



What a year it has been for the world. We saw increasing insecurity in countries formerly known for their safety, growing climate change, deepening economic crisis, expanding emerging markets at the expense of some larger powers, growing global migration that has surpassed World War II levels, deepening despair in the Middle East, emerging of newly elected US President, passing of Cuban Revolution figure Fidel Castro and the list can go on. Eritrea, also, had a quite unforgettable year in 2016, a combination of challenges and success stories.

After the New Year's celebration and the Geez Christmas in early January, Eritrea was quickly immersed into events, diplomatic work, conferences, new agreements, and reforms, with everything culminating in the silver Jubilee anniversary of Independence Day. In today's first issue of the year, let's look at Eritrea in review of 2016 through its major headlines, particularly related to cooperation, divided into two parts, you already looked at the review of the first half of 2016 on our last issue and today, Eritrea profile presents its second and final part.

- **July, celebrating the youth and the intellectuals simultaneously...**

After a turbulent June, July was a quieter month for Eritrea. While in the middle of the heavy rainy season, to the delight of Eritrean dwellers, we transitioned to the time of festivities in the diaspora in different parts of Europe and North America. Here in Eritrea, the 29th round of Sawa's 12th graders came to an end and was celebrated in zeal under the 7th Eri-Youth Festival organized by the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) as it is a tradition every two years. This year's festival celebrated Eritrean youth with more than 20,000 participants, including the diaspora gathered in the hub of the Gash Barka region for four days.

Meanwhile, throughout the rainy season, graduations flew one after the other throughout the whole season while youngsters from high school engaged themselves in community services known as Maetot, a 10 years-strong summer program aimed at preserving the environment as well as enhancing a sense of ownership and civic duties towards youth nationwide.

COMESA also delivered a follow-up workshop to key stakeholders and policy makers on money laundering and illicit financial flows in the capital city. Meanwhile, Eritrea continued its diplomatic

journey by attending the UNESCO World Heritage Committee in Istanbul, Turkey, followed by the 27th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union in Kigali, Rwanda in which Minister Osman Saleh delivered a statement. In terms of investment and cooperation, a high-level government delegation went on a working visit to China to discuss and negotiate issues of trade, investment, mining, infrastructure, housing, agriculture and human capacity building. Coinciding with the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in Beijing, China, the Eritrean delegation led by Hagos Ghebrehwet, Head of Eritrean Economic Affairs and the National Mining Corporation, took part in the event.

Soon after the national festival, the International Conference on Eritrean Studies (ICES) took place at Asmara Palace between the 20th to 22nd of July. Participants including international scholars, representatives of international institutes, government officials, and members of the diplomatic corps, public intellectuals and students gathered together for this unique event to share their ideas and experiences through various panel discussions and papers presented on a range of topics related to Eritrea.

- **August, displaying Eritrea's cultural treasure and harmony...**

The beginning of August continued to celebrate the youth with the commemoration of International Youth Day marked in Asmara under the umbrella of NUEYS and the UN Development Program (UNDP) through workshops and discussions with one aim to have an "Eritrea Free of Poverty by 2030".

As it is the tradition since the first years of independence and the Bologna Festivals held during the struggle, Eritrea hosted Festival Eritrea in the Asmara Expo grounds for ten days filled with cultural performances, shows, exhibition stands, food and beverages and a bazaar to fulfil everyone's taste, especially children. Under the theme of "Festival: the Foundation of Unity and Diversity", combined with the heavy rainfall, this year's festival was another reflection of Eritrea's cultural heritage and harmony.

August was also significant in Eritrea's politics with the cabinet of ministers meeting on August 11th and 12th. During the cabinet meeting, all ministers presented their report, action plan and way forward for the year 2017. In his paper, President Isaias Afwerki focused mainly on the development of general education, stabilizing the balance of payment, revising the monetary policy, trade and industrial policies as well as ensuring the capacity and cleanliness of government institutions.

The month of August was one in which the nation strengthened and built new diplomatic relations. As such, Minister Osman Saleh held talks with Netherlands counterpart, Mr. Bert Koenders to develop constructive diplomatic engagement and mutual cooperation. Soon after, talks with Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida were held in Nairobi on fostering bilateral relations during sideline of Tokyo International Conference on African development.

- September, observing history and holy days...

September 1st, a day remembered by all Eritreans since the beginning of the armed struggle, was celebrated in Eritrea for the 55th time. For the occasion, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) stated that, "the people of Eritrea were compelled to resort to armed struggle in 1961 to assert their inalienable national rights when all the vigorous legal, peaceful and political endeavors that they conducted in the 1940s and 1950s, in the heydays of Africa's decolonization, were singularly ignored by the UN and the international community at large".

A week later, it was time to celebrate the holy days of Kudus Yohannes (or St. John), gathering at Bahti Meskerem Square to celebrate the Geez New Year, the beauty of the harvest season and most commonly known through the tradition of the bonfire or the torch. This year's uniqueness is that another holy days was celebrated at a similar time: Eid Al-Adha followed by 'Meskel' or the "finding of the true cross". All holidays were vividly celebrated this month at Bahti Meskerem Square giving a festive feeling to local citizens.

On the other side, events continued with the 12th YPFDJ North America Conference in Washington DC, gathering hundreds of Eritrean youth under the theme of "Reinforcing Professional and Economic Contribution of the Youth for Sustainable Development and Strengthening International Relations". The South Sudanese branch of YPFDJ, on its side, held its first congress on September 25th.

At home also, conference on literacy in line with International Illiteracy Eradication Day was conducted while "Tourism for All" was the motto of this year's International Day of Tourism celebrated for its 22nd time in the country.

Great diplomatic achievements were achieved this month with the signing of cooperation

protocol between Eritrea and Germany as well as the meeting between Foreign Affairs Minister and Former UN Secretary General Ban-Ki Moon by month's end.

September also closed with Eritrea receiving the EPI Award for outstanding achievement in expanding the program on immunization by the WHO and UNICEF. Additionally, the 13th Eritrean Military Sports Competition officially opened on September 1st ending in October 29 in the city of Keren where nine Eritrean Defence Force (EDF) sports clubs took part.

- **October, and more public diplomacy...**

While Eritrean students at both the master's degree and PhD levels took part in a scholarship program to Russia in various fields of study from medicine to engineering, World Food Day was marked at the Hamelmalo College of Agriculture putting greater focus on ensuring food security and encouraging even greater achievements.

October, sadly, was remembered for the month that we saw the passing away of one of Eritrea's greatest diplomats and former fighter, Ambassador Girma Asmerom, on October 5th. Nonetheless, the diplomatic world continued with UNHRC's EXCOM meeting in Geneva attended by Ambassador Tesfamichael Gerahtu while President Isaias Afwerki embarked on a diplomatic trip to UAE, holding talks with Sheik Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan on enhancing bilateral ties between the two countries.

Diplomatic effort continued with the Assembly of the AU on Maritime Security, Safety and Development in Lome, Togo on October 15th. Eritrea was busy at the UN with a side event organized in collaboration between both Eritrea and Finland Permanent Missions, Finn Church Aid, UNDP and NUEYS calling for "Youth leadership in Peace and Security".

Also, the Eritrean delegation attended the 28th ordinary session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in Gambia. The presented report highlighted the legal and institutional framework, policies and programs implemented. Simultaneously, another event was organized at the UN in New York entitled "Mainstreaming Human Rights through Partnership" and Mr. Yemane Gebreab, Presidential Advisor, addressed the UNHCR third committee at the Interactive Dialogue in which he underlined that, "We favor dialogue, engagement and cooperation. Unfortunately, the policy of seeking to isolate and undermine Eritrea has limited our role. It has also deprived the Horn of Africa of the positive

contribution we would have been able to make”.

The diaspora community also continued its public diplomacy as well as conducted annual assessment meetings such as the conference of the National Union of Eritrean Women (NUEW) in Europe between 25 to 30 October.

- **November, between visits and sport victory...**

Indeed, Eritrean sports have been at the forefront of this year with multiple victories, greater international participation and medals or cycling jerseys won. To strengthen this, the gold winner of the Beijing World Championship, Ghirmai Ghebreselassie, continued to impress his fans by becoming the youngest person ever to win the New York World Marathon on November 6. Mr. Ghirmai was well celebrated by the Eritrean community in New York on this special occasion.

The month of November was also a busy one regarding diplomatic work. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Arefaine Berhe attended and headed the Eritrean delegation at the Third Africa-Arab Ministerial Conference on Agricultural Development and Food Security. Minister Osman Saleh participated at the Climate change Conference COP22 in Marrakesh, Morocco followed by the Africa- Arab summit in Equatorial Guinea.

Adding to these, Minister of Information, Mr. Yemane Ghebremeskel, participated at the EU-initiated joint conference on issues regarding Eritrea at the European Parliament in Brussels under the theme “Eritrea – Opportunity for Development”. The event provided the opportunity to stress constructive engagement and cooperation, as stressed by Member of the European Parliament Brian Hayes. Meanwhile, Minister Yemane, on his part, outlined Eritrea’s national policies for sustainable economic development and plans for multilateral and bilateral partnerships.

At a regional level, President Isaias Afwerki received credentials of six ambassadors including the UK and Northern Ireland, Qatar, Italy, Israel and France before embarking on a visit to Egypt to hold talks with Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al- Sisi. The leaders called for boosting bilateral relations and cooperation between both countries, including fisheries, agriculture, livestock resources, trade and investment.

Once again, the Somali-Eritrea Monitoring Group (SEMG) continued to overstep its mandate and released a new report, stating— yet again—there was no evidence of Eritrean support of Al-Shabaab. The report led to the passing of Resolution 2317 (2016), drafted by the UK mission, extending the mandate of SEMG for reasons that few can understand. Attempting to reclaim national history in the voice and authorship of Eritrean, the well-accomplished and esteemed historian Almesged Tesfay published “Eritrea: From Federation to Occupation and Revolution” as his final installment of his Eritrean history trilogy. The book launch was well inaugurated with an eager, important crowd gathering at the Expo-Hall and making his last long awaited book the first of his series.

- **December, commemorating international days**

Alongside internationally recognized days of remembrance, Eritrea, each year, has placed great emphasis in commemorating international holidays that help forward national development initiatives. As such, on December 1st, Eritrea commemorated World Aids Day for the 23rd time through banners in major cities, awareness slogans disseminated and an official ceremony held on the premises of the Orotta National Referral Hospital hall under the theme of “Let’s Stand United to Control HIV/ AIDS”. Simultaneously, The UN in Eritrea and the Government of Eritrea signed a new partnership agreement, the Strategic Partnership Cooperation Framework for 2017- 2021 while commemorating UN Day at the NCEW hall on December 1st. Government bodies, members of the diplomatic corps and the UN family were among the participants. The launch of the new SPCF reflects the ongoing and strengthened relations between the government and the UN Country team in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as well as the Africa Union Agenda 2063.

With the passing of revolutionary Fidel Castro, the Eritrean delegation attended his funeral in Cuba while statement on migration was delivered at the Council of the International Organization for Migration in Geneva by Mr. Nebil Said Idris.

President Isaias Afwerki, on his part, received and held meetings with Mr. Mamadou Talla, Special Envoy of the President Macky Salla of Senegal at the State Palace to discuss future cooperation between the two countries.

Following these events, the International Day of the child, as well as the Disabled, were officially celebrated in great zeal without failing to recall World Diabetes Day allowing stakeholders to

take a stand and assess the situation in Eritrea. December 9th was Human Rights Day and Minister Osman Saleh stated on that day “the Eritrean Government commitment and responsibility to advance human rights to its people. It will also strengthen its engagement and cooperation as well as join the collective effort to address the emerging crisis in the global human architecture”.

Civil society groups within the diaspora also took the time to end the year with an assessment meeting and work plans for 2017 in all corners of the world. December 12th marked the history of global Mekete with the peaceful demonstration held in London, UK by more than 1,500 Eritreans and friends of Eritrea calling for the respect of Eritrean sovereign territory, the end to Ethiopian occupation and the end to unjust and illegal sanctions against Eritrea.

To beautifully end the year 2016, the application dossier presented to the UNESCO World Heritage to include Asmara won the 2016 Royal Institution British Award (RIBA) for Research. The dossier was supported with more than 1,300 pages of photographs depicting Asmara’s historic buildings and became 2016’s award winner. While at the Asmara Palace Hotel, Prof. Betty LaDuke, a longtime friend of Eritrea made the donation of her artistic work under the aegis of the Commission of Culture and Sport, an exhibition depicting her art and Eritrean history were shown to the public.

The chilly weather of the winter season did not stop dwellers to go out and enjoy time with closed ones or long lost friends to celebrate an end of year with joy. Streets and homes were all decorated with the shiny colors of the holiday season. On the eve of 2017, youngsters rushed to the free concert on Bahti Meskerem Square, while elders enjoyed a meal and coffee while watching EriTV live before hugging each other at the ringing bells of midnight while clubs and bars were full to the delight of their owners.

Looking back at Eritrea’s activities throughout the year 2016 allow one to analyze, assess and realized the numerous challenges and development made. A reflection of the past to start the new book by filling each of the 365 pages it contents.

- With the beginning of 2017, let me wish a prosperous year in peace for Eritrea, Eritreans and friends of Eritrea!