

## Blueprint for Democratic Eritrea

<Work-in-progress>

This subject would have been better written by those who have better knowledge and experience on this issue. The regime wants us to get entangled in negative propaganda to sap our energy and to cloud our judgment. It is important to interject positive discussions to help us put our struggle in proper perspective.

Fellow Eritreans are welcome to modify or make use of this paper as they see it fit. The sole purpose of this paper is to encourage discussions and debates. This paper is prepared solely based on my years of observations and endless discussions and debates with friends. *A comprehensive version will be made available in few months.* In the meantime, I hope to continue discussions with my fellow Eritreans.

Some may feel that it is premature to discuss the future of Eritrea and, instead, that we should focus our energy on addressing today's challenges. But the question is, can one effect change in today's situations without addressing the future? Would people say, our current situation is so bad that we are prepared to bring about change without knowing what the future holds for us? Would we be perpetuating the abused-wife syndrome unless we show the victim that there is an alternative? Another reason why we should discuss these issues is that PFDJ's fall will be abrupt leaving a vacuum. The opposition movement must hit the ground running. The day after PFDJ, the first luxury that will be taken away that we are enjoying today will be "time"

Political activists who strive to bring about change have moral obligations to reach consensus and to articulate how they intend to manage a nation they hope to inherit. The current struggle to bring about change is based on political campaign, and in Diaspora at that, not a military campaign. Political campaigns can only be effective when those who can bring about change project crystal clear vision.

Purpose of this paper:

- ✓ Aligning vision and expectations among democratic forces,
- ✓ To instill confidence that we have detailed plan for success

How to align:

By drawing the big picture of the tasks that await us

Why align:

1. If we don't align our visions and expectations, our evolution towards democratic Eritrea will falter not so much due to "bad people" but because we are all thinking at different wavelengths. Misunderstandings will lead to ill-will, which will then inevitably lead to slide back to dictatorship.

2. We must align our vision and expectations in order to modify our Constitution, to set national priorities, to focus our struggle, to demand certain laws needed for wider participation and maximum freedom for political activists to hold their government accountable, etc... we need to understand the bigger picture.

Who is the audience of this paper:

The primary audience is the wider community of political activists, which primarily consists of individuals and non-governmental organizations. As will be explained later, these groups are the best vigilantes against usurpation of power.

### Basic Premises

- ✓ Throughout history, man's misery has been caused significantly more from its own government than by its external enemies. System of checks-and-balances must be designed to control government power, which if left unchecked has tendency to subvert laws with dire consequences.
- ✓ Despite our preoccupation with certain burning issues, in reality, the success or failure of Eritrean democracy, like any other democratic societies, remains in ensuring that politicians'/representatives' interests remain aligned with both their constituents and the nation. As politicians manage the nation, the public must maintain strict *direct* and *indirect* controls to ensure that politicians' personal interests don't undermine the nation's interests.
- ✓ We can't change human nature. A system must, at times, take advantage of certain human nature, while other times, negative human nature must be negated through the *aggregate effect*. There will always be conflicts among individuals due to conniving, breach of trust and misunderstanding that can lead to widening of conflicts unless cooler heads prevail. Managing human nature and conflicts in practical manner and consistent with our core values is at the heart of democratic systems.
- ✓ Instead of following certain socio-political and economic models borrowed from other societies to apply to our own, success can be better assured through evolutionary steps by adhering to basic natural laws and based on our tradition, culture and past experience.

### Critical arguments contained in this paper

There is a general misconception that "backward" societies can't bring about and sustain a democratic state. Unlike Athenian democracy, the ratio between (people's) representatives and constituents/voters in modern

democratic states is anywhere from 1-to-50,000 to 1-to-500,000. Therefore, individual voter has nearly no *direct* influence on the views of his/her representative. Moreover, voters can only participate in elections once every 4 or 5 years, and thus there must be a more sophisticated system that needs to ensure that the voters' and politicians' interests remain aligned throughout the intervening periods between elections.

KEY POINT: A modern democratic state requires a whole set of intricate institutions including political activists, various types of organizations and associations, thus replacing individual voter to influence public servants or politicians. Individual voter's influence has become indirect, resulting in more refined and more focused public participation. *This shift towards institutionalized politics has many of its advantages and some of its own challenges.* On the balance, this is the only workable method in modern state where the ratio voter-to-representative is extremely high.

### Dangerous Misconceptions

Some genuinely believe that democratic system must be suspended during times of war or in state of emergency, resulting in all powers being transferred to the incumbent leader of the nation [Head of State].

In reality, no one is ever or can be above the law, lest we invite dictatorships. A democratic system provides certain legal provisions that grant wider powers to a leader during times of national difficulties, but within certain restrictions. For instance, powers given under State of Emergency might be granted for six months only, and then the leader must return to the granting body [usually, a legislative body] for extension of time.

Without such controlling mechanism, powers that may be granted under state of emergency can easily be usurped by the leader.

REALITY CHECK: the true strength of a nation's democratic system is tested during times of difficulties. During adverse times, we learn about ourselves, about others, and the strengths and weaknesses in our system. What we are able to achieve during these difficult times will define where our nation is headed.

### Note:

1. In this paper, representative, politician and member of parliament are used interchangeably. Similarly, citizen, voter and constituent are used interchangeably. The public consists of all citizens except politicians.

## **Background**

The irony of post-independence Eritrea is that the very leader who played his share to bring about Eritrean independence has become its polarizing figure, instead of a uniting one. *Today, Eritrea's issues are sadly defined more by the personalities than the underlying issues.* Even those who should know better, those who should stay above the frays and become the beacon for our future have chosen to either remain silent or pay lip service to today's men.

Today's Eritrean politics is being played out by those who still carry the lingering effects of the Marxist-Leninist ideologies of revolution, triumph of the proletariat, reactionaries, class war, violence to achieve aims, uprooting a system and exploitations by imperialists. We may have toned down the extremism and ominous language, but our thought process still doesn't stray too far from our ideological inculcation during our young, fiery and impressionable age. The seismic socio-political and economic changes taking place in the world since the end of the Cold War hasn't yet fully permeated to a point where there is a seismic paradigm shift in our thinking.

Even more disappointing is that there are still dwindling few who should know better and those who enjoy the very blessing beget through the rights and freedoms we enjoy in the West are the very same ones that justify the deprivations of the most basic human rights in Eritrea. They shed crocodile tears claiming that democracy can only come after nationhood – an old battle cry by those who still think we are in “meda” and who conveniently forget that Eritrea is the 183<sup>rd</sup> member state of the world community that our 100,000 martyred forced the world to reluctantly raise our flag on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1993.

Their fallacious arguments run unabated claiming that dictatorship is needed to protect Eritrean sovereignty, and thus implying that evolving democracy is weak, or if people had their rights and freedoms protected that sovereignty would be weakened. Thus they justify the imprisonment of mothers and old people without due process of law and held incommunicado as the protection of Eritrean sovereignty. Barely a decade after the heroic Eritrean people *voluntarily* laid down their precious lives to stare down a superpower supported Ethiopian colonizers, the new rulers tell us that Eritreans don't fight for their sovereignty *voluntarily* unless their rights and freedoms are stripped away from them.

As we are witnessing in post 9/11 world, the battle cry for sovereignty and freedom has become the very justification for encroaching and depriving rights and freedoms that we are told they are protecting. This is a circular argument designed to confuse and strip basic rights. We are tired of cheap political propoganda by pseudo-nationalists who condemn others' Guantanamo Bay and Abu Gharaib while ignoring the hundreds of Guantanamo Bays and Abu

Gharaibs in their own backyards. Only genuine humanists, human rights activists and believers in rule-of-law can truly condemn all Guantanamo Bays and Abu Gharaibs anywhere, anytime and under any circumstance. True believers don't cherry pick, only self-serving politicians do! We are on a slippery road when we allow ourselves to condone the deprivations of other people's rights by justifying it was done for people's own good or for the common good. Regardless of what we think of ourselves [as super-nationalists, the wise ones], we have no right to deprive the rights of others without due process of the law - period.

When PIA arrested politicians, journalists and activists in September 2001, he thought that he swept his problems under the rug. PIA thought this was a déjà vu, an encore presentation or an ugly necessity of wiping out the "Menkaes" and the "Yemenawiyans". Since it succeeded then, it can only succeed again. Wrong!

Instead, PIA has unwittingly unleashed a much bigger "force for change" in the form of a new generation of Eritreans to take up the cause of the Eritrea we all aspire – building the new democratic Eritrea – the very dreams that our martyrs believed so hard that they gave up their one precious life. The young Warsais, the young journalists, the young students, the young Eritreans around the world in Australia, Middle East, Germany, UK and other parts of Europe, North America – and those indomitable lions in South Africa who are roaring so loud and with so much energy that it fills the entire airwave in Eritrea. *Unwittingly, PFDJ has revived the very Eritrean determination that delivered our independence.* Unwittingly, PFDJ has created the very foundations of Democratic Eritrea it is trying to destroy by creating a backlash in the form of Eritreans in Diaspora who are exposing the regime through their websites, media outlets and human right organizations. Indeed, *amid the darkness around us*, we have embarked on an irreversible course towards *our vision* of a stable democratic Eritrea. We see the light at the end of the tunnel because we believe in our fellow brave Eritreans. We believe in our heroic struggle for independence. We believe in our Eritrea.

In our enthusiasm for New Eritrea, we should not lose sight of the fact that nation building is never easy, especially after a traumatic experience under a tyrannical regime. Despite all the best laid plans, the secret to success remains in our spirit – spirit of tolerance, perseverance, strength in our flexibility and flexibility in our strength, compassion, free of hatred (which clouds our judgment) and love of humanity. Without this spirit, everything else is futile.

The argument against democracy is that ordinary citizens are either too poor or uneducated that democracy can easily be subverted. In their false and self-serving arguments, usurpers tell us that various preconditions must exist before embarking on the road towards democracy. In the meantime, the usurpers tell us

they should have a good life, while the rest suffers under Warsai Yikealo slavery campaign and in PFDJ dungeons. What a convenient pseudo-philosophy.

Some say that we should follow the Chinese model or the Vietnamese model of strong centralized but yet soft authoritarian regime. Can we implant the realities and models of a couple of nations half-way around the world away from us in Eritrea? Do we have the same tradition, culture, societal structures, historical experience and demography that their models be directly applied to Eritrea? Can we apply the Chinese model of over 40-years ago in an age of satellite dish, cell phones and internet? Can we apply the Chinese model in a country where one-quarter of its population lives in Diaspora, and thus the local population has someone to lean on in foreign lands?

### **Lost Opportunity**

The best path towards Eritrean democracy would have been to implement the 1997 Constitution and for elections to proceed by the year 2001. In September 2000, the PFDJ Central Committee followed by the National Assembly passed resolutions stating that national elections should be held by the end of 2001. The significance of these meetings is that the vast majority within the “legislative body” believed that Eritrea is ready for national elections leading to representational democracy. With all the flaws and imperfections of the democratization processes, at least it had offered progress in the right direction towards what we all had aspired – a democratic Eritrea.

By subverting the general desire and consensus towards establishing a democratic Eritrea through evolutionary steps, PFDJ has now created unnecessary obstacles towards our aspirations. We won't know the extent of the damage until we embark on the road towards stable and sustainable democracy. *We won't refuse to learn to walk just because we are afraid to fall.*

### **Essence of Democracy**



#### **ENABLING FACTOR:**

The following paper examines the intricate relationships that exist in democratic system. Dictators falsely argue that democratic system is complex that can't work unless certain preconditions exist.

In reality, the only enabling factor for democracy to work is to be:

**Free from fear and intimidation, implying the rule-of-law**

The remainder is just to ride natural dynamics – period.

Many of us use democracy and rights & freedoms interchangeably. Although they reinforce each other, they have separate definitions and thus different implications. Democracy is a method of governing a nation. Rights and freedoms relate to what individuals are allowed to do or exercise as members of a society. One may ask, can one have rights & freedom without democratic form of government? Conversely, can one have democratic form of government without rights & freedom? Do rights & freedoms arise from man-made laws or natural laws?

Although there are different forms of democracies, the most workable one is representational democracy. Although the most ideal democracy would have been for every adult to directly participate in the political, i.e. legislative, processes of a nation. Unfortunately and obviously this isn't workable. What is the most workable ratio between constituents and representatives? For instance, Eritrea has 3 million Eritreans that live inside Eritrea, of which 1.5 million are estimated to be over the eligible age of 18-years old. If we set the number of representatives/legislators as 150, the ratio between constituents and representatives would be 1-in-10,000. In other countries, the ratio might be as high as 1-in-500,000. Although some ancient societies also had democracies, however, suffrage was limited to the elite class. As a result, the ratio was significantly less than modern nations.

As the ratio increases, the direct interaction between the representatives and the constituents decreases. The question becomes, with the decreased interaction between representatives and constituents other than on election day, what will continually align the interests of the representatives with the constituents?

### **Political interests**

Are voters' interests and politicians' interests the same?

Generally, voters have common interests including,

1. Prevalence of security, stability, law,
2. Availability of employment opportunities,
3. Availability of Social Services,
4. Availability of Housing
5. Preservation of values, customs and traditions,

In fact, in the countryside, people may not depend on the state for the availability of housing or employment opportunities.

Representative's interests may include,

At individual level, each representative may,

1. Have concern over own job security,
2. Seek personal ego, power, legacy or ambition,
3. Seek personal enrichment
4. View job as community service, [and combination of all the above but with different priorities for different politicians]

At group [of politicians] level,

1. Collusion,
2. Conceal mistakes, blunders, illegal behaviors, etc...



The question is: how do we align voters' interests with representatives' interests? Especially considering that the ratio between representatives and constituents is increasing, what will ensure interests remain aligned?

### **Aligning voters' and representatives' interests**

Ideal democracy is where informed constituents can directly influence and elect an ideal candidate. However, this doesn't exist in real world. Thus, in modern democracies, representative democracy must be supported by layers of institutions to ensure that there is some form of alignment between voters' and representatives' interests. What are the layers of institutions?

Layer 1: Legislative, executive and judiciary

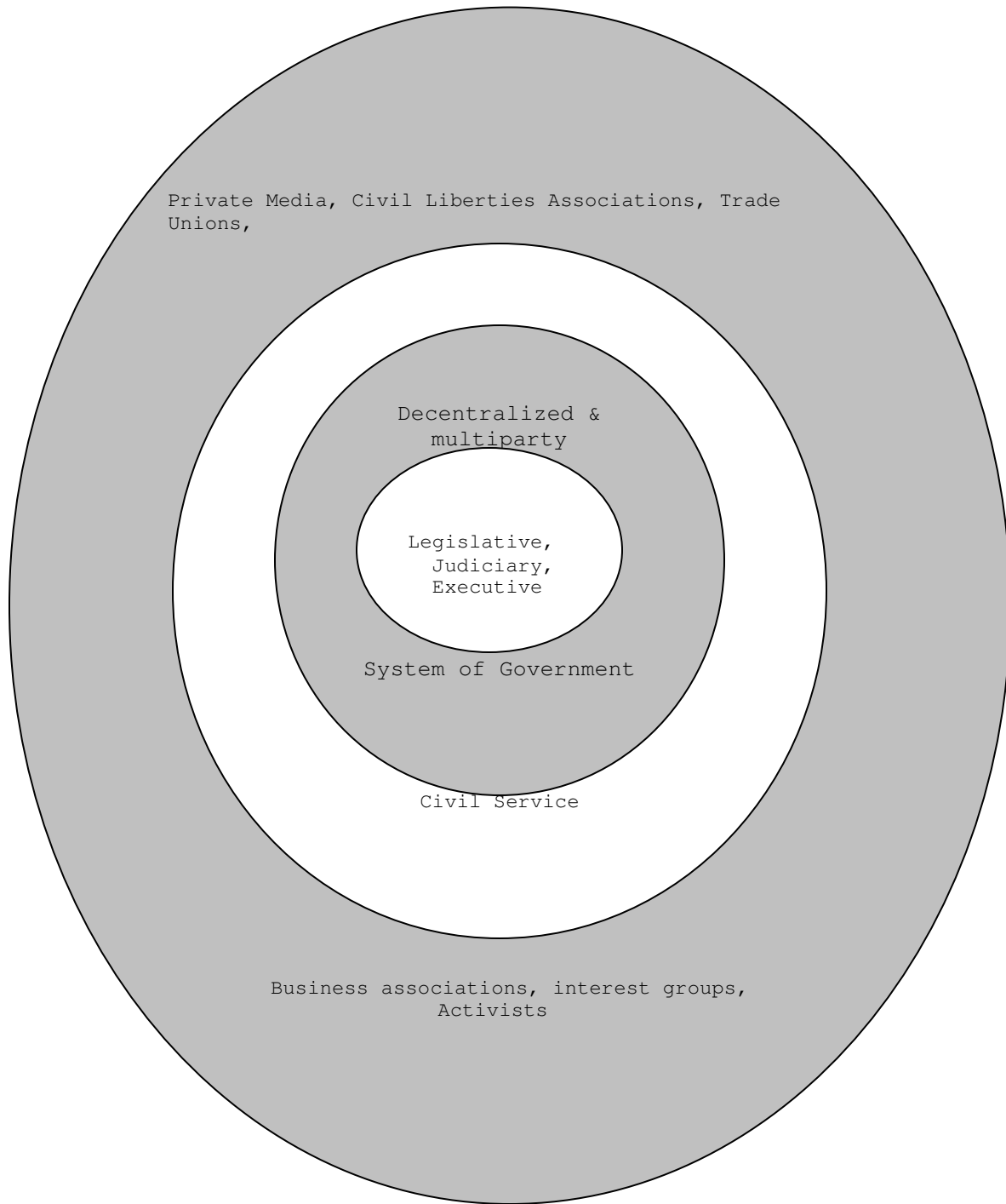
Layer 2: Decentralized system of government (although part of government, However, an alternative political and structural system)

Layer 3: Civil Service

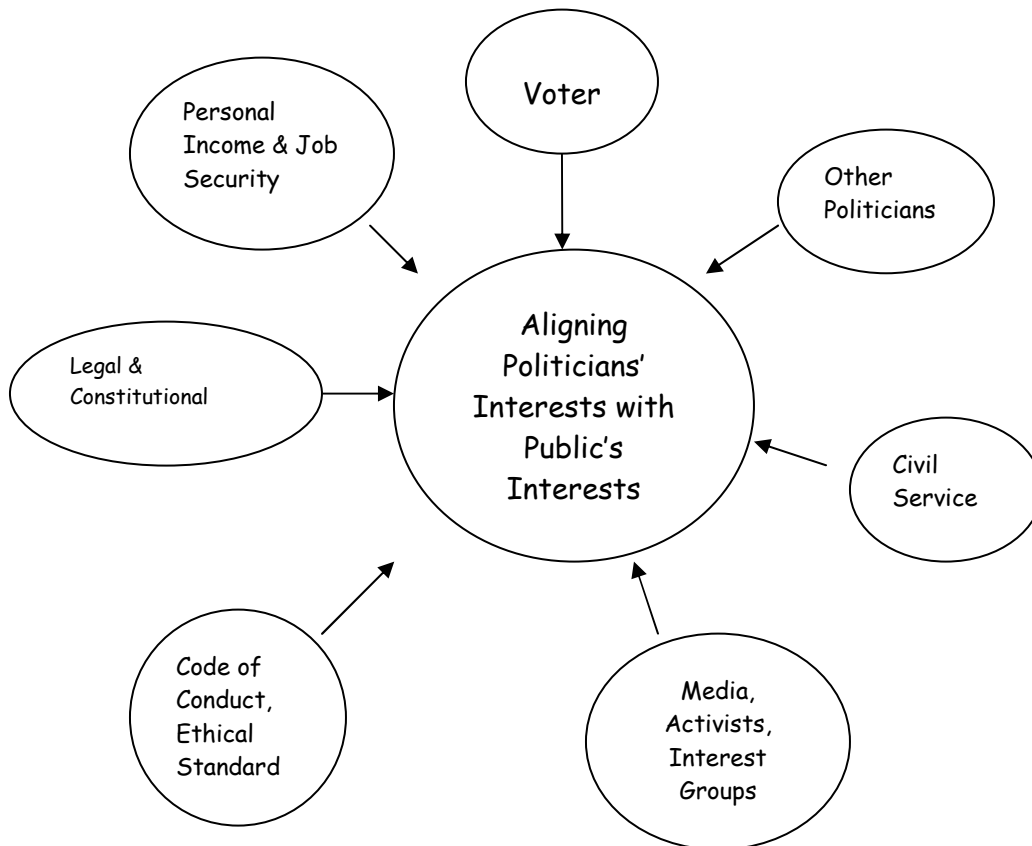
Layer 4: Independent and private media, trade unions, civil rights and other associations

The different layers don't signify importance but each group's direct relation to the central legislative body. As we move to outer layers (i.e. from 1 to 2, to 3, to 4), that layer's group's impact on the legislative, thus politics, process becomes increasingly indirect.

**INSTITUTIONALIZED POWER CONTROL SYSTEM**



**Aligning Politicians'/Representative's Interests with Public's Interest**



**The biggest challenge in government is to ensure that:**

➤ Institutional credibility is maintained through transparency, accountability and through remedial processes. Credibility can only be established by aligning politicians' and publics' interests.

Politicians may engage in the followings that may undermine political institutions' credibility,

	<b>Example</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Remedy</b>
<b>1. Corruption</b>	Government Contract	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Enrichment</li> <li>• Votes or Political Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anti-corruption laws</li> <li>• Conflict of Interest Guidelines</li> <li>• Public Access to Government Contracts</li> <li>• Grievance process to third party</li> <li>• Private media</li> </ul>
<b>2. Nepotism</b>	Public Hiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favoritism</li> <li>• Votes or political support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparent Hiring process</li> <li>• Code of Conducts</li> <li>• Grievance process to third party</li> </ul>
<b>3. Influence peddling</b>	Influencing judges or law enforcements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favoritism</li> <li>• Votes or political support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Conducts for civil servants</li> <li>• Private media to allow aggrieved party to expose</li> <li>• Whistle-blower acts</li> </ul>
<b>4. Mismanagement</b>	General incompetence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>	Performance Evaluation  Public Data and Information  Audits available to public

The entire political system must ensure that politician's interests are aligned with the public's interests. Politicians are always under personal pressures such as,

1. We are all influenced and pressured by our relatives and friends to lean on others to hire someone close to us. If public hiring process is lax, we encourage politicians to use their influence not necessarily because they want to, but because others are doing it.
2. Democratic process requires campaigning which may require the candidates to seek the endorsements of popular or influential individuals

or the financial assistance of rich people. This can easily lead to corruption and influence peddling.

Therefore, a democratic system that doesn't have effective controlling mechanisms will lead to undermining the credibility and trust in the institutionalized democratic system. This may even lead to usurpation of power by those who claim to stem out corruption.

### Politicians vs. Politicians

Normally one assumes because there are many politicians in government legislature or because there are multiple parties in a political system that natural dynamics will ensure that they act in the best interest of the public. This may not be necessarily true.

The relationship between politicians might be more complex than just comradeship or adversarial. The common game among politicians might be trading favors contrary to public's interests, but that will benefit their own personal interests. "I won't tell if you don't tell" or "Do as I tell you or I will expose your mistake, remember." This type of horse-trading may erode credibility in the entire institutional system.

The only means to ensure such trading of favors doesn't jeopardize public's interests is for political activists to continually probe and identify certain critical acts that may undermine our institutions and seek legislations that lessen the tendency for favor-trading. Political activists may study the experiences of other democratic and non-democratic countries and keep abreast of current affairs around the world.

### Politicians vs. Civil Servants

The typical political representative in the West might be: 1) Experienced Lawyer 2) Experienced Businessman (and highly educated) 3) Academia (usually post-graduate, i.e. doctorate)

The typical political representative in (early) democratic Eritrea might be 1) Farmer, 2) Herder, 3) Businessman (lower education), 4) Academia (probably teachers) 5) "Career Politician"

The task of running a nation requires highly experienced and widely exposed legislators and overseers to ensure that government is functioning properly. To overcome this handicap, effective and efficient civil service is needed.

Civil service is critical because,

1. Civil servants have direct knowledge of their departments and tasks. Although legislators dictate policy, the most practical approach is a bottom-up approach to policy formulation where top civil servants are tasked to propose policies through wide consultation within their departments. Legislators can then consult with civil servants to formulate a workable policy that address various concerns.
2. Whereas policy formulators (i.e. ultimately legislators) may have temporary tenure, *continuity* of public services and programs can only be provided through the civil service. For instance, in Italy, new governments are formed less than every two years, yet the country functions smoothly without interruption.
3. Without strong civil service, new or changing politicians may introduce widely fluctuating policies that undermines the entire public service system. The nation will become an experimental guinea pig by ambitious and over-eager politicians who will continually tear away any efforts at building institutions and programs through evolutionary process.

Thus by creating effective and efficient civil service, we can address most of the handicaps associated with establishing democratic system in a young nation. Moreover, the civil service is one more control mechanism to ensure politicians aren't reckless in their policy formulations. Again, politicians' "eagerness to change policies or to leave a personal stamp" should be tapered by civil servants' "desire to maintain the status quo", thus creating the right equilibrium to ensure changes take place at appropriate pace.

It should be noted that representatives who are farmers, herders or villagers aren't ignorant, and in fact, may know their priorities better than many educated people. Their problem is that because of their lack of exposure, they can't hit the ground running when elected, thus requiring a strong support system. In few months, these "farmers and herders" will become the most practical politicians than those who have traveled and lived around the world and who are plugged to the world media.

## Politicians vs. Political Activists



Civic associations and political activists are the most important players in ensuring that individual interests and national interests are aligned between political institutions and the public. Their motivations are driven out of idealism, esp. when they are volunteers. Students are one such example.

The key factor to remember is what motivates an individual to act in certain way. For instance, politician might be reluctant to dissent against the government because he believes [correctly or incorrectly] that the powerful individuals within the government (or party) can rid of him thus depriving him of his livelihood or income. Thus politician may be willing to supercede personal interest over national interest. On the other hand, volunteer political activists don't rely on politicians for survival, thus volunteer political activists may exhibit higher incidence of placing national interests ahead of individual interests. Politician's desire to achieve job security may lead to a tendency to favor 'status quo' to ensure their own personal survival while political activists advocate for 'continuous change'. It doesn't necessarily follow that advocating for status quo is bad and quick and continuous change is always good. Instead, this friction between 'status-quo' and 'change' is healthy and needed to ensure that we don't move too fast or too slow in managing our national affairs.

## Managing Relationships

Life is all about managing relationships:





1. At individual level we need to manage: our parents, our brothers and sisters, our spouses, our children, our relatives, our friends, our colleagues, our bosses, our subordinates, our neighbors, fellow members in various organizations, people we deal with everyday at gas stations, groceries, restaurants, etc...
2. Similar relationships exist among communities, among different zonal administration groups, among different ethnical, regional and religious groups, etc...
3. Relationship also exists between the citizens and their governments.

Dynamics between relationships can be:

1. Voluntary
2. Force

Outcome of the type of relationship dynamics:

1. Voluntary relationships: peaceful, harmony, love, energy, innovativeness, creative, imaginative, healthy, strong, unity, etc...
2. Forced relationships: misery, slavery, abuse, conflicts, poverty, pain, suffering, imprisonments, separation of people, etc...

		<b>Motivations</b>	
<b>Status Quo</b> 	Government, Politicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Income</li> <li>• Duty</li> <li>• Enrichment</li> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Legacy</li> </ul>	 Jobs Affected
	Civil Servants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal Income</li> <li>• Duty</li> <li>• Enrichment (in corrupt system)</li> </ul>	
	Business Associations, Trade Unions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence on law-making</li> </ul>	 Jobs Indirectly Affected
	Private Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial Gain</li> <li>• Duty</li> </ul>	Jobs Indirectly Affected
 <b>Change</b>	Civic Associations & Political Activists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duty</li> <li>• Lesser extent, income source for NGOs</li> </ul>	Jobs mostly unaffected



One of the poorest excuses used by pseudo-democrats is that uneducated and poor citizens can't properly use their democratic rights, or that people are foolish and need wise leaders to dictate their lives. This creates the justification for using force in this relationship.

1. Regardless of their educational or economic level, people know where their immediate and long-term interests lie. People correctly place their priorities: their immediate needs first, food, shelter, clothing, preservations and security first. Then their interests broaden as they obtain their basic needs.
2. However, sometimes people's priorities may need to be rearranged at higher level of interests [or needs] once people have obtained their basic needs. Without being distracted by few bad apples in society, the vast majority of the population is rationale and able to discern different arguments. Thus, as democrats, we must believe that the vast majority of the people are rationale and can be persuaded. The bad apples can be controlled through myriad system.

### **Managing Relationships at every level**

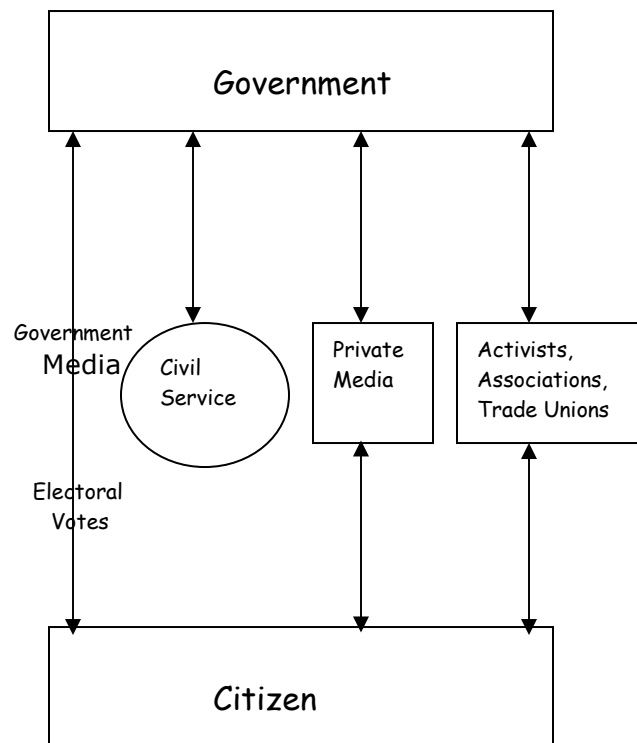
#### At individual level:

1. By creating stable society,
2. Through positive reinforcements,
3. Community counseling (formal or informal)
4. Various laws: family, criminal, etc...

#### At community level:

1. rule-of-law,
2. balance between individual right and group rights,
3. Laws

At national level (between citizen and government)



The danger to modern democracy is that relationship between voter and its representative has become further removed. In Athenian democracy (which may be qualified due to absence of universal suffrage), the ratio may have been as low as 1-in-200. Citizens may know the representative directly and thus individual voter had direct influence on issues that mattered to him. In modern democracy, the ratio may be as high as 1-in-500,000 or even higher. In Eritrea the ratio might be 1-in-10,000 (1.5 million eligible voters for 150 members of the national assembly).

Moreover, a citizen can't monitor his representative on continuous manner in a world where issues are becoming complex. Therefore, the relationship between citizen and government can't be as simple as we all tend to imagine – i.e. democracy through ballot box only. In order to effectively manage the challenges of modern democracy, the relationship between the citizen and its government must be augmented, but not replaced, by various institutional frameworks.



**IMPLICATIONS:** Examining modern democracy, the role of individual voter has either been diminished or has felt alienated. The average turnout at elections is between 50% to 75% at national level, even less at state level and some 25% at municipal level. Thus the critical element in ensuring that representatives' interests remain aligned can only be the organized pressure exerted by different interest groups.

The existence of various interest groups allows the individual voter to indirectly delegate his responsibility to another body that has the time and financial resources to maintain close control over a political body. As a result, it isn't as critical that individual voter maintain close watch or influence his representative.

For instance, a government claims that a border stalemate should be given priority above all else. Each and every citizen may have an opinion over this matter, but at 1-in-10,000 representation ratio, not every citizen is able to reach out to his representative. Moreover, the government may monopolize the public media skewing arguments in its favor. Without the existence of the various organizations and institutions, public debates are stifled.

The existence of non-governmental political and non-political organizations, interest groups and political activists is that they can present differing arguments (i.e. these organizations may have different views) to politicians and to the public – thus enriching debates, informing the public and in the process becoming a bridge and an alternative channel between a government and an individual voter.

As long as there are healthy number of non-governmental organizations, interest groups and political activists, we can have a healthy democratic system. A healthy friction among these institutions will become a catalyst in educating and mobilizing the individual voter.



**In the Nutshell:** To ensure a properly function system, we need to achieve the following (which as contradictory as it may seem, use friction to achieve harmony),

- **At individual level:** tolerance, law-abiding, certain degree of conformism
- **At institutional level:** certain degree of friction among institutions to force transparency and accountability
- **At national level:** harmony, rule-of-law, respect for minority rights, stability.

### Task of Building Eritrean Institutions

The current regime in Eritrea has been destroying the already weakened [due to colonialism] Eritrean institutions ever since its first day in power. Some examples include the following,

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Current Status</b>		<b>Task of Rebuilding</b>	<b>Time</b>
Legislative	Defunct	Was never effective. Primary role: rubber-stamping (except in Sept. 2000)	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Government Of Unity	<u>Workable:</u> 3 years  <u>Effective:</u> Three elections
Political	Defunct	Limited to EPLF/PFDJ but now defunct	<u>Priority:</u> High (i.e. multiparty system)  <u>Responsibility:</u> Government Of Unity	<u>Workable:</u> 3 years  <u>Effective:</u> Two elections
Judiciary	Defunct	Special Courts with illegal powers and corrupt	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Government Of Unity and  Legal professionals	<u>Workable:</u> 5 years  <u>Effective:</u> 15 – 25 years
Zonal & Municipal Administration	Very weak, with extremely little powers		<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Government Of Unity	<u>Workable:</u> First election  <u>Effective:</u> Five elections
Trade Unions	Non-existent	All gatherings banned, teacher's unions banned	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Interest Groups	<u>Workable:</u> 2 years  <u>Effective:</u>

			(workers and activists)  <u>Enabling Factor:</u> Rights & Freedoms	5 years
Business Associations	Non-existent	Constantly under harassment	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Interest Groups (businesses)  <u>Enabling Factor:</u> Rights & Freedoms	<u>Workable:</u> 2 years  <u>Effective:</u> 5 years
Private Media	Banned	Many arrested or exiled.	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Interest Groups  <u>Enabling Factor:</u> Rights & Freedoms	<u>Workable:</u> Immediate  <u>Effective:</u> 1 year
NGOs and human rights organizations	Banned, harassed, or never allowed to form	Severe restrictions tantamount to refusal	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Interest Groups  <u>Enabling Factor:</u> Rights & Freedoms	<u>Workable:</u> Immediate  <u>Effective:</u> 1 year
Religious	Continuous harassment	Continually nudged towards state of anarchy	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Interest Groups  <u>Enabling Factor:</u> Rights & Freedoms, Separation of State & Religion	
Civil Service	Mismanaged	Demoralized	<u>Priority:</u> High  <u>Responsibility:</u> Professionals & international	<u>Workable:</u> 2 years  <u>Effective:</u> 5 years

			assistance <u>Enabling Factor:</u> Rights & Freedoms	
Army	Bloated and unsustainable	Instrument of repression and source of power	<u>Priority:</u> High <u>Responsibility:</u> Task Force	<u>Workable:</u> 2 years <u>Effective:</u> 5 years

**Institutions are needed to address the following national issues.**

As stated earlier, if small group of politicians are allowed to address a whole myriad of issues, this will lead to corruption, mismanagement and ineffective decisions, leading to national discord, which in turn will bring dictatorship.



At the early stages of building democratic Eritrea, the primary tasks of politicians shouldn't be to address every issue. They don't have the time, skill, experience or knowledge to tackle many of these issues. Instead, the priority remains in promulgating the necessary laws to allow the various institutions to come into existence, to acquire the necessary expertise and finance to implement the structural changes needed to accommodate a stable and sustainable democratic system.

The concern is always that left to their own devices, politicians will be too busy carving out their little fiefdoms and lack the necessary organizational experience to undertake wide ranging reforms needed to establish the requisite institutional checks-and balances system. Conceptually, the institutional system is not difficult. However, implementation requires aligning peoples' interests, which is never easy. This is made even more difficult if we don't map out clear strategy and bring people onboard through public campaign and transparent political processes.

<b>(Key) National Issues</b>						
	<b>Defense</b>	<b>Foreign Policy</b>	<b>Internal Security</b>	<b>Economy</b>	<b>Social</b>	<b>Laws</b>
<b>Objective</b>	Safeguarding Sovereignty	Protecting National Interests	Maintaining law and order  Separate function to decentralize power.	Growth and wealth distribution	Social justice, preservation and promotion of culture, societal well-being	Rule-of-law to enable members of society to live together.
<b>Ideological (Alternative)</b>	Small army	Pacifists	Army should never be used for internal security, and laws must be promulgating prohibiting this practice.	Small government	Little government involvement	Decentralized
	Medium-sized army	Mixed		Mixed	Mixed	Mixed/Shared
	Large army	Pro-active		Big government	Welfare State	Centralized
<b>Responsible Body</b>	Central Government	Central Government	Intelligence: Central Government (i.e. no police at federal level)	Central Government	Central Government	Central Government
			Police: At Zonal level	Zonal level	Zonal level E.g. Health, education	Zonal level
			Police: At Municipality level	Municipal level	Municipal level E.g. housing	Municipal level
<b>Constraint</b>	Lack of skills, experience, ideological, financial, etc...					
<b>Trade-off</b>	What do we have to give up in order to get something else? For instance, more expenditure on military will mean less funds available for education or health, or assigning experienced person to assist in federal legislature may mean one less available for zonal legislature. We need to have clear priorities.					

Some of these issues are structural in nature while others are policies. Structural issues must be addressed early in our democratization process because it has a degree of permanence, while policies may change depending on the political party in power.

What should be the primary tasks for the first political body tasked with establishing the foundations for democratic Eritrea?

1. Agree on the big picture, the common vision, upon which short-term and long-term tasks can be mapped out. Agreeing on basic principles enshrined into a charter can be part of that vision. However, the big picture must be fully spelled out and understood.
2. A Constitution must be implemented quickly. The 1997 Constitution may need to be modified to address realities in the last decade. These may include modifying government structures and additional safeguards. Without the constitution, laws can only be promulgated without a constitutional legitimacy. Constitution is the underpinning of laws.
3. Regardless of when the constitution is implemented, laws must be promulgated immediately or people must be allowed to exercise their *natural* rights to express their views through any forms, and to gather and form unions without official laws. The existence of institutions is paramount for the establishment of democratic state, and thus the development of non-governmental institutions shouldn't be hampered by the possible slow processes within governmental or political institutions to promulgate laws allows these non-governmental institutions to come into existence. Otherwise, the non-governmental control mechanisms won't be able to exert pressure on governmental (i.e. political) institutions to reform, to be accountable and to become transparent. *If we don't create a healthy friction immediately, we will have lost the momentum towards democracy.*
4. The most important laws at early stages of democracy are the ones that distribute power towards the various layers of governments and other institutions. Moreover, laws must be promulgated that forces the government to become transparent. To this end, laws must be enacted the government to divulge information to the public on periodic basis. Other information would be available to the public on demand basis through 'freedom of information' acts.
5. Devolving power too quickly without proper oversight will lead to chaos, corruption and mismanagement. Thus, devolving power should be done in conjunction with the capacity for oversight. However, the central political body shouldn't be allowed to use the excuse of inadequate oversight to delay devolving power. The central political body must assess its capacity and publicly divulge how it intends to address inadequacies. Between delaying devolving power and challenges of devolving power, better to take risk with devolved power.

## Multiparty System

### Merger of Ideologies

Unlike the polarized ideologies of the last century in the form of capitalists vs. communists or big government vs. small government, today's ideology is a synthesis of those polarized ideologies. Consequently, the differences in major political parties may be in personalities rather than policies.

Implications: The merger of ideologies has blurred the multiparty system. One may have difficulty differentiating among the major parties with national representation (in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies). The major Eritrean opposition political groups are just one example. The blurring effect has both positive and negative implications. On the balance, however, it is positive.

The existence of center parties (center-right and center-left) is important because this allows voters to vote against incumbent and in favor of the opposition. Unlike our perception, in politics, people vote either 'for' or 'against' incumbent party in government, thus, doesn't necessarily mean that people are voting for the opposition.

For instance, in calling for Eritrean political parties to merge into similar platforms, it should not result in polarizing the political spectrum. The people shouldn't be given a choice between two political parties that, for instance, one advocates for central government and second that advocates for federal system. If given with limited choice, the public will continually vote for one party only and thus ushering in a one political party dictatorship or worse. Ideally, there should be at least two major parties that both believe in central government along with other parties who are free to run on their platforms. The public should feel comfortable voting against the incumbent government, thus resulting in the opposition being elected, without feeling that there will be seismic political change.

### Party System as a Screener

One of the arguments against democracy in developing system is that voters will elect inappropriate or unqualified candidates. In modern democracies where the ratio between voters and representatives is 1-in-50,000 or more, people vote for parties rather than the individual candidates unless the candidate receives highly negative publicity.

The advantage of the party system is that the parties themselves will vet or screen candidates to run in any specific constituent. Ideally, the parties themselves will check the qualifications, experience, integrity and other necessary qualities of their candidates before nominating them to run as party candidates.

Multi-party laws and other relevant laws must be promulgated that encourage parties to put forward candidates in the widest regions possible, and certain codes of conducts and ethical standards must be introduced to ensure that parties select qualified candidates.

Naturally, some may question if our tradition and culture would allow codes of conducts and ethical standards to be adhered to. We shouldn't outright dismiss such standards as unworkable in Eritrea due to cultural or other factors. Without large degree of standardization in behavior and expectations, we will be inviting failures. Moreover, with the right arguments, people are amenable to accept new or workable system. We have to know on what issues we can be flexible and which ones we can't, lest we bring about chaos.

### Commander-in-Chief and Army

Most of us have share a common misconception that the army must blindly obey the commander-in-chief. In reality, the army pledges oath of allegiance to the laws of the land. The relationship between the army and commander-in-chief is defined by law and doesn't arise from one's own personal views, beliefs, insecurity or paranoia.

The degree of responsibility within the army is different based on one's rank, although ultimately all soldiers have dual responsibilities as common citizens. Still, officers carry more legal responsibilities than non-officers. Similarly, higher ranking officers have greater legal responsibilities than lower ranking officers. The ramification of apportioning responsibilities is that should the rule-of-law be subverted, the eventual course of justice would apportion blame and mete out punishment commensurate with the degree of responsibilities.

The army in general and army officers specifically must be properly inculcated with the dangerous consequences of subverting the rule-of-law and that the maintaining institutional balance is at the centre of the rule-of-law. At the other end, where the rule-of-law is subverted and the army acquiesces to such acts, army officers may be charged under treason.

The protection of sovereignty, aliens from outer space, or any other excuse should be used to subvert the rule-of-law. No ifs, no buts, no maybes! If we allow any excuse to subvert law, we are surely inviting dictatorship.

### Internal Security & Police

In the national issues chart above, internal security has been broken down as follows,

1. Central government will have intelligence service and criminal investigation units, but will command no police force.
2. Zonal government will have its own police that will maintain security in non-urban areas. It will have no jurisdiction in urban areas.
3. Municipal government will have its own police with responsibilities within its jurisdictions only.

Laws must be promulgated that prohibit the central government to deploy the army for internal security purposes. Any such acts should immediately be viewed as attempts to usurp political powers. If certain highly specialized armed teams (such as in hostage situations) are needed and are beyond the capacities of zonal or municipal governments to maintain such teams, the central government may be allowed to operate such teams under strict laws and oversight.

Why breakup the police force? Efforts must be made to bring the various gun-carrying members of the army and security forces under different political powers. If the leader of the central government usurps the power of the central body and the army, it shouldn't automatically bring the police force under its sphere of influence.

KEY CONCEPT: One act of usurpation shouldn't bring all the armed, police and political forces under the influence of control of the usurping power. Instead, the usurping body must be forced to continue usurping the various layers of controls.

Constitution and/or laws must be formulated to address this issue.

### Effective Decentralized Government

If decentralized government bodies are to provide additional layer of control against the usurpation of central power, they should be allowed to collect their own revenues, as municipalities do, for example. Granting the decentralized

governments to only promulgate their own zonal laws and to formulate some of their own socio-economic policies doesn't protect them against undue influence from the central government.

Where the decentralized government isn't granted to raise its own revenues, the central government will exert undue pressure on the decentralized governments and thus negating the entire exercise of distributing power as a defense against usurpation of power.

Constitution and/or laws must be formulated to address this issue.

### Bureaucracy: the Necessary Evil

Creating layer of control mechanisms will lead to increased bureaucracy. There is no dispute that bureaucracy reduces efficiency and creates more waste. Unfortunately, life is about tradeoffs. Do we want a system of government with little control and thus less bureaucracy but with increased risk of falling into dictatorship, or are willing endure increased bureaucracy in order to lessen the risk of dictatorship?

Bureaucracy becomes a major obstacle if the primary engine of economic development in a country is the government itself. Slow bureaucracy can't adapt quickly to ever-changing business world. Moreover, bureaucracy isn't governed by market laws and thus economic decisions might be made on socio-political reasons rather than primarily for economic reasons. This will lead to inefficiency, leading to economic stagnation, entailing falling personal income, high unemployment and other crisis.

If the consensus among politicians [excluding business community from this decision making process] is that government should become the primary engine for economic growth, it is better to create significantly less layers of controls in order for the central government to act quickly without the impediments of bureaucracy. The downside risk of this system of government is that the country will surely expose itself to dictatorship, which will mostly likely destroy whatever progress is made at the first hint of insecurity to one's power. Any dictatorship has within it the seeds of greater destruction than building a nation. We can learn from our own experience in Eritrea under PIA and PFDJ.

The negative effects of bureaucracy can be lessened through the followings,

1. By creating a highly trained civil service,
2. By formulating clear policies,
3. By educating the population on navigating through the bureaucracy,
4. By using modern technologies, etc...

5. By pushing down certain decision making down the chain of commands and down the civil service,

Moreover, the negative effects of bureaucracy on the economy should be lessened by ensuring that the government refrains from directly engaging in business ventures. Business decisions should be left to businessmen who can make better decisions on how to allocation the country's resources for maximum sustainable benefits. *The government may influence economic decisions but shouldn't control it.* Small government is at the heart of reducing the effects of bureaucracy, which in turn is needed as one line of defense against bureaucracy.

### Layers of Control

The existence of layers of control doesn't necessarily prevent usurpers or dictators from breaching all the layers of control. This isn't unlike a line of defense in a physical battle, referred to as trench lines. Having two or three trench lines or lines of defense doesn't necessarily mean the enemy won't breach it. However, having multiple lines of defense will give the defenders a better chance of winning. Multiple control layers and trench lines force the enemy or usurpers to suffer greater damage in achieving their aims, thus weakening them, which in turn leaves them exposed to counterattack.

KEY CONCEPT: layers of controls are designed to address specific objectives or concerns. For instance,

1. Level: Central Government  
 Danger: Usurpation of power leading to dictatorship  
 Other Concerns: Corruption, Mismanagement, Nepotism  
 Layers of Control: Say, 5 layers of controls are needed.
  
2. Level: Zonal Government  
 Danger: None? Little risk of power usurpation  
 Other Concerns: Corruption, Mismanagement, Nepotism  
 Layers of Control: Say, 2 layers of controls are needed.

We can evaluate the risks at every level government where power is distributed, and then to design the necessary controls to ensure that power isn't abused for personal purposes and to maintain institutional integrity and credibility.

## Speculations and Rumors

Again, there is a misunderstanding about speculations and rumors undermining a nation and its institutions.

It is true that speculations and rumors undermine the credibility of national institutions and thus weakening a nation. But what we should first ask is what causes speculations and rumors.

Speculations and rumors are caused by lack of information and lack of credibility. For example, if a crime is committed in my neighborhood, I will hear different rumors and speculations, sometimes even contradictory, as to what happened. Speculations and rumors multiply until the police publicize the results of their investigations which will stop all rumors. Naturally, there will always be the persistent conspiracy theorists, but the vast majority will move on to the next rumor and speculation.

Where the public is engaged in speculations and rumors over the government's conducts, activities, or any other topic, it is the government's responsibility to quell those rumors and speculations by providing accurate and timely information. It will be insurmountable task leading to repression to say that the public should stop or refrain from engaging in speculations and rumors. It is impossible and counterproductive.

Naturally, government can't engage in refuting every rumor and speculation due to the nature of the issue such as reasons of national security or because it will require significant efforts to refute thus taking away valuable resources away from other functions. One general approach that a government can use to counteract speculations and rumors is to maintain high degree of institutional credibility and integrity.

With high degree of institutional credibility and integrity, people are likely to dismiss rumors and speculations that may tarnish their national institutions. PFDJ, for instance, totally lacks credibility and integrity and thus encouraging high degree of speculations and rumors. This undermines the viability of the nation. The onus is always on the government to ensure that transparency, accountability, credibility and integrity are used to lessen the impacts of public speculations and rumors.

Rampant speculations and rumors should simply be viewed as symptomatic of lack of transparency and accountability.

## Constitution and Laws

Constitution contains principles upon which all laws emanate. Constitutions and laws can't be formulated unless we are able to draw the blueprints of our democratic system. We need to understand the big picture before we sit down and discuss what issues need be addressed at what level, and with what kind of controlling mechanisms. Once we have aligned our objectives, formulating and/or modifying our constitution and laws become simply a mechanical task.

For instance, some will say that laws must be instituted controlling private media. However, closer scrutiny of their arguments reveals the following,

1. Only few are able to relate their personal views to the overall philosophical arguments. After a bit of discussion, many accept their lack of knowledge on these issues and that their views were formulated on their limited experience or limited observation on this issue.
2. No two individuals advocating for controlling private media would agree the reasons for the control or how it should be controlled. Without the bigger picture, or without agreeing on the underlying philosophical arguments and agreeing on the functions and necessities of private media, private media would be restricted unnecessarily or for the wrong reasons leading to collapse of the extended checks-and-balances within our envisioned system of government.

## In Summary

The purpose of this paper is:

1. To draw the big picture in order to make it easier for Eritreans in general but more specifically for politicians and activists to put together the jigsaw puzzle called democracy. Only with the big picture will we be able to know which piece goes where, when and how.
2. To dispel one of the poorest justifications for delaying the implementations of democracy in that ordinary Eritreans are too poor or uneducated to make use of democracy. This paper argued that modern democratic system doesn't require "sophisticated" voters to ensure that democratic systems work. A workable democratic system, as there is no perfect democratic system, can be achieved through;
  - a. Devolving power,
  - b. Establishing effective institutions, and by

- c. Allowing political activists, trade unions, business associations and other interest groups to flourish. Due to our struggle for independence and our demonstrated unending love for our country, Eritrea is blessed with strong political activist movement. **That is all we need to establish one of the best democratic systems in the modern world.**
3. To show that the issues that occupy the opposition camp such as land and official language, as important as they are, represent only a small part of our overall challenge. In fact, we can only resolve any issues such as land once we have aligned the interests between the public and the political institutions. Otherwise, some politicians' pursuits of self-interest – i.e. for re-election, for financial gain, for legacy, or other – may hinder efforts at finding solutions. The alignment of interests between citizens and politicians is achieved 1) through the election process, 2) through effective laws and codes of conducts, 3) through checks-and-balances, transparency and accountability and 4) through vigilance of private media, interest groups and political activists.
4. To show that layers of institutional control implies that the general public is the last line of defense against dictatorship. As politicians strive to place themselves within the central circle of power, they automatically make themselves the first line of defense against dictatorship. This is a big responsibility which only few are willing to bear, as the G-15 has done. If politicians quickly capitulate to a dictator, the first line of defense is breached. The next trench line might be the judicial system (e.g. Constitutional Courts). The trench after that might be the army, followed by the civil service, followed by unions and other associations, followed by activists. If the dictator jumps over the three lines of defenses and first destroys unions, associations and activists for instance, in reality, this is tantamount to breaching the first three lines of defenses first.

There is no reason to believe that Eritreans aren't ready for democracy. Eritrean history is all about the people's beliefs in the rule-of-law, which is the most critical component of democracy. Although the Eritrean struggle may have tested our various beliefs, ultimately the Eritrean struggle for independence is yet another example that the majority of the Eritrean population is able to discern what type of system is appropriate for a specific stage of our national challenge.

When Woyane declared war on Eritrea and the Eritrean regime fell into paralysis, Eritrean political activists took up their campaigns against the Woyane regime, while the Warsai tigers chewed any enemy troops that crossed into our territory. The Woyane regime could only lament at the heroism of ordinary Eritreans.

In September 2000, the PFDJ Central Committee and the National Assembly passed resolutions stating that ordinary Eritreans are brave, experienced and

trustworthy enough that Eritrea can embark on the road towards stable democracy by holding its first election ever at the end of the Year 2001.

Instead, few PFDJ elites said that Eritreans can't be trusted with democracy and must be thrown into dungeons, exiled and executed to maintain Eritrean unity.

The battle for Eritrea's future begun in earnest in the year 2001. Our victory is near because our cause is 'just' and we have proven our perseverance and determination throughout our history. We shall continue our march because there is no other alternative and have a promise to keep.

**Circular Argument:** We should vehemently reject the circular argument that dictatorship is needed to prevent dictatorship.

Some will argue that this paper is "theoretical" and can't be applied in Eritrea. But what is the alternative? One can't possibly argue that PFDJ's current acts and policies are "practical". This paper isn't a source of ultimate wisdom, however, every politician and activist has a moral responsibility to ensure that a certain vision and workable model is articulated. This paper is designed to nudge activists and politicians in that direction. In reality, this paper is simply an articulation of what the reformers, journalists, the thousands of Eritrean political activists held hostages by the regime have sacrificed their freedoms and lives for. This paper is the very essence of what Eritreans sacrificed themselves for Eritrean liberation and maintaining its sovereignty. This paper is the very essence of the 1997 Constitution and what the PFDJ Central Committee and National Assembly voted in September 2001. This paper is the very essence what Min. Haile Woldetensae (Drue) articulated in his speech of August 2000.

Although this paper points out the priorities, key tasks and control mechanisms needed to establish effective democratic system, the details will require volumes of papers to address. It isn't complicated but requires focused energy and wide consultations. We can use the current political lull moment to formulate the necessary strategies, policies and mechanisms at the same time that we are waging our struggle for change.

I hope this and other similar articles prompt my fellow Eritrean to engage in discussions that will prepare us for even bigger tasks that await us after PFDJ, which will disappear before we know it, and we are thrust into a position of responsibility with life of a whole nation. We can't afford to fail our people again, or at least, it won't be for lack of planning and extensive discussions and debates leading to aligning our expectations and efforts.

This paper is dedicated to the brave Eritreans who laid down their lives and who defiantly chose to step into PFDJ dungeons so that we can enjoy our rights and freedoms. We carry their torches.



[Xhosa/Zulu]

Amandla [to the people]! Ngawethu!

Amandla [to the people]! Ngawethu!

Amandla [to the people]! Ngawethu!

Kalsina Newih'n Merir'n Eyu, Awetna Naigidin!

Kibri N'Semaetatna!

Humbly Yours,

Berhan Hagos

February 23, 2007