

The Coming Together of Eri-Youth

Written by shabait Administrator

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This is for the fourth time that the Sawa Youth Festival has been celebrated. Such a festival is very common for the Eritrean people in general and the Eritrean youth in particular. Eritreans inside the country and Eritrean communities abroad have developed a reputation as a community of festivals.

These festivals are not like the 'Summerfest, an 11-day music festival' held in many western countries which are a showcase for acts ranging from alternative rock to hip hop music. Eritrean youth festivals are staged for one and only one objective – to acquaint the Eritrean youth with their country and develop positive relationships among themselves. Who can deny the role of Eritrean women in Milan, Italy, to the Eritrean struggle? Who can forget the role of Eritreans abroad as diplomats and ambassadors of their country? Who can deny the contribution of Eritrean Diaspora in supporting the families of Eritrean martyrs and the needy ones?

And last weekend, the Eritrean youth festival was staged in Sawa. This festival, in essence, was not different from the festivals conducted inside the country and abroad by the Eritrean people. This festival draws Eritrean youths from all over the country and Eritrean youths from abroad, hence, here, in Sawa, the two– the youths who came from abroad and who reside here – meet to materialize their common dream of building a prosperous nation. The Eritrean Youth festival is celebrated every two years in Sawa during summer time. This festival celebration is nationally renowned.

It is celebrated through staging several events like cultural shows, seminars, different art competitions and exchanging experiences of youths from the six administrative regions and Eritrean youths coming from all over the world. Knowledge of Eritrean culture and life is essential to any Eritrean, for both who reside inside and outside the country. The youth who resides abroad may know everything else, but without knowledge of his/her country he/she remains ignorant of the best cultural and moral achievements of his own race. When ever one starts talking about culture among peers, he may interpret culture as meaningless. However, if we examine our lives we are more social or cultural than natural. Coming out from the womb our minds are blank, it is after birth that we become we. At birth the human mind is just a blank or tabula rasa and can acquire basic knowledge of the world through the society one grew up. And above all it is not with out reason that we are named 'social animals' – for we are not suited to live alone like animals do. Once they get their daily food, they can serenely sleep in their dens with out caring about their neighbor fellows.

Culture acquaints us with the best that has been known and said in the world, and thus with the history of the human spirit. One common fallacy about people who are interested about the past and the culture is that, they resist change and are not progressive. However those people who look to the past or to the culture are not against change. In fact they are realistic and to excel

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the past they must not allow themselves to lose contact with it. They must feel it under their feet because they raised themselves upon it. It is extremely important that you show some insensitivity to your past in order to show the proper respect for the future. In the most primitive societies the principal function of cultural rituals was almost to stop change. However, the principal function of the most vital and living traditions today is precisely to provide the instruments of rapid change. Today, Culture is perishing in overproduction, in the madness of quantity. The more recent flood of pop culture has raised the alarm that serious culture is being engulfed. With out culture, the future of humanity is uncertain, even in the most prosperous countries, the quality of life is deteriorating. And worse than that, people who live on borrowed culture often go to extremes that their models and mentors had never intended. Generations who are not taught their culture, do not know themselves and their place in the global world and are often confused. In the transmission of human culture, different countries often attempt to replicate and to pass on to the next generation the skills and values of the parents, but the attempt usually fails because cultural transmission is geared to learning. So we can not expect transfer of cultures to go smoothly, in a natural order. In so doing, the existing generation has a moral obligation to build the future of the young ones.

A culture that values integrity, combined with tolerance that tries to address potential causes of unethical behavior, is perhaps the best way of helping the next generation. One important role of the Eritrean Youth festival is that it is the time where Eritrean youths in Diaspora come to know the progress of their country. During the struggle, Eritreans were joining the armed struggle and now their attachment with their country is at its highest level. When peoples wander in hard times, they let chance carry them, draw them, but Eritrean migration must have proceeded in accordance with some principles. They never get detached from their birth land. Writers in the Diaspora talk about 'double absence' to undermine Diaspora's role both to their country of origin and to international development. However Eritrean Diaspora has refuted this way of thinking. Eritrean Diaspora while they are 'there' in the host country, in well organized communities; they maintain strong social, economic and political links with their home country. By so doing they have been and are dynamic channels for Eritrean development.

Many communities in the Diaspora do not have close relationship with their countries. And many African governments do not work for these ends. On the other hand, Eritrea, long ago, has figured out how to take full advantage of the influence and resources of the Diaspora communities and especially the youths and their communications' networks around the world. In this case, Eritrea is almost an exception. Eritrean communities all over the world have strong ties with their country. This is basically the result of the efforts exerted by the Eritrean government and above all by the inner belief of Eritrean Diaspora to help their country. Being part and parcel of whole, they are playing a great role in the process of nation building. Eritrea, starting from the struggle for its independence, has been investing to channel the Diaspora's 'abilities and willingness' to influence change in the country. There has been a great endeavor in the attempt to bridge the gap between Eritrean Diaspora and the people within, to facilitate the country's development. The Eritrean Government has been encouraging the Eritrean Diasporas to participate in their country's development and engaging them through conferences and seminars and festivals. In particular, these festivals, seminars and conferences have been playing great roles in exposing young Eritreans, born and raised in abroad, to Eritrea. And on the other hand, participating in such occasions would teach tolerance and give young people

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valuable experience and transferable skills. And returning volunteers could share their knowledge with communities here, and possibly help to bring the concept of international development to community levels. Diversity of the Eritrean youth population is celebrated in Sawa as a defining feature of Eritrea.

Diversity is not a slogan in Eritrea, it's a reality. Diversity, for peoples who use it wisely is an asset, because it is scientifically proven that it raises the intelligence of groups, it raises the resistance of crops in gross production. Eritrea is not a blanket woven from one thread, one color, and one cloth, yet with incredible unity and tolerance which is rare in other African countries. In addition, the Sawa Youth Festival is not held for celebrations sake. It initiates feeling of competition in different fields. It is a centre of creativity – creativity in all fields, inventions, art, literature, music. It is a centre of unity and nationalism. Unfortunately, in other countries, there is scant evidence that they give anything more than lip service to the importance and implications of an increasingly diverse population. The Sawa Youth Festival plays a huge task, though small in size, in manifesting the heterogeneity of both the Eritrean culture and the Diasporas.

The network created in the small compound, has a wealth of diversity - and a beauty to enjoy it. Our festivals in general, and in particular our Sawa Youth Festival can answer easily questions like: What is the extent of interests of Diasporas Eritrean youth communities to their country of origin? How do they function to help their country? To what extent is Diaspora youth communities actively contributing to promote Eritrea in the world? What are some of the tangible contributions and initiatives of Eritrean youth in Diaspora? What are some examples of existing or potential partnerships and collaborations between Eritrean Diaspora youth organizations and “mainstream” Eritrean youth organization and other institutions that may better facilitate development efforts?