



Red Sea Afar Movement for Change

Manifesto

Introduction

The Red Sea Afar people have inhabited the coastline of the Red Sea in Eritrea for centuries. They share a historical and cultural identity with their co-ethnics in Djibouti and Ethiopia. Through their established traditional institutions, the Afar people historically exercised political and social authority over the coastal territories. The population resides in a historically significant, strategically located territory that is vital to global trade and possesses abundant physical and underground resources.

Eritrea achieved its hard-won independence from Ethiopia with full UN membership on 25, May 1993. The independence struggle was initiated by Eritrean Liberation Front and completed by Eritrean People Liberation Front((EPLF), later reorganized as the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). Even during the liberation era, warning signs of authoritarian tendencies were evident, including grave incidents such as the 1988 killings of Afar civilians in As-Ela village. After Independence, once a Popular movement gradually turned into an authoritarian regime that betrayed the dream of Eritreans.

Shortly after independence, the regime instructed its military and security forces to impose punitive measures on those resisting disarmament and the restructuring of Eritrea's political boundaries from nine to six provinces, all without meaningful consultation or consent. Following these instructions, government troops swept through villages: they killed and maimed civilians, conducted arbitrary arrests, abducted religious and traditional leaders, bombarded fishermen in the Red Sea, forcibly evicted villagers and destroyed livelihoods in the coastal areas, targeting our people solely because of their ethnic background. These human rights violations sparked widespread resentment. In 1994 and 1995, the Red Sea Afar people resisted and fought against regime forces in various parts of Afar Land.

Subsequently, a group of elders and a youth established the Red Sea Afar Democratic Organization, an armed resistance advocating self-determination, including the option to secede from Eritrea, if necessary. Over the past three decades, the Red Sea Afar resistance has manifested in various forms, experiencing both strengths and weaknesses, but the objectives remain the same: Justice and recognition of their rights in a nation where all people share the same basic right, live together in peace and harmony, and allow their diverse cultures to develop freely.

After years of silent cries and relentless struggle against the regime, hope was born for the Red Sea Afar People in terms of shading lights on their plight. In 2015, a groundbreaking report by the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in Eritrea was released. The 484 pages report detailed gross human rights violations the regime perpetrated against its own people. The report implicated the regime forces in ethnic cleansing against Afar and Kunama communities. The Afar people have been subjected to extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearance, forcible eviction, ethnic persecution, and land grabbing. The commission

confirmed the Eritrean officials have committed crimes against humanity against Afar population since 1991.

RSAMC hereby presents its vision for defeating the brutal dictatorship in Eritrea and replacing it with a constitutional, democratic, and just System.

1. Origin of Our Movement

Our organization builds on the ongoing struggles of our people, both before and after independence of Eritrea. The armed resistance of our forefathers and creations of political and civic groups inspired hope for future generations. However, the collective efforts have not matched the sacrifices made due to external and internal challenges. As a result, political groups have become fragmented and unable to represent the legitimate interests of our people or address the existential threats. The continuous exodus of Youth to neighbouring countries and across the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea has led to widespread discontent and demoralisation. In response to this reality, as a Youth led movement supported by broader Afar community, we have engaged in extensive consultations with youth, political leaders, elders, and community representatives. These discussions strengthened our conviction that a renewed and more coherent political initiative is urgently needed.

Our movement consists of youth with lived experience under the totalitarian regime in Eritrea. RSAMC emerged as a youth-led movement supported by elders, professionals, community leaders, educators, health workers, and former military personnel committed to responsible and organized change. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, we have taken responsibility to mobilize youth and unite political groups and establish Red Sea Afar Movement for Change.

We affirm that Eritrean people possess the right to self-defence against the current regime in Eritrea. As part of our objective to protect our people, RSAMC will strongly encourage the Eritrean Political groups to establish a durable political alliance. The Unity of justice seekers to achieve radical change must become a reality; therefore, we will collaborate with forces that seeks and promote a unified entity to end the dictatorship in Eritrea. This realisation comes from the belief that no group can dismantle entrenched authoritarian rule alone. The unity among justice seeking forces is therefore a strategic necessity.

Our vision is simple; we want a change in our country. A change that will be genuine inclusive, democratic, and future oriented.

2. RSAMC Vision, Mission and Principles

2.1 Vision

RSAMC envisions a constitutional, democratic Eritrea where all ethnic, religious, and regional communities freely exercise their right, including the right to self-determination, within a framework of equality, justice, and prosperity.

2.2 Mission

To build a unified political movement capable of defending Afar rights, resisting authoritarian rule, and contributing constructively to Eritrea's democratic transformation.

2.3 Principles

RSAMC is guided by the following principles:

- Uncompromising opposition to *authoritarianism*.
- *Commitment to constitutional governance and the rule of Law.*
- Protection of Afar Land, identity, and cultural heritage.
- Equal rights and dignity for all Eritrean communities.
- Commitment to fundamental liberties and freedoms.
- Safeguarding the territorial unity and sovereignty of the nation and its people.
- All Eritrean national languages are equal and shall be recognized as official languages of the country. Additionally, English should be included as an official language.
- Right to Internal self-determination: In accordance with internationally recognized principles of self-determination, the Afar people are entitled to pursue forms of self-rule that protect their identity, security, and economic viability as guaranteed by the future constitution of Eritrea.
- Promote the rule of law, accountability, and transparency in all aspects of conduct during the struggle and subsequent transition to democracy.
- RSAMC believes in non-interference in the internal issues of neighbouring countries and is committed to international law by adopting a broader strategy to pursue regional economic cooperation and integration.

3. A shift from the Ideological Paradigm of the PFDJ in Eritrea

- Following the rise of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) led regime, Eritrea transformed into a despotic society, experiencing significant cultural and social fragmentation because of the ruling party's policies. These policies have systematically imposed social oppression, disenfranchisement, cultural suppression, economic stagnation, and displacement. The concept of a "New Eritrea" following independence was not intended to create a rhetorical unity lacking practical significance. For more than three decades, the regime has governed Eritrea without a constitution under absolute dictatorship, with internal contradictions and crises of Legitimacy. Aside from orchestrated public performances best described as a 'dancing democracy, the regime showed no appetite for pluralism and inclusiveness.
- In Eritrea, challenges are everywhere - in lowlands, highlands, western and eastern parts of the country, primarily due to dictatorship and limited political freedom. The peculiarity of the Red Sea Afar People is not only about geography, history, maritime ownership, and unique identity our people possess. Our people's plight is not political but fundamentally a matter of survival. Although the suffering of Eritreans cannot be measured, the extent of suffering experienced by the Afar people is particularly severe and constitutes crimes against humanity. The question of the Red Sea Afar is therefore not merely a local matter but forms part of the broader commitment of the international community—embodied in institutions such as the United Nations and the African Union—to uphold the principles of self-determination, human dignity, and equitable political arrangements.

Therefore, **paradigm shift** is required. The shift would involve a multifaceted approach to resist against dictatorship in Eritrea, coordinating political and diplomatic efforts to establish a legitimate and transformative, capable unified force to bring drastic and radical change.

- Following the independence, the government sought to divide the Afar people of the horn of Africa incorporating fabricated narratives unrelated to Afar history in school curricula. Both Coastal and inland regions of the Afar Land have a rich history and valuable stories to share with the world. RSAMC is committed to preserving Afar history, language, and cultural autonomy. We support intellectual and cultural collaboration across Afar communities in the Horn of Africa, consistent with principles of sovereignty and regional cooperation.
- Since the Independence, the regime has initiated border conflicts with all neighbouring countries such as Yemen, Sudan, Djibouti, and Ethiopia. Our approach differs fundamentally from that of the current regime in regarding both in internal and external coexistence. We are committed to promoting stability, justice, and **peaceful coexistence** in Eritrea, while also fostering **regional integration and cooperation** with neighbouring countries. We will work to end the cycle of violence, border disputes, and insecurity that the regime has perpetuated in the region. Instead, we will strive to maximize mutual benefit with our neighbours and to strengthen the deep historical and distinguished relationships with these countries.
- The current regime has systematically undermined Afar unity by promoting a distorted Eritrean Identity (Eritreanness), presenting it as a unique political construct, and disregarding the historical ties of Afar-to-Afar relationship within the horn. While recognizing Eritrea as a sovereign state, RSMAC supports **Qafar Toobokiinu (Afar Brotherhood)** across the Horn of Africa which we believe lays a foundation for the African Union Motto 'the Africa we want.'
- There is no social contract among ethnic, religious, and political groups, which undermines efforts to unify the country and protect the rights of individuals and groups, thereby weakening national cohesion and coexistence. In our movement, we aim to develop a concept note for a post-PFDJ **social contract** that will address critical issues to prevent future conflicts. We will advocate for broad agreements on constructive dialogue, truth and reconciliation, and constitutional commitments to protect and involve citizens.
- **Voluntary Unity** in Eritrea remains a distant goal. While the state narrative shows a cohesive society under stable political order, many ethnic groups feel marginalized, and assimilated. Some even accuse the regime of engineering the supremacy of one ethnic group's culture over another whom the system favours to control the political, social and security apparatus of the country. The regime is authoritative and its tactics used to control the population vary overtime. The Red Sea Afar people's attitude toward the current Eritrean regime is negative, not because of the regime's use of political cleavages but because of policies implemented in their Land. The Afar widely believe the ruling party acts as a conquering power that demands allegiance

from them rather than co-nationals who have the same rights as they do. The ruling elites do not understand the Afar's sentiment and cares more about their land due to its strategic value. Because of the ruling party's parochial interest their nation -state building project has failed. Therefore, we aspire to voluntary unity based on creating viable political and socio-economic commonality that unites all Eritreans. We plan to start this important effort in diaspora through civic discussions, political dialogue, and media engagement.

- **Refugee and Transnational Repression:** Indefinite military conscription and national service, often described as national slavery have compelled thousands of Eritrean youths to flee the country, making Eritrea one of the World's major sources of refugees. The regime's security apparatus extends its repression beyond national borders, employing coercive measures such as intimidation, harassment, monitoring, and pressuring Eritrean nationals even in countries where they seek sanctuary. RSMAC asserts that a concrete and realistic solution requires developing a comprehensive plan to remove the authoritarian regime and establish a democratic, inclusive government that promotes peace, stability, and prosperity, thereby facilitating the safe return of refugees to their homeland.
- RSAMC believes the **Red Sea** is integral to the history of the Afar people, who are a littoral community. Maritime security of the Red Sea and its littoral community should always be a priority. Our people face an existential threat due to the strategic importance of their land. Therefore, we will never regard our land and its resource as a curse but will use them for the betterment of our people and the wider region. We aim to develop a sustainable, integrated coastal development plan and advocate for win-win solutions to resolve **maritime access** issues with our neighbouring countries based on our people's inalienable rights under international human rights law, customary international law, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of indigenous People's.
- **Adopting a forwarding-Looking approach** is essential to facilitate a smooth transition, encourage popular participation and establish sustainable democratic state. In seeking to establish a unified political and military alliance, RSAMC will incorporate lessons from previous experiences when drafting the political roadmap for post-PFDJ transitional period.

Manifesto Declaration

With this manifesto, the Red Sea Afar People for Change solemnly affirm the enduring rights and aspirations of the Red Sea Afar People.

Guided by justice, self-determination, peaceful coexistence, and regional cooperation, the movement commits to advancing a future where the Afar people secure their survival, preserve their cultural identity, and fully participate in the political, social, and economic life of their homeland.

The movement calls upon the people of Eritrea, the governments of Horn of Africa countries, and the international community to engage constructively in addressing historical injustices through dialogue, partnership, and shared responsibility.

Through inclusive governance, cooperative regional arrangements, and respect for the rights of the Afar People, the Red Sea Afar region can move from a history of exclusion to a foundation for peace, stability, and shared prosperity. Eritrea's future must be shaped by its peoples through lawful, inclusive, and democratic processes. The Red Sea coast must be a source of prosperity, not repression.

Red Sea Afar Movement For Change – Political Bureau

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