

Eritrea has a history of colonial occupations and has never had a national archive for the preservation of its indigenous heritage. Collecting and preserving historical documents started during the armed struggle period by the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF). EPLF has invested greatly on the preservation of its documents. In 1975, Research and Documentation Units were established under various departments of the EPLF. Research and Information Center of Eritrea (RICE) was established in February 1979 entrusted with the responsibility to conduct research, collect historical documents pertaining to Eritrea and disseminate information in order to justify the Eritrean cause. After liberation, the Research and Documentation Unit of the Department of Information and Research and Information Center joined together and formed the current Research and Documentation Center (RDC) in 1994. Currently the RDC is serving as de facto national archive in the country. In addition, the RDC is also shouldering responsibility of national library in Eritrea. The RDC is responsible not only for records under its custody, but also for all public records, which are in the line ministries and departments of the government and including the Peoples Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) through consultancy services.

The mission of the RDC is to preserve and make available for research national archives with historical and cultural values by introducing an integrated records and archives management system. The RDC has six specific objectives as: to acquire and organize Eritrean historical records, to upgrade and improve the existing Records and Archives Management system by providing support and setting standards and professional guidelines at a national level, strengthen and restructure the RDC in preparation for the establishment of a National Archive/Library and regional archives, identify and implement the best and most appropriate options of preservation, create public awareness of the importance of documentation throughout society, and at last but not least to make all archival materials accessible and promote their use by the public.

Archives, Documentary, Audio-visual Photographic and Cartographic Collections are the documents that are maintained in RDC. The archival collections of the RDC date back to the Italian period and they are arranged according to their chronological order, the documentary collection is divided geographically in to groups. Some of the documentary collection on Eritrea date back to 1798. The RDC's collection of clippings date back to 1984, there is also a very small collection published in 1929 and 1936. Even though the collection includes clippings relevant to different countries, the majority of the clippings are on the Horn of Africa namely Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti. The periodicals are arranged chronologically under their title. Periodical cards are used to control the existence of the periodicals, both deep and shallow indexes and summaries are available for periodicals and radio programs, to help information seekers.

The RDC has a vast photographic and audio-visual collection. The photographic collection dates back to the Italian period, this collection encompass photographs and films of the colonial and mainly Armed Struggle periods. The head person of the photographic department Mr. Simon Zerizghi said that the occupation of this department is to give clear information about photographs and different materials collected in different times to the coming generation. Mr.

Simon added that this department's additional job is to change photographs from analog to digital and said that the main aim is to keep safe the pictures in modern ways, and secondly is to create an easy way of using them, so that the users won't have difficulties, even though they ate on the process of it, Mr. Simon said that millions of pictures have already been changed from analog to digital. For further advancements of this department it has been actively engaged in creating skilled manpower, as well as in introducing up-to-date technologies Besides, the RDC in collaboration with library and information communities has been arranging different courses to the members of the RDC and as well as members of other government sectors, higher institute colleges that extends for about two years.

Moreover Mr. Simon indicates that the center is preparing to extend its efforts on such kinds of training, to different zones of the country. Among of the other collections there is the Audio-visual collection that dates back to 1972. Its subject content includes interviews with prominent figures of the armed struggle, visitors of the liberated areas, congresses, oral history and songs. There is also a separate collection of cassettes that deal solely with Ethiopian atrocities on innocent Eritrean citizens. The RDC houses cassettes and reels of the EPLF's radio programs during the period 1979-1991. The radio program records are recorded in six languages: Tigrinya, Arabic, Tigre, Kunama, Afar and Amharic, and they are all well indexed and the transcripts are bound. There is also the video collection that dates back to 1974; the contents are almost similar to those found in the photographic collection. As it was taken during the armed struggle periods; it reflects all aspects of activities during the struggle for independence.

The audio and video department is equipped with modern electronic equipment for transferring analog record to digital; The head person of the audio-visual department at the RDC, Mr. Misgna Rusom; said that the RDC' is endeavoring: on the preservation of the Eritrean historical documents in an organized way and hence the institution is on its way introducing better means of documentation system. RDC is working hard in raising societal awareness on the preservation of documents. The RDC is currently working as the national reference and as an institution responsible for the preservation of important historical documents of the Eritrean people's socio-cultural life.

Hence it has introduced modern technology that helps on the preservation of the documentation. The RDC, during the Eritrean armed struggle for independence, was part of the Department of News and Information. Hence it documented all the news broadcasted by the Radio of the Voice of the Eritrean Masses in all Eritrean languages. Additionally RDC documented video and photographs of the Eritrean struggle for independence. Our historical documents are the back bone of our identity and thus the preservation of our national documents is not the business of individuals or private institutions; it is the responsibility of all of us.