

Eritreans in Oakland (California) Celebrate Independence Day with Zeal

By: Elias Amare

19 May, 2012

Oakland, CA -- Over One-thousand Eritreans in Oakland and surrounding area of bay Area, California, gathered at the Richmond Civic Center to celebrate Eritrea's 21st Independence Day tonight. On 24 May 1991, freedom fighters of the Eritreans People's Liberation Front (EPLF) militarily defeated the Ethiopian colonial occupation army in Eritrea and totally liberated Eritrea. Every year on the week of May 24th Eritreans all over the world celebrate this special day in their history.

To help in the Eritrean Independence Day celebration, Eritrean legendary singers, Bereket Mengisteab and Tareke Tesfahiwet, traveled all the way from Eritrea and played alongside the Eritrean band, Selam, from Seattle to their popular tunes. In the next few weeks the duo of Eritrean singers, Bereket and Tareke, will be traveling across the US to play at Independence Day Celebrations of Eritreans across the country.

The Oakland Independence Day celebration held a week ahead of Eritrea's official independence Day, May 24th, was celebrated in high spirit and zeal. Under the banner of "Our Independence is our Dignity" the thousands of Eritreans in the Bay Area danced the night away to commemorate the 21st anniversary of Eritrea's Independence .

"Today is a special day for us Eritreans, because this is the day we celebrate our freedom which was achieved at high cost", said Ms Dehab Gebremeskel of Santa Rosa.

"I am happy being here, celebrating our Independence Day with my compatriots," said Mr Abedela Sifaf of Oakland.

One of the organizers of the Independence Day celebration, Mr. Berhane Kassa, said that Bay Area Eritreans have gathered today to celebrate Eritrea's independence with confidence and dignity. "We are 100% behind the government and people of Eritrea, and we are ready to fulfill what is required from us."

When legendary musician Bereket Mengisteab started off on his popular tune "Diaspora Eritreans, you are always connected to your homeland wherever you are" the dance floor was packed with young and old diaspora Eritreans alike, who demanded an encore to his song.

Kifle Kidane who read a poem titled "It's for your love, Eritrea", said that Eritreans have a deep love for their country and will do anything to preserve its independence and sovereignty.

Most of the participating Eritreans expressed their dismay at the US's misguided policy and hostility towards their homeland Eritrea, and called for a positive and constructive engagement by the Obama

administration which is urgently needed in the Horn of Africa region. They voiced their collective anger at the unjust and unfair UN sanctions against Eritrea, and called on the US to push its ally Ethiopia to abide by the international court ruling of the Hague and evacuate from sovereign Eritrean territory which it is currently occupying.

Eritrea, a country of five-million in the Horn of Africa, fought one of the longest and most bitter wars of national liberation against a bigger neighboring country, Ethiopia, to finally win its independence on 24 May, 1991. In 1998 Ethiopia, under the ruling minority regime of Meles Zenawi, unleashed another war against Eritrea which ended in 2000, with a total loss of hundreds of thousands of lives on both sides.

The two countries signed a US-sponsored peace agreement in Algiers in December 2000. Based on this peace agreement, the contentious border issue was resolved by an arbitration court at the Hague, whose ruling was supposed to be "final and binding". The court awarded Badme and other contested areas to Eritrea in its "final and binding" ruling of 13 April 2002. Ten years after this international court ruling, Ethiopia still occupies sovereign Eritrean territory. On 15 March earlier this year, Ethiopia unleashed another provocative attack against Eritrea.

Alazar Abrahm, an Eritrean-American peace activist, said "Eritrea is always for peace in the Horn Africa." Mr. Abraham further elaborated, "We are actively engaged in advocacy and lobbying efforts to highlight to our representative in Congress that the US should play a more constructive role in the Horn of Africa. The US should listen to Eritrea's perspectives and play a balanced and just role to bring peace to the region."

There are an estimated 100,000 Eritreans living in the United States. Throughout the 30-year war of independence, these diasporas Eritreans have supported the struggle of independence in their homeland, and still maintain strong ties with their motherland. Every year, thousands of Eritreans from the diaspora travel to their homeland and contribute to the nation-building development projects currently underway in Eritrea.

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