

The Establishment of Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) and The Beginning of Armed Struggle

Written by Winta Woldeyesus

After the official establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) in Cairo, many of the students who were prohibited from various educational opportunities in the country and majority of the political leaders in the country went to Cairo, Egypt in exile. In 1960, Ato Weldeab Weldemariam, Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem and some 300 Eritrean students were in Cairo.

Sheikh Ibrahim Sultan and Idris Mohammed Adem were traveling and campaigning to Far East countries to continue the movements they started in the homeland and Ato Weldeab Weldemariam got an opportunity to speak in Egypt's local radio and called on all Eritreans to fight for the liberation in their country in 1956. However, even though they were all working for the liberation of the country, their varying stances on various issues prevented them from working together.

As a result Idris Mohammed Adem and some of the students in Cairo established the Eritrean Liberation Front, in July 1960. Idris Mohammed Adem, Idris Osman Gelawdewos, Mohammed Saleh Humed, Seid Hussein Adem, Mohammed Ali Akte, Taha Mohammednur and many others joined together to form the Eritrean Liberation Front and declared that the movement is an armed struggle against Ethiopian colonialism. The above mentioned individuals were also elected as the executive committee of the front. Idris Mohammed Adem as the chairman and Idris Gelawediwos were elected as the vice- president of the front.

In the following year, Osman Saleh Sabe from Jeddah joined the committee upon the request of Idris Mohammed Adem. On arrival, Sabe called for the abolishment of the executive committee and since he had some knowledge of foreign affairs, both Idris Gelawediwos and Idris Mohammed Adem accepted his request and dissolved the committee. After that Idris Mohammed Adem and Osman Saleh Sabe entitled themselves as the leaders of the Eritrean Liberation Front.

Despite their efforts to establish an armed movement, these leaders were among those who had sub national sentiments as propagated by British and Ethiopian colonial forces in a bid to create division among different Eritrean ethnicities. They did not share the political outlook of a unified Eritrea as was being promoted among the Eritrean people with the establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Movement (*Haraka*). They were highly influenced by religious and regional affiliations.

The leaders of the Eritrean Liberation Front also didn't have the desire to work with Eritrean Liberation Movement (*Haraka*) and as a result Idris Mohammed Adem and Osman Saleh Sabe were traveling to various Arab countries to find financial and material support. But there wasn't any aid coming from outside and later the leaders were advised to start the armed struggle before hand and then ask for support. Idris Mohammed Adem traveled to Sudan and recruited Eritrean soldiers who were serving in the Sudanese Army. Later, through the support of his brother residing in Agordat and another prominent religious leader, Mohammed Adem met Hamed Idris Awate, who already had an experience in armed combat. Upon the request of the Eritrean Liberation Front, Hamed Idris Awate began the armed struggle for Eritrean liberation by firing the first shot.

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