Freedom Comes Neither Freely Nor Cheaply

**(A Tribute to Our Martyrs)**

By Haile Habtegaber

The 20th of June is one of the sanctified dates in Eritrea’s annual national holyday calendar. It is a day when we venerate and pay tribute to our martyrs for the most precious gift they gave us – a free sovereign Red Sea country called Eritrea. On this occasion, it is incumbent upon every patriotic Eritrean to pause for a moment and reflect on the true meaning of this day. When one hears the incredible stories of bravery and deeds of the young women and men (not exclusively young), it is hardly possible to comprehend the extent to which they were selfless and focussed **only and only on one thing** – the liberation of Eritrea. This writer has witnessed in person while in prison this selflessness, defiance and perseverance of the Tegadelti to withstand torture and hideous maltreatment. It was a harrowing experience but this Tegadalay did not hesitate to give his life and as I learned later he did as he was hanged by the brutal Derg regime of Ethiopia.

The story of two heroes Jemil Hassen and Mekonen Tadesse as movingly narrated in this link (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WU-1dxw8jhw>) also fittingly illustrates the extraordinary bravery and stoicism of Tegadalti Hizbawi Ginbar. It is a remarkable story to listen and true to their character these two young men did not return alive and the last word of their obituary is self-immolation. That is what Eritrea has costed.The Tigrigna quote ‘’ሓርበኛ ኣይነብርንዩ ታሪኹዩ ዝውረስ’’ truely epitomizes the life history of these good patriots who passed as best women and men and such is the backdrop to the commemorations of our Martyrs’ Day.

We as people who aspired to determine our fate and destination were denied by powerful regressive forces from establishing our own nation state unlike the rest of other colonized territories subsequent to the extrication from colonisation. Nonetheless, and not withstanding this misfortune, the Eritrean people were not deterred from realising their dream of founding a country by which they can define and identify themselves as free people to engage the world. They fought a fight uniquely singular and won to make the independence of Eritrea a reality. Inevitably this has costed the people of Eritrea immeasurable loss of their best souls not least the destruction and opportunity cost of time, resource and economic progress.

Our freedom was not manna from heaven. That much is true. It is therefore on this day 20the June, Martyrs’ Day, that we remember, honour and salute each and every one of our heroes and heroines for their sacrifice on behalf of every Eritrean alive today and those yet to be born. Generations will pass but Eritrea will remain for eternity and the memory of these gallant Hizbawi Ginbar Tegadelti and every Eritrean who was murdered for being an Eritrean and she/he who gave her/his precious life for the birth of Eritrea will also remain synonymous with name Independent Eritrea for ever.

The passing of time therefore cannot and should not diminish our respect and honour for our fearless patriots. For those of us older than Independent Eritrea, we know what it means to live under occupation and be treated as second class citizen in your own country. Perceptibly we can appreciate how Eritrea’s independence was achieved. But for the younger generation since they know only independent Eritrea, they may take it for granted. It is therefore critically important that they are helped and encouraged to actively take part in Martyrs’ Day commemoration activities so that they become cognizant and compassionately connected with the history of their ancestral land and the price that has been paid.

Equally our flag deserves our reverence and respect in equal measure because it cannot be separated from the martyrdom of our Tegadelti. Yet we have seen individuals who disgracefully denigrate the Eritrean flag and disparage our revered Tegadelti. Clearly these are not even traitors but twisted, damaged and pure mercenaries doing dirty enemy work for hire. Equally, it is baffling to see others who display the flag of the federation period and associate it with Eritrea- a none exsitent country. Are we missing something here? What does this mean? No clue , explanation please! Never mind these group of people are irrelevant gone astray beyond the horzon. They ought to unlearn and learn a lot.

 And finally, as we perform the commemorative candlelight event, let us remember and recognize with deeper and solemn reflection that our Martyrs Day is our unifying day that bequeathed on us all our beautiful country with its beautiful flag. Let us proudly march forward inspired by the legacy of our martyrs and actualize our multifaceted aspirations.

Eternal Glory to Our Martyrs

Long Live Eritrea Libre.