



NTT on GiE Final Assessment

January 31, 2023

1. In March 2021, a small volunteer group of Eritreans formed the National Task Team on Government in Exile (NTT on GiE) and wrote a Concept Note on the path forward for Eritrea.
2. The Concept Note envisioned the following:
 - a. Consolidation of the myriad of the exiled Eritrean political organizations into two mainstream blocs (Bloc 1 & 2)
 - b. That the two blocs would be differentiated only on **political principles** that have been irreconcilable throughout decades of opposition activism, as it pertains to future governance in Eritrea. In addition to personal conflicts and lack of organizational discipline that are common to all exiled opposition groups, the issues that have caused the splintering of Eritrean opposition organizations into dozens of ineffective groups are differing visions of Eritrea: unitary vs decentralized State; a State with official vs working language policies; a State that focuses on individual vs group rights; validators and invalidators of the 1997 constitution; reformed vs traditional land policies, as well as definition of citizenship itself.
 - c. NTT-on-GiE sees these differences not as threats to Eritrea, but a sign of its political maturity that would lay the political platforms in pluralistic Eritrea.
 - d. That these two blocs, as well as one additional bloc of civil society organizations, would hold organizational congresses, and elect representatives to a Consultative Council, who would then form an Executive Council (i.e. government in exile), composed of 9 technocrats with specialties in International Relations and Diplomacy; Economic Reconstruction and Development; Finance (Treasury); Information; Social and Humanitarian Affairs; Transitional and Constitutional Affairs; and Security and Safety.
 - e. The focus on this structure was to enable Eritreans to best focus on areas they can contribute in and direct the discussion and action towards activities that would quicken the pace of change.
 - f. Government in Exile would be the highest form of organization, speeding up the change in Eritrea. Once the illegitimate government of Isaias Afwerki is removed, the mandate of GiE would end. Its members would be citizen-stakeholders, with equal rights and duties, just like any Eritrean citizen, who may or not participate in transitional government.

3. In summary, the idea of the GiE was to address two issues that should be foundational questions for any organization that claims to be an “Opposition”: how do we bring about change in Eritrea, and what does change look like?

4. The initial reaction to this proposal, as measured by surveys conducted by Setit Media as well as social media comments, and responses from Eritreans who had never been involved in politics or activism, was very positive. To build on this momentum, NTT had a dozen outreaches to Eritrean media, influencers, civil society and political organizations. Based on extensive outreach with all, here is a summary of their input:

- a) The criteria for Bloc 1 and Bloc 2 was not sufficiently clear to the stakeholders with many saying that there is a great deal of overlap between the principles of both.
- b) Some who clearly understood the criteria for Bloc 1 and Bloc 2 as distinct historical schools of thoughts mainstreamed in Eritrean political views, associated them with Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF) civil war era, and saw it as an unwelcome return to a painful era.
- c) Even cadres and veterans of the Schools of Thoughts denied that they believe what they had espoused in their political programs and literature.
- d) Some individuals whom the NTT envisioned as future members of GiE either preferred to be news analysts and seminar organizers or, shockingly, had developed sympathies for organizations that NTT considers an anathema to Eritrea’s national interest.
- e) Even when they were able to overcome this mindset, and clearly saw themselves as belonging to either Bloc 1 or Bloc 2, they did not approach the issue with the urgency it required and chose to focus on their small organizational agendas already set.
- f) Some of those who were expected to be equal partners in this endeavor saw themselves as the vanguard organization that should naturally assume a leadership position on GiE.
- g) Some preferred formation of an “umbrella organization” rather than a “government in exile” which they saw as unworkable and/or not likely to be recognized by any nation.
- h) Some chose to resuscitate their own version of government-in-exile.
- i) Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the War in Tigray, Ethiopia polarized Eritreans into two even more irreconcilable camps. Some saw the TPLF as strategic ally for change and decided supporting it was the quickest means to change; others saw the hands of TPLF and its “handlers” in everything, including GiE and opted to jump to the embrace of the ruling party, notwithstanding the reality that the regime has still not accounted for the tens of thousands of Eritreans it has exiled, disappeared or holds in detention without a day in court.

4. NTT had its own missteps that contributed to the slowing down of the momentum:

- a) It was not able to recruit volunteers who were publicly known and were diverse enough to represent Eritrea’s plurality (ethnicity, gender, etc.) and put our people at ease.
- b) It did not conduct the necessary social media outreach to explain its position and allowed others to define it.

5. Considering all of the above, NTT finds it necessary to re-assess its campaign and poses the following questions to itself and those who supported the initiative:

- a) Was there a flaw in the premise that all Eritrean opposition organizations could be consolidated into two blocs? And if so, on what basis? If not, how many blocs should there be?
- b) Why was a war in neighboring Ethiopia capable of being the sole political gravity that drew the attention of Eritrean opposition to the exclusion of everything else? Related to that: what is the core national interests of Eritrea, keeping in mind its multi-ethnic identity?
- c) Do Eritreans have a common narrative on who their friends and foes are?
- d) What has been the role of social media and activists in the paralysis of Eritrean politics?
- e) How do external factors—the emergence of China, Turkey, UAE, KSA as power brokers—influence the politics of our region?
- f) What, if any, should the next steps of NTT be after it conducts its assessment:
 - i. a think tank focused on preparing white papers for Eritrea.
 - ii. an organization focused on the urgency of having a government-in-exile given the fact that the government-in-power continues to gamble with Eritrea’s national interest.
 - iii. re-writing a new concept note to incorporate the lessons learned from the previous 18 months.
 - iv. Dissolution.

6. With the war in Tigray winding down, NTT on GiE believes that Eritreans are ready to focus on these questions and continue the long-stalled dialogue on how to bring about change in Eritrea, and articulate what we, as a people, envision governance (people to people, people to government contract) in post-Isaias Administration Eritrea.

7. A “government-in-exile” is just a means of organizing: the objective remains removing 30+ years-long stranglehold of authoritarianism and warmongering from Eritrea. And those who pursue the objective with the seriousness it deserves, with the recognition that Eritrea is a plural society with all citizens having equal rights, will always remain our comrades and can count on our support. The issues we identified about the illegality and illegitimacy of the PFDJ government have not changed; thus, we Eritreans have no choice but to struggle to change it. No dictatorship has changed without a push. Our struggle may or may not yield change; not struggling is guaranteed to perpetuate the atrophy.

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