

No One is Entitled to Infringe on the Unity of Irob People!

As is stated in its objectives, IRAA is an advocacy group founded to promote the interests of the Irob people, in particular, and those of the Ethiopian people, in general. Hence, it is its duty to speak out whenever the Irob people's rights are violated. Accordingly, IRAA is obliged to release this statement in light of the Ethiopian prime minister's interview with Assena, an Eritrean opposition radio station.

Since the 1998 Eritrean invasion of the region, the existence of the Irob people as an undivided entity in the Ethiopian setting is being threatened. This danger overtly started in 1998 when the Eritrean Armed Forces invaded and occupied part of the Irobland. Understanding the consequence of the occupation, the Irob people had gallantly resisted the invading Eritrean forces that were equipped with tanks and artilleries. The Irob militia had heroically fought for days on the battlefields of Aiga, Maychia and other localities defending its homeland. Initially, the militia managed to repel the invading forces. But, due to a lack of any backing from the Ethiopian government, the invading Eritrean forces eventually succeeded in occupying the region. They stationed themselves in Irob-land for two long years and engaged themselves in destructive acts. In those two years, rape, desecration of holy sites, abduction of citizens, destruction of all sorts of development plans, demolishing schools, extrajudicial killings, deforestations, expropriating private and public domains, etc. were the daily routines of the invading force. Citizens were abandoned and left on their own without any internal or external assistance. They were forced to live in caves and bushes. The communities' social fabrics were intentionally dismantled. The losses and destructions witnessed in the whole war zones are enumerable and the extent of damage done is incalculable. The only journalist, a VOA reporter, who coincidentally happened to be in the area at the time, was ordered by the Ethiopian authorities not to report on the events and to leave the area immediately. Hence, Ethiopians and the world community at large were unaware of the heinous crimes perpetrated by the invading Eritrean forces.

At the initial stage of the conflict, the US and Rwanda had presented a peace plan to both Ethiopia and Eritrea to help avoid further escalation of the conflict. Unfortunately, the proposal which would have saved many lives, properties and the environment was instantly rejected by the Eritrean regime. Although the initial peace proposal did not succeed, the then OAU continued with the endeavor of the peaceful resolution of the conflict and came up with a framework agreement and the modalities for its implementation. The fate of this proposal was no different than the previous one as it was again rejected by Eritrea. Ethiopia had no option left but to evict the invader from its territories by force.

Hence, after two years of preparation, the gallant Ethiopian defense forces waged a war on all fronts against the occupying army and in no time the enemy started fleeing in total disarray. Within less than 12 days, the enemy army was not only evicted from the Ethiopian territories, but was driven to the gates of Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. The regime in Eritrea was encircled by the Ethiopian armed forces and it was on the verge of total collapse. The military victory was not without costs. Although no official data is available, the sacrifices sustained by both sides are immense.

However, for reasons still unknown to the Ethiopian public, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia suddenly declared a unilateral cease fire and told the Ethiopian armed forces to withdraw from the strategic posts it occupied deep in Eritrea. Thus, the advance of the Ethiopian armed forces was stopped and the regime in Asmara was saved. Not only was it saved, but it was also allowed to be a party on equal footing to sign the so-called "Framework Agreement and the modalities for its Implementation" in Algiers. Through this shameful agreement, the invader was made a winner of the cause it lost on the battleground.

The signing ceremony was hosted in Algiers, and the process of ceding sovereign Ethiopian territories to Eritrea was signed between PM Meles Zenawi and the Eritrean president Isayas Afewerki. The lives lost in defense of Ethiopian sovereignty, the displacement of our citizens, the environmental and structural destruction Ethiopia sustained were left to be dealt with by the so-called claims commission established under article 5, paragraphs 1-18 of the same agreement (see the award on: http://www.pca-cpa.org/showpage.asp?paq_id=1151 ruling). The human and material losses sustained by the Irobs and other Ethiopians who were invaded and lived under the occupation of the

Eritrean Armed Forces is incalculable and going to Hague with the invader that had lost the battle on an equal footing is totally incomprehensible. Thus far, no government in world history had entered into such a disastrous deal that betrays its own citizens and cedes its territories to an enemy that had been driven out from one's sovereign territory it invaded.

The arbitration commission established through the Algiers Agreement illegally rewarded the Ethiopian territories secured by the Ethiopian defense forces to the aggressor and the Ethiopian government agreed to cede huge part of the Irobland and some other Ethiopian sovereign territories. On paragraph 4.85 of this deplorable ruling of the bogus commission, we read the following statement:

“Even so, the commission is unable to draw from this the conclusion that it should vary the 1900 Treaty line so as to include the whole of the Endeli Projection within Ethiopia. The commission has noted that, in general, the impact of Ethiopian administrative activity has been weaker, and the impact of Eritrean activity stronger, in the northern and western fringes of the Endeli Projection, and that therefore Ethiopia has not established its effective sovereignty to the required degree over those areas. The Treaty line should therefore be varied so as to place only the more southerly and easterly parts of the Endeli Projection in Ethiopia.”

In this statement the phrase “...in general, the impact of Ethiopian administrative activity has been weaker, and the impact of Eritrean activity stronger, in the northern and western fringes of Endeli projection...” is a phrase worthy to cite. Because the places depicted “northern and western fringes of Endeli projection” are integral parts of Irob. They had never been other than Ethiopian territories in the geopolitical history of the region. These territories have been always under Ethiopian sovereignty, including during the period Eritrea was under the Italian occupation. Thus, the Italians had no jurisdiction whatsoever on these now ceded Ethiopian territories. Hence, it is inexplicable why the Ethiopian government could not bring the necessary evidences showing strong Ethiopian administrative activities, such as court cases, tax records, etc. concerning the mentioned localities. On the contrary, how the Eritrean regime managed to present evidence showing strong “impact of Eritrean activity in the area” that had never been part of Eritrea is a mystery. Otherwise, it must be a total fabrication of the commission. Hence, when we scrutinize these absurdities, we honestly suspect the Ethiopian government's complicity in trading our territories for some obscure political objectives.

On the date The Hague ruling was pronounced, the foreign minister of Ethiopia, Mr. Seyoum Mesfin, publicly announced the “triumph Ethiopia booked” in The Hague ruling. However, a few hours afterward, his deceit was revealed and Ethiopia's loss to Eritrea became a glaring fact. Since then, Ethiopians from all over the world had called upon the Ethiopian government to declare the Algiers Agreement NULL and VOID. But the call fell on deaf ears and the government continued with its misleading tactics of claiming that no Ethiopian territory is delimited to Eritrea while knowing in depth which territories had been ceded. The Ethiopian government even made a futile attempt to convince the Irob people to agree to the appalling decision of The Hague.

In the interview he gave in Tigrigna to an Eritrean opposition radio called Assena, the PM of Ethiopia made it very clear that his government is ready and willing to negotiate the demarcation of these borders with Eritrea. He also said that he accepts the delimitation decision of The Hague without any precondition. The Prime Minister emphasized the word “normalization” a number of times in his interview. Are we being told to barter our territories for the sake of normalization? IRAA calls on Prime Minister Melles Zenawi to address these concerns properly and transparently. Ethiopians are not ready to give an inch of their territories to secure an obscured normalization with Eritrea.

In his interview, the PM was bold enough to call the names of Eritrean villages he says have been delimited into Ethiopia and to express his lament for that while being inhibited to call the name of a single Ethiopian village let alone expressing any defense for their citizenship right. However, after years of wrangling and deceptive behaviors, now the PM announces his readiness to trade our territory for the so-called normalization. We are not against normalization, but normalization among nations emanates from the interests that they have among them. Normalization should not be correlated with the ceding of one's territories. It should be made to benefit citizens of

both nations on an equal basis. The proposal forwarded by the PM regarding the sovereign Ethiopian territories does not satisfy the national interest of Ethiopia.

The PM's statements have very much trivialized the territories ceded to Eritrea. His concern does not include the vast Ethiopian areas and the citizens residing in those territories. His only concern seems to be, as he puts it, the dissection of a single house or a church into two. For Irobs, this is a slap in the face. As could be witnessed from the maps below, Irobs are not talking about single houses. The talk is about the whole Northern Irob consisting of many densely populated hamlets and villages such as Aburta, Adaagena, Ad'daga, Adogabo, Ado-Nago, Aftih, Angara, Awda, Ayeeha, Dadoh, Da(t)'ggarab, Dalawot, Denay, Enguraele, Gaabihar, Gafanat, Garassa, Haahayti, Haidile, Hambokale, Herra, Hido, Kaarima, Kafna, Karankar, Koora, Madaba, Maera, Makata, Mariyayto, Massidage, Maytsia, Miblaehakale, Mugullay, Sabatit, Serekle, Yunga, etc. and many fertile villages such as Agarali-Boho, Araato, Dire, Islamto'da, Kerensasa, Koora, Quololmishela, Tinkeito, Wankabo, etc. from western Irob have been awarded to Eritrea as well. We are talking about an area accommodating more than one third of the Irob people. These citizens are authentic Ethiopians by birth and by choice and there is no power to dispose them from their citizenship rights. To the contrary, they need a government that can help them protect their choices and rights.

Mr. Prime Minister, the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia article 33 paragraphs 1 & 2 stipulates the following:

(1) No Ethiopian national shall be deprived of his or her Ethiopian Nationality against his or her will. ..."

(2) Every Ethiopian National has the right to the enjoyment of all rights, protection and benefits derived from Ethiopian nationality as prescribed by law.

Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, the constitution has it right. Hence, in line with paragraph (1), the Irobs residing in the areas absurdly delimited and virtually demarcated to Eritrea should not be deprived of their Ethiopian citizenship against their will because of a couple of lawyers sitting in warm chairs in far away Europe who do not know anything or did not care to know anything about the geopolitical history of the region. The citizenship right, at least according to the long tradition of the region, cannot be seen separate from the territories they inherited and reside in. No right of citizenship shall be considered respected without the respect of the territory where the citizens reside.

In accordance with paragraph (2), every Ethiopian national has the right to the enjoyment of all rights, protection and benefits derived from Ethiopian nationality as prescribed by law. Hence, the government of Ethiopia has the obligation of protecting the Irob citizens residing in the areas illegally delimited and "virtually demarcated" in Eritrea. That protection will not have any meaning unless the principles of territorial integrity are otherwise adhered to.

Therefore:

- 1. IRAA calls upon the Ethiopian government to unequivocally declare that the Ethiopian territories enlisted above will remain secure, and no Ethiopian territories will be ceded to Eritrea or to any other nation for that matter.*
- 2. IRAA calls upon the Ethiopian Government to recognize and work for the release of the more than 100 Irob abductees suffering in the dungeons of Eritrean prisons for more than 12 years now.*
- 3. IRAA invites Irobs in particular and all Ethiopians in general to challenge the Ethiopian government to defend Ethiopian citizens and Ethiopian sovereign territories. Moreover we appeal to all Irobs, whatever political views or affiliation they may have, to come together in preserving undivided Irob as an integral part of the Ethiopian nation as it has always been.*
- 4. IRAA calls upon all Irobs and Ethiopians to pressure the Ethiopian Government to recognize the abducted Ethiopian citizens and work for their release.*

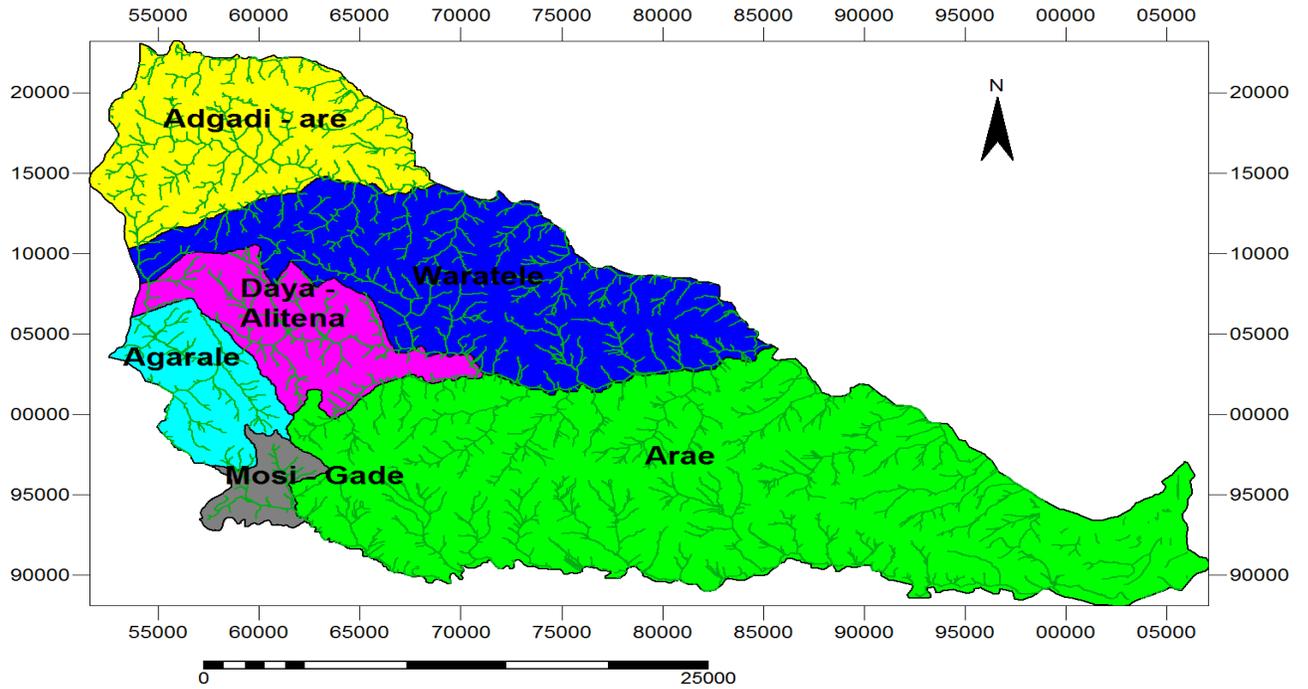
Moreover, to let our readers get a picture of the landmass ceded to Eritrea, we hereby are attaching two maps of Irob-land. From these Maps one can see the difference between the authentic map, MAP 1, and the one which shows the virtual demarcation done by the so-called Eritrea-Ethiopia Border Commission (EEBC), MAP 2.

IRAA (Irob Rights Advocacy Association)

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MAP 1: MAP OF IROB

Tabias of Irob District



The map shown above is the legitimate map of Irob-land and is inserted to help as a point of reference, so that the reader can easily identify the illegally ceded territories.

MAP 2: TERRITORIES CEDED TO ERITREA AS PER THE VIRTUAL DEMARCATION

The area that has been illegally delimited and virtually demarcated to Eritrea is the area specified by the bold black boundary and it is about 15,983 hectares.

The total area of Irob-land is about 93,000 hectares. Hence, the area illegally given to Eritrea (15,983 hectares) is about 17% of the Irob-land. Please see the map bellow.

