

# EASE SELF RULE AND GOVERNANCE POLICY

“Isaamoh Xiniiy-Agat Kee Agattiinnah Gar Daabisenno”

## A. Introduction

For centuries the Afar nations have been self-governing themselves autonomously and practicing their indigenous customary laws and self-rule in accordance to their own unique legal systems called, ‘Madqa’.

The Afar societies in the region have been organized into independent territories, each ruled by its own Sultanate, Sheikdoms and Clan system. When conflict arose between Afar and neighbouring tribes and nations over territories and resources, Madaa was enacted to resolve conflicts and peace treaties were signed.

The Afar political and cultural systems have survived foreign occupations, colonial rules by Othman empire and Italian invasion. Internally, it continues to survive occupations and changing of powers and military aggressions.

The indigenous Afar are heavily attached to their land and their environment. They continue to practice their distinct culture and traditions, their way of life as indigenous pastoralist. Their unique economic pursuits and sustenance consists of animal husbandry, livestock raising and trade, small scale farming, fishing, salt extraction in the coastal areas.

Afar are Sunni Muslims. Some historians credit the introduction of Islam into Africa, as a continent, starting in the Afar region at a place called “Mideri” and near Dahlak Islands. When the companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBOH) fled from Makkah, Saudi Arabia, after persecution, they arrived in some areas of Afar territories where Islam was mixed with their indigenous traditions.

The Afar coast of Dankalia in Eritrea is approximately 40,000 square kilometers in size, and has over 1000 km of coastlines. Danklia is not interloped by other Eritrean ethnic territories.

During Eritrea’s independence struggle, The Afar Eritreans joined hands with their fellow Eritreans from all walks of life, regions and ethnic background and sacrificed their lives and struggled for more than 30 years to eventually realize Eritrea’s right to self-determination to finally become a sovereign state. However, a new tyrannical regime brought horrors, atrocities and depravities to the region marking the saddest story in the history of the Afar and modern history of the Horn of Africa. The country was turned into a repressive, murderous police state.

The current regime in Eritrea continues serious human rights violations against ethnic Afar citizens with arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, mass killings, rapes and forced labour. As a consequence of this, the Afar people declare their will to restore their political freedoms and protection for their human rights. The Afar Eritreans mandated EASE (Eritrean Afar State in

Exile) to represent them in the struggle for their rights to self-rule and self-determination inside a unified Eritrean federation of states.

## **B. Background**

The world doctrines and great empires have either directly or indirectly affected the Afar people's political will. This is because the Afar homeland is positioned in strategically very important and significant geo-political location in the Horn of Africa, which emanates from Eritrean Afar coast to Bab-el-Mandab. This has been the cause of various religious, repressive and colonial wars as well as conspiracies of the colonial powers from which the Afar people have suffered physically and morally. In particular, and historically, any force or power with the ambition to control either the Ethiopian Plateau, the Water Tower of the Horn of Africa, or the Western Red Sea coast, started by invading at initial instance the hostile Afar land and attacked its people. Thus, the Afar people who were exposed to various doctrines and world outlooks had to confront the Persians, Turks, Abyssinian Highland Feudal Lords and European colonial aggression.

1867 the Sultanate of Awsa fought a decisive battle against Muzinger Expedition (Swiss Envoy of Khadive Ismael of Egypt); 1925 – 1931 war of resistance and liberation fought by the Sultanate of Biru (Grifo) against the Italian Colonial ambition and several battles fought against the Turkish and Egyptian infiltrating forces from the port of Massawa. Countless battles fought against the aggression and invasion of the Abyssinian Highland Feudal Lords along the northern and southern escarpment throughout the history of the Afar people residing in the lowlands adjacent to the highlands of the Ethiopian plateau. In 1935 resistance was put up by the Afar tribesmen in the Middle Awash against the invading Italian colonial army from the Italian Somaliland to conquer Ethiopia and continued to resist the Italian occupation joining hands with other Ethiopian patriots.

### **Beginning of Italian Colonization in Dankalia**

In 1869, a piece of land located near the coastal city of Assab in Dankalia, was rented by the Rubattino Shipping Company from Sultan Ibrahim, one of the Afar clan leaders, to be used as a coaling station for naval vessels as the area was located in strategic coast on the red sea, and it coincided with the opening of The Suez Canal, one of the world's most heavily traveled shipping lanes connecting the Mediterranean and the Red seas.

The Italian Empire took over the ownership of the commercial contract between Rubattino shipping company and the Afar sultan Ibrahim. The Afar people understood that Italy's intentions were to expand and colonize the whole Afar Region. The Afar people in the south Dankalia started its resistance against the Italian occupation. This battle was led by Sultan Haysama Ahaw and his son Sultan Mohamed Haysama. The battle continued to the days of Sultan Yassin Haysama. After a long struggle by Sultan Yassin Haysma, Girifo was defeated in 1931; the young Afar Sultan was killed in his hometown of Bidu at the age of 39, during a fierce

fight with Mussolini forces. In 1882, the Italian rule was able to control the entire Afar territories in Dankalia, and subsequently the rest of Eritrea.

### **British Custody**

In 1941, British and allied forces defeated Italian forces at Keren in Eritrea. This terminated Italian rule and brought British administration to the colony until 1952. Stephen Longrigg, who served as the British Military Administrator between 1942 and 1944, considered Eritrea as an “artificial unit”. Longrigg thought that “the interests of the inhabitants of the territory” should be “the first consideration” in deciding disposition of the colony; and accordingly recommended partition.

Longrigg suggested that Muslim tribal areas adjoining the Anglo Egyptian Sudan should be included in Sudan. Afar Dankalia, from Assab to Arafali, should be joined to Ethiopia. The central Christian highlands should form a united province of Tigray under Ethiopian sovereignty, but administered by a European power for some years. Longrigg concluded: “Eritrea would cease to exist.”

Longrigg’s partition proposal was displaced by American and British concerns. UN General Assembly Resolution 289(IV) of 1949 established a Commission to investigate the disposal of Italy’s colonies, taking into account “the wishes and welfare” of the inhabitants of Eritrea, “the interests of peace and security in East Africa” and the “rights and claims of Ethiopia.”

### **Federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia in 1952-1962**

In 1949 the UN established a Commission of Inquiry to finding out what Eritreans wanted for their own future. However, the eventual decision in 1952 was made on western suggestion which is based on geographical strategic reasons to become a federate with Ethiopia.

In 1962, against the expressed will of the people of Eritrea, mainly, the afar representatives in the Eritrean Parliament, Mohammed Omar Akito, who refused to be the part of Ethiopia, However, by the support of the majority highlanders from Tigregna and Saheel lowlands Members of Parliaments the federation of Eritrea was dissolved and formally declared to be 14th province of Ethiopia.

### **The Afar Struggle in Eritrea**

The coast of Dankalia was the birth place of Eritrean liberation struggle against Emperor Sellassie’s Feudal regime of Ethiopia, alongside their Eritrean brothers to ensure equality,

ethnic diversity and democratic rights. The Eritrean Afar heroes and thinkers like Mohamed Omar Akit, Ibrahim Shehem and Ahmed Ahaw were the pioneers of Eritrea's liberation struggle.

During the early 60's and 70's the Eritrean Afar were the faces of Eritrean resistances against occupation. Martyrs like Idris Gumhed, Yassin Abdalla, Musa Rashid Gaas, Ali Company, Ali Gafo, Mohamed Usman, Dinin Ismail, Ahmed Hilal, to mention a few, were the leading military commanders not only in Dankalia but extending to Samhar. The Afar participation was the turning point for the liberation struggle and gave the ELF much needed access to the sea and supply routes.

### **Short lived Autonomous Afar Rule of Assab in 1988**

(from Ras Damera to the Gulf of Zula including the Islands)

The struggle of the Afar people was partially crowned by the formation of the Assab Autonomous Region which was a product of social consciousness and sacrifices of the Afar people and also an event recorded in history as the first legal political right the Afar ever obtained to administer their own affairs in their localities through democratically elected parliament. This Parliament de facto ceased to function because of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front's (EPLF's) military occupation.

### **The Situation of Afar after Eritrean Liberation**

Today, the Eritrean Afar are being mass displaced, mass murdered, their resources exploited, their social- economic way of life has been annihilated, their distinct identity and history is under threat and unrecognizable.

The current Eritrean regime is removing the Afar from Dankalia and colonizing the area with others. In order to remove the Afar, the regime is using mass murder, rapes, kidnapping, political assassinations, and extrajudicial killings of the Afar leadership.

In addition to violent persecutions, the Eritrean government has deployed systemic policies to destroy Afar identity, their indigenous customary laws, their traditional economies, confiscating Afar livelihood and properties.

The Afar leadership has filed numerous Human rights complaints against the State of Eritrea with the United Nations Human rights council, the UN SR and the commission of inquiry in Eritrea.

In May 28, 2013, The United Nations Special Rapporteur Ms. Sheila Keetharuth on the situation of Human Rights in Eritrea, in her report to United Nations Human Rights Council concluded "The Afar are forced into displacement from their indigenous lands In Eritrea", the report found that the current Eritrean regime has been systematically targeting the Eritrean Afar people with "extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and rape" in order to "force [them] the Afar into displacement from their traditional territory" along the Red Sea. The United Nations Human Rights Council unanimously adopted the SR's findings and Report.

### **Eritrea Government's policies are existential threat to Afar people**

The government of Eritrea has committed cultural genocide against the Indigenous Afar. The recent United Nation's Commissions of Inquiry report the Eritrean government accountable for crimes against humani and crimes of persecution of Afar in Eritrea.

In JUNE 8, 2016-The UN Commission of Inquiry on human rights in Eritrea (COIE) finds that Eritrean officials including President Isaias Afwerki, have committed the crime of persecution, a crime against humanity, against Eritrean Afar population since 1991.

COI Reported in Para- 295, stated "The Commission also has reasonable grounds to believe that Eritrean officials have intentionally and severely deprived Eritrean Kunama and Afar of fundamental rights contrary to international law on ethnic grounds. The Commission has corroborated evidence that the Afar and Kunama were targeted, at a minimum, in the period between 1998 and 2001. It has also received uncorroborated information that both ethnic groups were persecuted during other periods as well, and that such persecution persists".

The Eritrean Afar leaders currently in exile acknowledge the graveness of Afar situation and the catastrophic situation requires immediate humanitarian intervention by the international community and the legal framework must take into consideration Minority and Indigenous Rights to prevent the Afar's cultural and social extinction. Eritrea can no longer continue to implement or apply policies that disproportionately marginalize Indigenous groups economically and socially, or that exclude them from the process of political decision making.

### **The Will of Afar People "The Samara Declaration"**

Based on the violations and ethnic cleansing that have occurred to the Eritrean Afar, those that survived the violence that's happening in Eritrea and are able have been exiled to the neighbouring Ethiopia, Djibouti and Yemen.

In 2010, Eritrean Afar refugees in Ethiopia gathered together with Eritrean Afar Diaspora in Ethiopia, Eritrean Afar political opposition leaders, elders and cultural leadership, Eritrean Afar Women Organizations and Eritrean Afar Youth League made a declaration as follows:

We, the Eritrean Afar People, the Eritrean Afar diaspora, the political and the military leaders of the Eritrean Afar, Eritrean Afar elders and Cultural leadership, Eritrean Afar Women's Organizations, Eritrean Afar Youth League and the Afar Refugees from our homeland in Eritrea, assembled in Conference today of 1,500 people together declare to the World the solemn will of the Afar People as follows:

- 1. WE REAFFIRM the Principles of the Samara Declaration to which the Leaders of the Afar People solemnly committed in Samara on 26 July 2010;***
- 2. WE CONDEMN the Murder, Torture, Rape, Disappearances, Expulsions, Forcible Confinements and Aggression against our Afar People in our ancestral homeland in Eritrea;***
- 3. WE EXTEND OUR HANDS to our brother and sister nationalities in Eritrea to establish with them a liberal democratic federation based on the principles of Freedom, Autonomy and Equality for all nationalities;***

4. ***WE NOW DECLARE that it is the solemn will of the Afar People to participate in a reformed Eritrea on the basis of these principles:***
- a. ***The rule of law;***
  - b. ***Democracy;***
  - c. ***The equality of each nationality;***
  - d. ***That each nationality shall exercise the rights of self-government and self-determination in a federated autonomous region;***

## **C. EASE will deliver an Afar made solution for Afar Eritreans**

Our two pronged Self Rule policy calls for:

- Reinstating Indigenous Afar Self Rule in Dankalia
- Introduce Ethnic Federation for Eritrea

### **1. Re-Instating Indigenous Self Rule**

The Eritrean Afar identity has evolved with its own distinct cultural, distinct way of life and traditions and indigenous values and beliefs systems since the time immemorial. As indigenous people, the Eritrean Afar must define their self determination and their rights to self rule model based on their indigenous identity, their long established history and self governance in their territories based on their customary laws.

This collective perspective represents [the will of Afar](#), the indigenous rights to self rule to leverage the development of Afar political system, cultural diversity and economic institutions as collective assets of Afar Indigenous systems.

Our policy charts a new beginning for the Eritrean Afar People that will guarantee their autonomous self rule over their societies, control over their land and resources, rights to economic development, carry out their day-to-day economic activities, resolve conflicts in Dankalia's territories and promote the diversity of Eritrea while advancing nation building and democracy in Eritrea.

Afar indigenous self reliance and traditional economic pursuit, their long established customary laws and their way of life have sustaining their identity from being wipeout the Afar in Eritrea. Our people are of the most persecuted minority ethnic groups in Eritrea.

### **2. Introducing Ethnic Federalism in Eritrea**

Our policy calls for Ethnic Federalism in Eritrea. Eritrea is a deeply diverse nation. The current Eritrean regime agenda is racist and is systemically designed to destroy the

unity of Eritreans and its social fabric. It is designed to subdue the smaller and weaker nationalities into one super nationality.

The concept of Eritrea as “**One Heart-one people**”, “**Hade Libi, Hade Hizbi**”, the current mantra of the Eritrean government must be abolished. Unity without recognition of diversity is a recipe for prolonged conflict and insecurity. Eritrean Afar people are bearing the brunt of Eritrean regime’s assimilation agenda and are being stripped of their identity which has evolved historically as self-conscious and a strong self-sustaining nation in the region.

#### The Regime in Asmara is Unsustainable

However invincible the regime might think of itself or the use of violence to suppress the dissent to maintain power grip over Eritrean societies, the change is inevitable. The suffering is simply too great to continue. The statuesque is simply unsustainable. The regime’s ideology driven politics and excessively centralized policy is incompatible with a deeply diverse nation like Eritrea. Many of those inner circles who were once the diehard supporters of Afwerki’s regime are now fragmented. The Asmara regime is running out of steam. Like many tyrannical regimes in Africa and in the Middle East, Asmara is vulnerable to sudden political shock.

Inclusive and sustainable policies must be devised to protect the society and the nation from enraging in prolonged conflicts, insurrections and even the breakup of the state in the aftermath of the regime’s collapse.

Eritrean Afar people are ready for a Multi-Ethnic Federalism in Eritrea where its ethnic identity, recognition and self-governance as a people is preserved at the federal government level. Though minority in Eritrea proper, the Eritrean Afar are still make up the majority in their traditional homeland of Dankalia, constituting more than 88% of local population.

Ethnic federations have proven to work in Africa and elsewhere in the world formations and nationalities much larger and more diverse which have succeeded in maintaining their national unity and sovereignty.

***Samara Declaration: That each nationality shall exercise the rights of self-government and self-determination in a federated autonomous region; the equality of each nationality; that each nationality shall enjoy the right of self-determination up to and including the right of secession;***

#### Rule of Law

Eritreans from all walks of life, regions and ethnic background sacrificed their lives and struggled for more than 30 years to eventually realize their right to self-determination to finally become a sovereign state. However a new tyrannical regime brought horrors,

atrocities and depravities to the region marking the saddest story in the modern history of the Horn of Africa — and the history of the AFAR. The country was turned into a repressive, murderous police state.

Eritrean Afar people are calling for the building of a new foundation for Eritrea. A strong future for Eritrea is built on laws that free its citizens and protect them. The rule of law empowers its people and enables them to be masters of their own destiny. The security of the people guarantees growth and continuity.

***Samara Declaration: That no conviction shall occur except by due process of law; That the people of all nationalities shall be secure in their persons, shall be free from arbitrary search, seizure, arrest, detention, and charge; That the judicial branch shall be independent and secure in its tenure;***

## Democracy

The authoritarian PFDJ regime declares that the country shall be ruled without a democratic governance nor will it have free elections for the next forty years. The future of Eritrea is dependent on establishing a new democratic governance that is based on political independence of its national stakeholders, the sovereignty of all of its states with respect of their cultural and ideological beliefs and aspirations.

The framework of the new democratic governance to secure true Eritrean national unity should be based on the rule of law, justice and equality, with respect to all Human Rights including the right to development, and overall commitment to a just and democratic society for development.

In order for these demands to be met, Eritrea needs to politically remodel itself towards a power sharing system so that Indigenous groups can achieve their rights and “aspirations for self-determination and self-rule, their territorial integrity, their right to develop their own resources to eradicate poverty and hunger, and an equitable power sharing with the other Eritrean nationalities.” A power sharing system has proven to be the only political system which fosters stability in pluralistic and deeply divided African societies.

The future of Eritrea is dependent on establishing new democratic governance that is based on political independence of its national stakeholders, the sovereignty of all of its states and respect of their cultural and ideological beliefs and aspirations.

The framework of the new democratic governance to secure true Eritrean national unity should be based on the rule of law, peace and security, respect for all human rights including the right to development, gender equality and overall commitment to a just and democratic society for development.

The authoritarian PFDJ regime declared the country will be ruled with no democratic governance or free elections for the next forty years.

Eritrean Afar of Eritrea demand a democratic system to achieve their indigenous rights and aspirations for self-determination and self-rule, their territorial integrity, their right to develop their own resources to eradicate poverty and hunger, and an equitable power sharing with the other Eritrean nationalities.

The new Afar state is committed to the country's democratic institutions and its security to safeguard the Eritrean national cohesion under a representative leadership maintaining Eritrean diversity and democracy.

***Samara Declaration: That each nationality shall, through the governments that they freely elect, have the right to own and control their lands and resources including surface and sub-surface resources, sea coasts, fisheries and air space and shall enjoy the profits there from under conditions established by law.***

### Autonomy

The Eritrean government continues to commit serious human rights violations against ethnic Afar citizens including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, mass killings, rapes and forced labour. The Afar region (Dankalia) has been divided into two parts without their consent and renamed by the present regime as southern red sea zone and northern red sea zone.

Governments across the globe condemn Eritrea for its human rights records including the U.S. State Department, the E.U. and the A.U. which have all unanimously condemned the ongoing violation of human rights in Eritrea.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has recently placed two sanctions on Eritrea for exporting instability and terrorism into the Horn of Africa.

Eritrean Afar people in Eritrea and the refugees in neighbouring countries along with the Afar diaspora are announcing the formation of an alternative, sustainable, federated and autonomous Afar State of Dankalia in Eritrea. This is a key step in the delivery of national salvation for Eritrea.

EASE in exile vows to create a new Afar state within a liberal democratic federation of Eritrea based on the principles of freedom, autonomy and equality for all nationalities.

***Samara Declaration: That each nationality shall exercise the rights of self-government and self-determination in a federated autonomous region; That the rights of freedom of religion, conscience, political opinion, expression, assembly, equality, mobility, association and liberty shall be guaranteed; That Afar refugees that the refugees of all nationalities of Eritrea who have fled Eritrea shall have the right of return to their homes and properties in Eritrea and to Eritrean citizenship; That all Afar People shall have the right of return to their ancestral homeland in Dankalia and to have Eritrean citizenship; and That***

***Dankalia shall have its traditional borders restored to those to which the Afar People enjoyed in 1991.***

#### National Unity and Sovereignty of Eritrea

Eritreans from all walks of life, regions and ethnic backgrounds sacrificed their lives and struggled for more than 30 years to eventually realize their right to self-determination to finally become a sovereign state. What a distant dream that was.

The current Eritrean Government and the ruling clique (PFDJ) have used Eritrea's national unity and sovereignty as a pretext to marginalize, subjugate and suppress the legitimate grievances of smaller nationalities wanting to preserve their rights to self-determination and self-rule under a national framework. In some quarters of Eritrean population, the present regime and its policies are accepted as preserving national unity when in fact other nationalities and other quarters in Eritrea consider them illegal and demonizing. Democracy is about more than elections; it needs to address the concerns of all citizens and ensure that the voices of all Eritreans are heard and represented by their government. How could the regime justify the exploitation of Eritrean Afar and the property, territory and resources of Kunama, Saho, Nara and other smaller nationalities in the name of national unity?

Unitary structure is discriminatory and a threat to the very heart of promoting pluralism and diversity amongst all Eritrean nationalities as well as a threat to Eritrea's sovereignty and the peace and stability of the entire region.

Contrary to distorted propaganda by the regime, Eritrean Afar people consider themselves an integral part of Eritrean society. While each nationality shall enjoy the right to self-determination up to and including the right of secession, ***Eritrean Afar State in Exile (EASE) and Afar People are not a secessionist movement.***

EASE is committed to the sovereignty and unity of Eritrea.

EASE rejects the false notion and fear-mongering against Eritrea's Border States under the guise of nation-building and Eritrean nationalism.

EASE will play its part to protect the nation's interests, unity and sovereignty provided the reformed Eritrea is founded on the principles of genuine democracy, equality of all nationalities and respect for self-rule, human rights and dignity of Eritrean Afar people and all Eritreans.

***Samara Declaration: WE EXTEND OUR HANDS to our brother and sister nationalities in Eritrea to establish with them a liberal democratic federation based on the principles of Freedom, Autonomy and Equality for all nationalities;***