

OPEN LETTER TO SECRETARY HILLARY CLINTON

Dear Secretary:

It was with great sense of hope and expectations that the Obama Administration came to power in a sweeping euphoria and optimism. In one of the most participatory presidential elections ever held in the recent history of the United States, the mantra "Change Yes We Can" reverberated throughout America.

As a Secretary of State in the Obama Administration, you accepted that responsibility to guide the foreign policy of the sole superpower of which the world has been expecting to see Change, change in shaping a new course to international relations for a new world order. In that regard, the expectations and hope seemed to hold more steam during your confirmation hearing at the House when you stated succinctly the need for real change in the US foreign policy:

"The American leadership has been wanting, but is wanted"

The unanimity in the call for the leadership of the United States reached its apex during the Second World War, after which it gradually slid down to its present state: a sole superpower incapable of defining its role in a rapidly changing world. In the meanwhile, the opportunity for positive foreign policy change has also been lost after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. In fact, that window of opportunity was squandered leading to quasi catastrophic "change" as the world witnessed America driven into a misguided open military adventures during the Bush Administration.

Madam Secretary, through the first year, as head of the Department of State, you had the opportunity ,at least, to define where and why has the American leadership been wanting. This open letter which was partially drafted last year with a tone of optimism is now unfortunately echoing the increasing number of disappointed voices calling for your extra attention to review the policy of the department that you head, particularly towards a wronged nation that has typically been at the receiving end of its misguided



policy. It was the expectation of many optimist observers that your brief visit in 1997 to the Horn Region particularly at the

moment when the relationship of the United States to both Eritrea and Ethiopia was at its peak, would spark more interest within the context of the wind of change that brought your administration into power. That has not happened and Eritrea still witnesses an American Administration that is wanting.

The original sin, so to speak, of the wrong policy of the United States towards Eritrea started from the early fifties when Eritrea was federated to Ethiopia under the justification clearly stated by the then US Secretary of State, Jhon Foster Dulles:

***“From the point of view of justice, the opinions of the Eritrean people must receive consideration. Nevertheless the strategic interests of the United States in the Red Sea basin and considerations of security and world peace make it necessary that the country has to be linked with our ally, Ethiopia.*”**

The rationale behind such unjust policy may be mitigated then by the Cold War politics; however, what Eritrea and its people are presently witnessing leads not only to speculations and assumptions but also to conclusions as to why all these hostilities are directed at this law abiding nation.

In 1993 when this resilient nation fought its way to freedom, in the then emerging post-Cold war era, it had high hopes for a renewed relationship with the United States; that hope barely lasted five years until 1998 when Ethiopia declared war on Eritrea. The “original sin” hit once again, but there was no plausible explanation to be had on the part of the United States for all the role it played in the so called border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea. In the new post Cold War era with no competing power to contend with and Eritrea having an exceptional security record of keeping its own territory and its environs safe, what is the reason for the continued hostilities? Those who have genuinely been working for an improved relationships between the United States and Eritrea, as you might be aware of, appreciate among other things, its unique and principled contribution in stopping at its infancy the Bin Laden fundamentalist enterprises from taking a foothold on its soil and the neighboring states. Then what is the reason for the continuity of a wrong policy that stayed the same over the past six decades?

Madame Secretary, if we leave the why part of the question it is easier to point at some instances from 1998 on, which clearly show when the American leadership in solving one of the major regional conflicts in our region or in engaging positively the parties involved in the Horn conflict has been wanting.

1. When Ethiopia declared war on Eritrea in May 1998, the United States sent a relatively junior official which had neither the experience nor adequate

knowledge of the region. Obviously, that didn't help. Then when Mr. Anthony Lake was sent as a special envoy of President Clinton, the war had already escalated; moreover, his long mediation efforts eventually came to be revealed that it was not only fair but also rife with calculated duplicity. The Ethiopian side was let to define and change the terms of reference of the negotiations from time to time in order to prepare for its successive military offensives. The so called mediation efforts led by the former national security advisor were not only unfair but also entertained preposterous requests by the Ethiopian regime. When Eritrea requested that Ethiopia makes a list of the territories it claimed has been illegally occupied, Ethiopia demanded that Eritrea has to provide the list itself. That illogical demand eventually came to produce a new meaning to the term environs. Under the flawed mediation of a former national security advisor, Mr. Anthony Lake, the term "Badme and environs" was defined to be the whole boundary between Eritrea and Ethiopia. (Badme, a small town was the flashpoint of the war).

2. Immediately after the war broke down, the Ethiopian government ordered more than seventy thousand Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin rounded up and inhumanely deported. Many European ambassadors in Addis who were caught by surprise of the sudden escalation of the conflict offered their good offices to help in bringing the two parties to a negotiating table. The then American Ambassador, David Shinn, intervened justifying the rounding up of the civilians which included children and septuagenarians as a necessary security concerns by the Ethiopian government. Well, the Europeans were almost excluded since then and the American "mediation efforts" continued exclusively which resulted not only in exasperating the tension but also in the trampling of international law, making mockery of the declared missions of various international and regional organizations like the UN and AU.
3. When Ethiopia finalized its preparations for its third military offensive, Mr. Richard Holbrooke, the then Permanent Representative of the United States to the UN, started a shuttle diplomacy between the two capitals. At the end of his "unsuccessful" trip, he pretentiously reported to the international media that the Ethiopian Prime minister has told him that he has no reason to stop the offensive because his government had already invested millions of dollars in preparing for the war!! In retrospect, it is rather obvious to conclude whose money the Ethiopian PM was talking about; moreover, when war broke down again the

UNSC under the auspices of the United States whose delegation Mr. Holbrooke headed, passed a resolution calling Ethiopia to stop its military attacks within seventy two hours, a rare if not unique time frame ever adopted in similar conflicts. Well Ethiopia did not reach its military objective even with all the “generous” diplomatic and financial support it got at every turn of its guided adventures.

4. Despite the continued “mediation” by the United States, the so called senseless war claimed the lives of almost 120,000 from both sides. The open war ended in 2000 when Eritrea and Ethiopia signed the Algiers Agreement which was basically drafted by the US team. Besides the US, the signatories included: the OAU, EU and the Arab League. Then, after a long and exhaustive deliberations, the Border Commission formed as part of the Algeris Agreement, gave its final and binding verdict. Once again, when the peoples of Eritrea and Ethiopia and the international community at large were expecting that the border demarcation will be expedited accordingly and normal relationships be established, the US Administration continued accommodating the illegal stance of the Ethiopian government. In his revealing memoir, Mr. John Bolton, the former US Permanent Representative made it clear the role of the state State Department in the illegal request of the Ethiopian regime to reopen a final and binding agreement. “...*For reasons I never understood Frazer reversed course, and asked in early February to reopen the 2002 decision, which she had concluded was wrong, and award a major piece of disputed territory to Ethiopia. I was at a loss how to explain that to the Security Council, so I didn't...*” It was at this point that the role of the United States in the conflict became evident, at least to the uninformed public, that it was not mediation but facilitation for whatever objective the Ethiopian regime and other interest groups supporting it had in mind. This is a different topic which could lead into other fundamental reasons why the American leadership has been wanting. Leaving this topic aside, the American role ever since the conflict started was not only wanting but also increasingly hostile.

Madame Secretary, over the last ten years of lost opportunities for peace and development of the two neighborly countries, the Eritrean government has been so patient and magnanimous not to have shared with our people on the real extent of the US interference throughout the conflict. But when the US escalates its interferences, isn't it the duty of the Eritrean government, as any responsible government does, to inform its citizens and to those concerned on the reasons behind the Ethiopian intransigence and lawlessness and the consequent defensive measures that it takes to safeguard its interests? Well, the Eritrean government has not disclosed much information about the continued hostilities by the previous administration, not only for

its magnanimity, but also believing that it is not constructive when a new administration, supposedly with a new platform for change, was taking over from the one that ridiculously threatened to enlist Eritrea, a nation that has proved itself otherwise, in the so called terror list.

Madame Secretary, the fact that you admitted that the American leadership is wanting had provided many with a sense of optimism that the new administration was to make positive changes and take appropriate measures, at least, take the right steps in the direction of amending the wrongs it incurred in many regions of the world. Eritrea and its people once again are witnessing instead a continuation of the hostile policies of the the United States.

It didn't come as a surprise either when the UN Security Council passed a resolution on Dec 23 to sanction Eritrea, since you made an unwarranted warning during your last official visit to Africa. That was when Eritreans' sense of optimism started to fade and felt that your Administration was just reading from the same files left behind by the previous Administration.

Despite the coordinated efforts by certain members of the Bush Administration to enlist Eritrea in what is called the state sponsor of terrorism, the pressure made by some responsible and sensible politicians stopped that proposal from going through. However, with your administration, the general expectation was that those who strive for positive change would be more empowered to contribute in bringing the US foreign policy towards the Horn region forward. Moreover, there was an expectation that the new administration would add an impetus to the role of The EU which had clearly recognized the positive role of Eritrea in its efforts to peace and stability in our region. Unfortunately that has not happened.

Madame Secretary, as head of the US foreign policy, substantially it is under your auspices that the Eritrean people has just received a Christmas gift in the form of a sanction which is based on pure fabrication and subterfuge. It is incumbent on all peace loving individuals to call upon your good offices that you have a closer look not only at the unjust sanction itself but at the processes and machinations that made it possible. Given the humongous US foreign making policy, at the moment, it may be difficult to do otherwise, but it is also timely to inform you, that Eritrea will keep on to work for peace and stability in our region despite the interferences of the known forces and agencies that mislead not only the general public but also governments and international organizations.

Madame Secretary, in case you wonder, to be exact, more so to the State Department and affiliated agencies, what would be the reaction of Eritreans to the unjust and illegal

sanction, there is no better statement other than what President Issays has said in an interview he gave to the Washington Post last November.

“It will be a regrettable move if it’s meant to blackmail or intimidate Eritrea.”

Indeed, regret they will those who have miscalculated and opted to avail their power in the service of those who have deluded themselves and their subjects to conquer even time when time is not on their side. Regret they will those who have not yet appreciated that Eritrea has long opted to be part of the “New Global Century”.



Respectfully Yours,

Haileab Luul Tesfai

Toronto