

**INTERVIEW OF MOHAMED SAID BARE
MEMBER OF THE EPLF CENTRAL COMMITTEE
BY THE
NORWEGIAN TELEVISION NETWORK (NRK)**

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Q How long will it take before Eritrea is completely liberated?

A There can not be a time table to decide the date of independence. It all depends upon the progress and development of the revolution in Eritrea. But after having liberated more than 80% of the land and the recent liberation of major towns in the northern province, it is easy to guess that the total independence of Eritrea is not far away.

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Q I suppose this means that the urgency for unity is increasing day by day. What are the prospects of uniting the movements in Eritrea?

A The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front has from early 1972 until now stood and strongly advocated for a unity of the movements. But it must be a principled unity. When we speak of unity we speak of eradicating the differences between us through a united front and not just unite while the basic differences exist. However, at present the prospect for unity is encouraging. Representatives of the EPLF and the ELF will discuss the question of unity on their meetings of 21st and 25th. (it doesn't tell the month but he must be referring to the same month the interview took place.)

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Q What, Mohammed Said Bare, will happen if independence is achieved and unity is not there?

A It is difficult to predict that there can be independence without unity. But it is not impossible. It can happen. Our hope and objective is to bring unity and independence. We are quite aware that independence requires strength and strength requires unity. Independence will be achieved only after the occupation army of the Dergue is crushed. However the EPLF does not view unity only as instrument to achieving independence. It is a long process to achieve unity based on equality not only of the combatants of the two fronts but of all the ethnic groups and nationalities that make the Eritrean state.

4

Q The liberation movements claim that the Ethiopians have mistreated and exploited the Eritreans. Just in what way have this been done?

A Ethiopias occupation of Eritrea is illegal and its claims of Eritrea as part of Ethiopia is unjustified. The relationship that exists is one of colonizer and colonized. So when the Eritrean people stood up against the aggressor and demanded their right to self rule, Ethiopia responded by mass massacre, napalming villages, torturing and imprisonment upon identity. There is as well a coordinated program to suppress the Eritrean economically, culturally and socially. Ethiopias treatment of the Eritreans is full of barbarous crimes and brutal atrocities. As a result tens of thousands of our people find themselves dispersed all over the world.

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Q What are the aims of this revolution and what principles is this revolution based?

A Our revolution is one that achieves its objectives stage by stage. We are now in a national democratic revolution. It aims to abolish the oppressive colonial system in Eritrea and establish on its ruins a genuinely independent and free people's democratic state that represents the interests and safeguards the democratic rights of the masses. To this effect, our national democratic revolution strives to unite all classes which oppose the Ethiopian occupation. Its first objective is the attainment of national independence.

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Q In newspaper reports the EPLF is frequently referred to as a leftist or Marxist-Leninist movement. It is obviously dangerous to press such label on a movement seeking the help of many governments, but to what extent is there truth in this description?

A Much is said to distort the nature and the direction of our organization. Our front is a democratic one that in theory and practice, staunchly opposes imperialism, colonialism and all types of suppression and discrimination. We call this a national democratic struggle.

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Q The other major movement the ELF is also carrying out a revolution along the side the liberation struggle. Is there any difference in the way of approach and ideology between the EPLF and the ELF?

A There are major differences between the ELF and the EPLF. If there were no differences they would not be two fronts. This is self-explanatory.

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Q What then is the difference between the two?

A Practically, the two fronts have in certain cases different national and international outlook. This will take us back to the history of the movement. When the armed struggle began in 1961 it was led by feudal lords who were in exile. Instead of uniting and correctly leading the oppressed masses of Eritrea against their enemy, the leadership further divided and created discord among the people by using backward religious and tribal lines. To keep themselves in power they even assassinated many progressive elements who tried to bring change in the leadership. It is the democratic force, in opposition to the feudal leadership of the movement, that separated and formed the EPLF. Ever since the birth of the EPLF, the Eritrean revolution has taken its correct path to achieving national independence and liberation.

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Q With the increased arms shipment to the ELF, isn't there a danger that the ELF will gradually become strong and wipe out the EPLF?

A It is only the level of political consciousness of our people and fighters that can stop unnecessary bloodshed. The liquidationist program of the ELF leadership from 1972 until the end of 1974 had badly hindered the advance of

the revolution in all aspects. It was the people and the fighters who stopped the civil war. Since our people are now fully conscious and fully participating in the struggle I do not expect a civil war will take place again.

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Q The EPLF is never mentioned as the enemy of the Ethiopian revolution. Only the ELF. Does it mean that you are willing to cooperate with the Ethiopians and perhaps I am thinking in terms of federation.?

A Divide and rule is not a strange tactic in the Eritrean history in general and the movement in particular. All the Dergue is doing is to magnify and subsequently exploit and differences in the movement and among our people on backward sentiments. True to their nature, The Dergue left no stone unturned to create suspicion and division among Eritreans. They even taint us with fabricated lies to isolate us from our supporters in the outside world, As far as the EPLF is concerned nothing short of total independence is acceptable.

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Q Do you see any possibility left for a peaceful negotiated settlement with Ethiopia. Or the decision is to come in the battlefield?

A Our front, whenever possible, believes in negotiated settlement. But it has to be genuine. The Dergue's proposal of " peaceful solution " is not designed to assure the legitimate national rights of the Eritrean people. It was a conspiracy to swindle and confuse the Eritrean masses so as to isolate and crush the revolution. The condition for negotiated settlement is the recognition of the Eritrean people's right for self determination. And all negotiations have to be conducted on the international forum of the United Nations.

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Q After independence, what kind of relation will you have with Ethiopia. For instance will Ethiopia be able to use the ports of Massaua and Assab

A As far as we are concerned there is no reason why the two neighboring countries should not have good relations. We do not overlook the existence of mutual interest in commerce and others. But this can be possible only when one recognizes the rights of the other. No contract or pressure can be made.

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Q Will independent Eritrea join the Arab League after independence

A Eritrea is an African country. It has a distinct history and geographical boundaries. It is historical reality of its people's identity and the geographical consideration that determines which group or league it should be a member of. Such claims and allegations have on several occasions been made by opportunists to suit their political wishes and use it as a means of getting support.

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Q But still the former leading personality of the EPLF, Osman Saleh Sabbe says Eritrea is an Arab homeland and that the war in Eritrea is a religious war of Moslems against Christians. Do you agree to this?

A This is a complete fabrication. All these lies said by Sabbe are to help him bridge a strong relationship with reactionary Arab countries, who are interested in religion and not the liberation of man. The struggle in Eritrea is between the colonizer Ethiopia and all the peoples of Eritrea. On the other hand. Ever since the formation of the EPLF, the Eritrean revolution has known its friends and its enemies as head of the foreign mission, Sabbe had made statements incompatible with EPLF principles. All his claims have been denied and finally kicked out of the organization.

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Q Finally, Mohammed Said Barre, how can the international organizations and the international community help bring about a solution in Eritrea?

A At present our main task is to prove to the world that our struggle is a just one. The people of Eritrea has been subjugated to forceful annexation and oppression. This reality has been hidden to the outside world by the notorious totalitarian Haile Selassie and by his predecessors. Once the history of our people and the justness of our struggle is brought to the knowledge of the peace and freedom loving countries, the Eritrean revolution will get the necessary political and material support. Recognizes the rights of the other. No contract or pressure can be made.

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