

Revisiting Ethio-Eritrean issues
Forum organizers in San Jose, California

On March 15, 2009—San Jose has hosted a discussion forum on the Ethio-Eritrean issues. The honorable invited guests on this topic were Professor Tesfatsion Medhanie from the University of Bremen, Germany and Professor Daniel Kendie from the University of Henderson in Arkansas, United States. Both scholars have written books on the Ethio-Eritrean issue. The meeting has driven lots of participants and it was a successful event. The Amharic version of what the first speaker, Professor Tesfatsion, presented to the audience will soon be posted on the Internet in its entirety.

In brief, his presentation focused on confederation as the framework for the closest relations possible between the two countries. He dwelt at length on the difference between confederation and federation. But even for this confederal union to be realized, there are some prerequisites. They include political changes in both Eritrea and Ethiopia; this means, among other things, that there have to be governments of national unity in both countries. Besides, there are also psychological barriers on the part of Eritreans as well as Ethiopians that have to be addressed. The elites of both countries have a big role to play in this regard. Professor Tesfatsion emphasized that if the peoples of both countries are satisfied with the process of the confederation, they can in the future voluntarily decide in favor of a closer relationship including federation.

Following that, Professor Daniel Kendie's presentation focused on the role played by Egypt and other Arab-nations for the secession of Eritrea. He favors not only reinstating the *Federal system* to Eritrea but also to implement it in other Ethiopia's sub-regions. In addition, he argued that a confederation allows two countries to sit side by side and is too weak to deal with major issues. Therefore, he stressed that a strong central government is a requirement. His vision of the federal structure also calls for the inclusion of Djibouti, Somalia, and perhaps Sudan.

The discussion was really very interesting and a milestone that brought both Ethiopians and Eritreans under one roof for discussions. On the other hand, both lecturers admitted that this vision may be supported by neither the current Eritrean nor Ethiopian governments. A democratic government is a prerequisite for its possible implementation. Therefore, one has to think beyond the era of the present regimes.

Professor Daniel also told participants that a meeting between Eritrean and Ethiopian intellectuals will be held in the coming days. It includes 15 participants on each side of the isle and he promised to inform us about its outcome. And finally, on the strength of Professor Danel's recommendations, 3-people on each side were selected to facilitate at least social interactions between the two communities here in San Jose. It's actually is the first of its kind since the 1998 major conflict between the two countries or even after the separations for that matter.

In sponsoring this discussion forum, we—the event organizers—strongly believe that we've brought this crucial issue to the forefront. At the same time, we also know that it's highly controversial. But taking a step towards peace and reconciliation as well as developing vision is a historical obligation. Let other people take it from here.

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