

DEAR FRIENDS: (Ladies and gentlemen) (Comrades)

First, I would like to express my gratitude to the Amnesty group in general and Mr. Peter Gilsvik in particular, for organizing this meeting. Furthermore, I would like to discuss the long war of national independence in Eritrea by giving a chronological order of events that led to the present situation.

#### ASHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A glance into Eritrea's past history will help us to understand better. Eritrea is an African country situated in the Horn of Africa with a population of 3,500,000 and with an area of 125,000 sq.kilometers. Because of its strategic location by the Red Sea coast, successive colonizers have tried to control it partially or totally since ancient times.

In the 15th century, the Ottoman Turks and the Portuguese controlled part of the lowlands of Eritrea and made the shores of the Red Sea into harbors for supply stations. Later, the Egyptians pushed the Turks away from the coastal areas until they themselves were expelled by the Italians in 1882. The Italians completed their control in 1889 and called the area Eritrea. Italy exploited Eritrea's natural wealth and labour power and began to turn Eritrea into a base for further expansion in the region. Italy ruled over Eritrea until its defeat by the Allied Forces in 1941, at which time Eritrea was put under British "trusteeship" until the big powers decided on the question of self-determination for ex-Italian colonies.

After ten years of British Administration, the big powers could not agree as to how to settle the question of self-determination of the former Italian colonies and referred the case to the United Nations. The United Nations, while granting independence to the other ex-Italian colonies, eg., Italian Somaliland and Libya, decided to "federate" Eritrea with Ethiopia against the expressed wish for independence of its people. After ten years Ethiopia unilaterally and in contravention to U.N. Resolution 390 (v) of 1950 abrogated the federation and in 1962 made Eritrea one of its provinces.

#### ERITREA: A COLONY SINGLED OUT FOR THE DENIAL OF INDEPENDENCE

In 1950, the General Assembly of the United Nations, in reaffirming the rights of peoples and nations to self-determination as a fundamental human right, called upon the Economic and Social Council to request the Commission of Human Rights "to study ways and means which would assure the right of peoples and nations to self-determination". In that same year the General Assembly passed Resolution 390 (v) under which the Eritrean people's demand for self-determination and independence was sidetracked, and a "federation" with Ethiopia imposed upon an unwilling Eritrean people.

The following year the General Assembly decided to include in the International Covenants on Human Rights a provision which stated that "all people shall have the right to self-determination". Again in 1952, at its Seventh Session the General Assembly adopted a resolution in which the rights to self-determination was declared as a prerequisite to the full enjoyment of all fundamental human rights and that every U.N. member shall respect that right. That same year U.N. Resolution 390 (v) which "federated" Eritrea with Ethiopia came into effect, ushering in another era of struggle for the Eritrean people.

The Eritrean people were thus denied the same rights that the United Nations repeatedly affirmed as a universal principle. The cause of this denial was linked to the strategic and geopolitical interests of the United States of America and some of its Western allies. U.S. interests coincided with those of Emperor Haile Selassie who coveted Eritrea's material and skilled human resources, as well as access to the sea. U.S. policy was thus wedded to the idea of meeting Ethiopian claims over Eritrea for strategic interests in Eritrea, all in violation of the principle of self-determination, and the demand of the Eritrean people. There is now ample documentary evidence to prove this. Those strategic and geopolitical interests dictated the terms of Resolution 390 (v) and mis-shaped the destiny of a nation.

ETHIOPIAN VIOLATION OF THE U.N. RESOLUTION

When the Imperial Ethiopian Government started violating the terms of the U.N. Resolution, notably in the areas of suppression of national languages and cultures and violation of fundamental human and political rights, and ultimately unilaterally abrogating the "federation" scheme, declaring Eritrea a province, the then U.S. dominated United Nations failed to sanction Ethiopia for its violation of international law. All attempts made by Eritreans seeking United Nations intervention were not heeded.

In view of these violations, the Eritrean people were left with no alternative but to take up arms. Indeed, Eritrean resistance had continued throughout the federation period (1952-1962) expressing itself in demonstrations, strikes and many other forms of civil disobedience - but all within the bounds of the law. When the Ethiopian Government became lawless the Eritrean resort to arms acquired double legitimacy.

ERITREA IS SQUARELY A U.N. RESPONSIBILITY

The Eritrean armed struggle was a last resort taken in the face of the United Nations' failure to sanction Ethiopia for violations of the terms and conditions of the United Nations Resolution. This failure followed an earlier and more fundamental failure by the United Nations to allow the Eritrean people to exercise their right to self-determination freely and without external interference. That basic failure was accompanied by a failure to provide clear and adequate remedies in the event of violations of the terms and conditions of the Resolution and laws based on it.

In view of this history of failure and also generally in its overall responsibility for peace and security, the United Nations has a special responsibility in Eritrea. Over and above the universal principle of self-determination, the case of Eritrea merits special consideration. The United Nations, which by failing to honor its own resolution, implicitly recognizes the right of the Eritrean people to wage their struggle in the only way possible, is now - and has been since the beginning of the violation of its resolution - under an obligation to translate the legitimacy of the Eritrean people's struggle to practical legality. To be more precise, the United Nations must openly and unequivocally recognize its past failure and recognize the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination and independence.

A significant juridical step has been taken in that direction by the Permanent Peoples Tribunal. The Tribunal heard the case of Eritrea in Milan, Italy from May 24-26, 1980. Basing itself on the Charter of the United Nations, U.N. Resolution 390 (v), I5I4 (xv), and 2625, and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples of July 14, 1976, and taking into account the determined struggle of the Eritreans, the Tribunal gave a consultative declaratory judgement which marks a legal breakthrough for the Eritrean case. In its judgement, the Tribunal declared (1) that the Eritrean people do not constitute a national minority within a State, but instead possess the quality (status) of people in the sense of the law of nations and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of People; (2) that such an identity of the Eritrean peoples stems from its resistance to Italian colonial rule and recognition of this identity by U.N. Resolution 390 (v), as well as its continued resistance to foreign domination since then; (3) that the Eritrean people's right to self-determination is inviolable and inalienable, and that the historical and ancient ties alleged by Ethiopia are not sufficiently proven and cannot in any case present an obstacle to the right of self-determination; and (4) that the United Nations has a responsibility to take up the Eritrean question on two grounds; (a) its responsibility of maintenance of international peace and security, and (b) its obligation to guarantee the respect of the right of peoples to determine their own destiny.

The Organization of African Unity is similarly reminded of its duties by the Tribunal. The Tribunal judged that the Ethiopian Government's violation of the U.N. Resolution and its final abrogation resulted in causing the Eritrean people to submit to foreign domination in the sense of the law of nations and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Peoples. This, the Tribunal declared, has created a unique case in Africa, which is distinguishable from a case of secession.

The United Nations and the Organization of African Unity face a double obligation and a historic challenge in the Eritrean case.

THE PRESENT SITUATION

IN THE LAST FEW YEARS A GENOCIDAL WAR HAS BEEN RAGING INVOLVING LARGE-SCALE USE OF NAPALM, DEFOLIANTS AND ANTI-PERSONNEL CLUSTER BOMBS AMONG OTHER DEADLY WEAPONS. THE PRESENT PREPARATIONS OF THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT WHICH INCLUDES THE USE OF LETHAL NERVE GAS COMES IN THE WAKE OF THE UTTER FAILURE OF SIX LARGE-SCALE OFFENSIVES INVOLVING SCORES OF THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS. THE FAILURE OF THESE OFFENSIVES IS, ON THE ONE HAND, PROOF OF THE DETERMINED AND DEVELOPED NATURE OF THE ERITREAN PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT SHOWS THE DETERMINATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT AND ITS SOVIET BACKERS TO USE ANY MEANS TO MAINTAIN THEIR OCCUPATION OF ERITREA.

THE ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT IS STOCKPILING LETHAL NERVE GAS (GA) AND OTHER DEADLY WEAPONS IN ASMARA FOR USE AGAINST ERITREAN FIGHTERS AND CIVILIANS IN A LAST DESPERATE EFFORT AFTER A FAILURE OF ITS MILITARY CAMPAIGN. ERITREANS AND THEIR SUPPORTERS HAVE APPEALED TO U.N. SECRETARY GENERAL KURT WALDHEIM, PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO, CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE NON-ALIGNED NATIONS AND SECRETARY GENERAL EDEM KOJO OF THE O.A.U.. WIDER APPEAL TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY IS TO STOP THE USE OF THE SOVIET SUPPLIED GAS AND OTHER DEADLY WEAPONS AGAINST DEFENCELESS PEOPLE - IN SHORT TO AVERT AN ACT OF GENOCIDE.

CONCLUSION

With this background to the justness of our cause, the Eritrean people have and are paying the high sacrifices needed to achieve the goal of attaining the right to nationhood and self determination. On the other hand, the Ethiopian people have long realized that the war is contrary to their interest and have consistently opposed the war and refused to fight in Eritrea. So the war is prolonged and taking a dangerous turn only because of the massive involvement of foreign troops. That is why we conclude that the unjust war on the part of the Ethiopians is fought to keep a fascist military dictator in power through whom his backers enforce their rule over the Ethiopian people.

Considering the seriousness of the situation today, we strongly appeal to all peace and justice loving individuals and organizations to condemn the Soviet backed aggression in Eritrea and show their sympathy towards the victimized people of Eritrea.

Thank You