution has not shown itself to be a mere profession of faith or a statement of hope. It has overthrown a feudal regime and has dismantled all the institutions which provided its underpinning. By further deeds, it has shown its capacity for bold revolutionary action.

The revolution has now turned its thrust to the uplifting of the people of Ethiopia from the abysmal depth of ignorance, poverty and disease and to the building of a new Ethiopia on a foundation of socialism and co-operative endeavours. This is a long and arduous process. Apart from creating the material base for a prosperous and a just society, age-old problems and contradictions will have to be resolved.

- 1.2 The announcement of the program for the National Democratic Revolution on 21 April, 1976 has now opened new horizons for the future of Ethiopia. This program which calls for the joining of all progressive and revolutionary forces in a united front to liberate the Ethiopian people from the shackles of economic and social underdevelopment, to defend their gains from feudalistic revival and imperialist encroachments, has made it possible for the broad masses of the Ethiopian people to organize themselves politically and socially. Availing themselves fully of their fundamental and inalienable rights, the Ethiopian people will soon be articulating their own wishes for the kind of political, economic and social institutions they want to adopt for their specific needs.

In effect, it will be the broad masses of the Ethiopian people who will be determining their future. Along with their other countrymen, the Eritrean people will have the possibility to organize themselves to protect and defend their rights. As much as any other section of the Ethiopian people, Eritreans hold in

their hands the key to their future. In the further consolidation of the revolution, the Eritrean people will have the best guarantee for the fulfilment of their individual and collective rights.

- 1.3 Viewed thus against the revolutionary process, one can say that the changes that have taken place in Ethiopia have responded in full measure to the requirements for a just and durable solution to the Eritrean problem. Like all their countrymen, the masses of the Eritrean people have suffered from the injustices of feudal oppression and exploitation. For long, they have been denied their individual and collective rights, particularly the right to assert their cultural identities and to establish regional and local administrations that best meet their needs.

2. Actions Undertaken by the PMG to Solve the Eritrean Problem

- 2.4 At this stage of the revolution, and in its transitional role, the PMG has responded to the wishes and the revolutionary impulses of the Ethiopian people in laying down a policy based on justice, equity and history for the solution of the Eritrean problem.

- 2.5 Ever since it assumed responsibility for the direction of Ethiopia, the PMG has continuously sought a peaceful solution to the Eritrean problem. One of its first acts was to call upon those elements of the Eritrean population who have picked up arms to lay down those arms and join the revolutionary struggle in building a new economic and social order in Ethiopia.

Following this appeal, between July 1974 and February 1975, the PMG suspended all Military initiatives against the secessionist forces in Eritrea and brought back the security forces who were assigned on patrol duties to their camps. It also undertook to establish contact with the fighters in the secessionist movement. In fact several contacts were made with them within Eritrea through various intermediaries. With the relaxation of security operations and other conciliatory measures which the PMG instituted, an atmosphere conducive to a peaceful solution was created. Through these contacts, in particular, the PMG was encouraged to further relax its military operations in Eritrea.

Parallel to these internal measures, the PMG publicly announced its commitment to a peaceful solution of the Eritrean problem, and renewed a request to the President of the Democratic Republic of the Sudan, Major General Jaafar Mohammed Nimeiry, to provide his good offices in establishing contact between the PMG and spokesmen for the secessionist movement.

At the same time, the PMG sent high-level delegations to a number of Arab capitals to explain the changes that took place in Ethiopia and how they particularly provided an opportunity to offer a solution to the Eritrean problem. The Ethiopian delegations informed the Arab Governments, especially those who had been known to provide assistance to the secessionist movement, to cease all such assistance and instead turn their attention to helping the Ethiopian people find a peaceful solution.

- 2.6 While the PMG was engaged in the fall of 1974 in such constructive efforts to solve peacefully the Eritrean problem, the secessionists, as it turned out later, were making different plans. Taking advantage of the relative relaxation of security, and while passing on deceptive signals that they might be receptive to peaceful negotiation, they were, in fact, bringing in men and war supplies from the outside and moving them closer to the main towns. Their objective was to launch coordinated attacks on the main towns and create a **fait accompli** which they expected the Provisional Military Government to accept. However, the secessionists must have either underestimated the will of the Ethiopian people and the determination of the Provisional Military Government or, duped by their own propaganda, they must have overestimated their strength.

The coordinated attacks which they launched on 20 February 1975 on all the major towns were soon scuttled, but with relatively heavy loss in civilian life and extensive damage on property. This extensive damage was caused because the secessionists launched their attacks from heavily populated areas using the civilian population as shield and hostage.

- 2.7 Bitter as this experience was to the PMG, and while it might have slightly eroded its idealism, it did not destroy its faith in the efficacy of a peaceful solution. The PMG did not lose faith

because it strongly believed that, given an opportunity to know what the Ethiopian Revolution was accomplishing even the most incorrigible secessionists who had for long been duped by their own propaganda, would recognize where the interests of the Eritrean people lay. The Provisional Military Government has thus persevered in its search on all fronts for a peaceful solution despite treachery, bad faith and hostile propaganda to all its initiatives.

- 2.8 In the meantime, in successive statements, the PMG has laid down a policy which provided all the elements for a peaceful solution.

The following statements have in particular clarified this policy.

The Declaration of the Provisional Military Government of December 20, 1974 states, *inter alia*:

"The rights of self-administration which our people had exercised at the village, district and regional levels and which had been usurped will be restored. The central government will be responsible for national or otherwise fundamental matters of state and give assistance and support to communities exercising self-administration".

Guided by the same principles which underline the above mentioned Declaration, and in a further spirit of reconciliation, the Chairman of the PMG, on the 1st Anniversary of the Ethiopian Revolution, issued a special appeal to his Eritrean compatriots in the following words:-

"We would like to appeal once more on this occasion to our Eritrean brothers not to be accomplices in the designs of others, who do not have their interests at heart, and to join the Ethiopian people in building one Ethiopia based on social justice and co-operative endeavours, an Ethiopia which embraces all her sons and daughters on a basis of equality, an Ethiopia which allows for the realization of the full potentials of every and all of its national groups."

Referring also to the envisaged self-administration for all of Ethiopia's regions including Eritrea, he said:

"Whatever constraints a highly centralized form of government might have placed on the full realization of the cultural development of the different sections of our people, we believe a decentralized administrative structure would, to a large extent, remove all such obstacles".

In a special press statement he gave on 4 December, 1975, the Chairman of the PMG further elaborated on his Revolution Day Declaration as follows:-

"The problem in Eritrea, to the extent that it is a question relating to a section of our people wishing to have some autonomy, the power to make some initiative at the local or regional level, and the possibility for cultural self-expression, will be considered as part of the decentralized administrative structures for the whole of our country. We have to analyze therefore the question for what it is in the national context and similarly devise a solution in the national context".

As to the further objective of decentralization, the Chairman added in the same statement:

"We believe that decentralizing the powers of government is necessary in order to enable the broad masses of our people to participate directly in the affairs of their government and to make their contributions to their own economic development. But as the administrative structure has been in the past — and as is still very much now — we feel that, however much well-intentioned we may be, it is difficult to direct the affairs and the development of a relatively big underdeveloped country such as Ethiopia from one center. Our plan therefore to decentralize is also dictated by the imperative of economic development, which by definition, requires the full participation of the people".

Only a few weeks ago, on May Day, the Chairman of the PMG reaffirmed Ethiopia's policy of continued search for a peaceful solution by renewing a call to all progressive forces in Eritrea to join their progressive compatriots in building a new Ethiopian society.

- 2.9 To all such initiative the secessionists did not show positive response. As a matter of fact, while such forth-right declarations

were being made by the PMG, the secessionists kept on escalating the level of violence in Eritrea, engaging in tactics that caused further damage and inconvenience to the civilian population. They also engaged in large scale, random, terrorist attacks, executing innocent people for psychological purposes or as a retribution for their collaboration with the local authorities in Eritrea. Undaunted by such negative attitude and such behaviour, and despite the detraction from pursuing the goals of the revolution that the Eritrean fighting meant, the PMG continued at every opportunity to state its policy of peace, while making it clear to the secessionists through its security operations that they would not and could not succeed in achieving their objective.

- 2.10 The recently announced Programme of National Democratic Revolution marks a milestone in this continuing effort of the PMG. This programme addresses itself in full measure to the question of the rights of nationalities and minorities within the framework of one Ethiopian Nation. Point 5 of the Programme states *inter alia*.

“Under the prevailing conditions in Ethiopia, the problem of nationalities can only be solved when they are guaranteed regional autonomy. Accordingly, each nationality will have the right to decide on matters prevailing within its area — be they in regard to administrative, political, economic, and social institutions, or the use of language, but more particularly in electing leaders and administrators. This right of nationalities for local autonomy will be implemented in a democratic way”.

PART — III

PGM'S POLICY DECISIONS

PART — III
P.M.G.'S DECISIONS TO PROVIDE A PEACEFUL SOLUTION
TO THE PROBLEM IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE REGION OF
ERITREA

In accordance with the Programme of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution and the repeated revolutionary calls in the past, the Provisional Military Government has made the following decisions to provide a peaceful solution to the problem in the Administrative Region of Eritrea:

D E C I S I O N S

1. The anomalies which had existed before will be done away with and the people of the Eritrean Administrative Region will, in a new spirit and in co-operation and collaboration with the rest of the Ethiopian people, have full participation in the political, economic and social life of the country. They will in particular play their full role in the struggle to establish the People's Democratic Republic in accordance with the Programme of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution.
2. The Programme of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution has affirmed that the right of self-determination of nationalities can be guaranteed through regional autonomy which takes due account of objective realities prevailing in Ethiopia, her surrounding and in the world at large. To translate this into deeds, the Government will study each of the regions of the country, the history and interactions of the nationalities inhabiting them, their geographic positions, economic structures and their suitability for development and administration. After taking these into consideration, the Government will at an appropriate time present to the people the format of the regions that can exist in the future. The entire Ethiopian people will then democratically discuss the issue at various levels and decide upon it themselves.
3. Having realised the difficulties existing in the Administrative Region of Eritrea and the urgency of overcoming them, and in order to apply in practice the right of self-determination of

nationalities on a priority basis, the Provisional Military Government is prepared to discuss and exchange views with the progressive groups and organizations in Eritrea which are not in collusion with feudalists, reactionary forces in the neighbourhood and imperialists.

4. **The Government will give full support to progressives in the Eritrean Administrative Region who will, in collaboration with progressives in the rest of Ethiopia and on the basis of the Programme of the Ethiopian National Democratic Revolution, endeavour to arouse, organise and lead the working masses of the region in the struggle against the three enemies of the Ethiopian people — feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism and imperialism — and thereby promote the unity of the oppressed classes of Ethiopia.**
5. **The Government will give all necessary assistance to those Ethiopians who, because of the long lack of peace in the Eritrean Administrative Region, have been on exile in neighbouring countries and in far-off alien lands so that they may, as of today, return to their own country.**
6. **The Government will make a special effort in rehabilitating those Ethiopians who might have lost their property because of the adverse conditions that had existed. All those who have been dislocated from jobs and education as a result of the existing problem will be enabled to avail themselves of the employment and educational opportunities which Ethiopia can offer in any part of the country.**
7. **People who have been imprisoned as a result of the existing problem will be released. The cases of those who have been sentenced to life imprisonment or death will be carefully examined and reviewed as soon as peaceful conditions are restored and, on the basis of their offences, they will either receive reduced prison terms or be altogether released.**
8. **The state of emergency will be lifted as soon as the major decisions begin to be implemented and peace is guaranteed in the Eritrean Administrative Region.**
9. **A special commission entrusted with the task of ensuring the implementation of decisions 5 to 7 above will be established by proclamation.**

There are quarters that are conspiring to reverse the victories gained as a result of the struggle of the Ethiopian people and to put our country again under the yoke of feudalism and imperialism. These forces, which are working day and night, in order to realise their dreams are dangerous forces that are weaving counter-revolutionary conspiracies around the country, spending millions of dollars daily towards achieving their goals and coordinating their counter-revolutionary activities.

The Ethiopian people must be fully vigilant, organised and armed throughout the length and breadth of the country and be on guard against these forces.

The Provisional Military Government of Ethiopia believes that the problem in the Eritrean Administrative Region can be peacefully solved along the lines outlined above. On the other hand, by allying with the broad masses the Provisional Military Government has the responsibility and duty to defend the revolutionary gains of the Ethiopian people from reactionary forces and to crush those who are inimical to the unity of the working masses and the Ethiopian Revolution.

The Provisional Military Government is making yet another revolutionary call upon the broad masses and progressive forces in the Administrative Region of Eritrea to give their fullest support and cooperation to the effort the Government is making to solve the problem in the region.

**ETHIOPIA TIKDEM
MAY THE UNITY OF THE OPPRESSED
MASSES FLOURISH
(MAY 18, 1976)**

BERHANENA SELAM PRINTING PRESS