

Remarks made by H.E. Mr. ESTIFANOS Afeworki Ambassador of the State of Eritrea to Japan on the occasion of the 26th Anniversary Celebration of the Independence Day of Eritrea here in Tokyo on May 26th 2017:

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Excellencies and Dear Colleagues

Honorable Guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First of all let me welcome all of our guests to this event, which is being held to commemorate 26th Anniversary of the Independence Day of Eritrea here in Tokyo. At this auspicious and historic moment - it is important, for all our friends and ourselves, to remember and share through available means of communications where we came from and where we are currently heading to. This event is blessed to portray this reality with 1978 NHK TV documentary "Liberated Area in the Desert" showing an outstanding part of a pre-independence event as well as the "Sense of Freedom" photo exhibition by a senior Japanese photojournalist in Africa Mr. Nakano for the post independent Eritrea. Our heartfelt gratitude and thanks also goes to Minato City, SEISA Group and other friends of Eritrea for their strong support to this event.

In 1977, I remember, I was responsible and commanding the Northern Front, which was controlling the outskirts of the capital of Eritrea (Asmara). I was also a member of the Central Committee of the Eritrean People Liberation Front and Army of that period. In those days, most of our country was totally liberated, except for some part of port cities and the capital, which were controlled by enemy forces. This was a historic period for the people of Eritrea because it was during this period that we started for the first time to breathe the air of freedom and self-rule. Unfortunately, the ruling military junta in Ethiopia painted itself red and labeled the independence forces of Eritrea "as agents of imperialism and Arab petro-dollar sell-outs" - luring USSR and its allies come to its rescue and escalated the war to a

brutal and savage level - in a very short time - through massive military intervention never seen in the region before. It was this time that our freedom struggle became a showdown between Goliath and David.

As a living witness of this period, it was a pleasant surprise for me to see "Liberated Area in the Desert" NHK TV documentary on Eritrea when I was assigned to Tokyo. Therefore, it is a great honor for me and I am very lucky to be alive to introduce this documentary film today. NHK camera has a better memory than mine. This wonderful Japanese work shows not only some aspects of the savage war instigated by foreign powers but also the local humanism involved.

There was a total conspiracy of silence on the illegal intervention of USSR and its Warsaw pact allies in Eritrea during this historic period, until a Tanzanian journalist sounded the alarm about the genocide perpetuated by the military junta of Ethiopia and its Soviet allies in late 1986. There was very little media coverage of the war that was unfolding in the rest of the world. Journalists from far off place Japan like Mr. Osamu Eya, the late Mr. Masataka Ito, accompanied by martial art teacher Mr. Harunobu Chiba and NHK TV Camera crew lead by Mr. Michiyuki Ozaki the late Mr. Itaru Tanaka, consecutively visited our northern front to witness and record this historic period of a huge repercussion to the people of Eritrea, Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn of Africa – a proxy war at its best in Africa.

A glimpse of the innocent Ethiopian prisoners of war, captured in this documentary, with a hummer and sickle insignia stitched to their shirt's collar, studying calmly in the liberated areas to read and write alphabets, tells thousands of stories of geo-political interest which is in direct conflict with basic human security and freedom of the people of our region and their dignity.

Lets take this important occasion to celebrate truly the life of all the people who contributed to this documentary and Mr. Ozaki and the late Mr. Tanaka, who made it happen. I also would like to this opportunity to thank the other staff of NHK, who gave this dead analogue documentary film a new life by digitizing it. This documentary is the living testimonial of the struggle of Eritrea and Ethiopia for

freedom, peace, development and justice.

It was 40 years ago and also a very intensive period militarily, socially and politically both for Eritrea and Ethiopia. People who were marginalized have a voice. So does people in the main stream. It is true that the media belongs to the latter. But this documentary has crossed over to the other side to find out some of the truth, if not all the truth. The coming generation can criticize or applaud objectively such kind of material and work. But this documentary gives clear answer to the questions why the expansion of USSR failed in Eritrea and Ethiopia? Why Italian empire failed in the colonial rule in Eritrea and Ethiopia? Why foreign intervention in our region is bound to fail always?

In 2017 forty years after, I am the Ambassador of the State of Eritrea to Japan striving to pass the baton of friendship of Eritrea to Japan. Please enjoy the film. I hope this film conveys some lesson to learn from the long struggle for the independence of Eritrea, and thank you.