

## **Warning Signs of Polarization in the Diaspora Community**

When I received a scholarship to study at one of the prestigious universities in Europe, the plan was to stay for a maximum of five years. It was an incredible privilege, and I felt a strong responsibility to return home, share my knowledge and experiences, and serve my society and country. Everything seemed bright as Eritrea had just gained its hard-fought independence, and the people were in ecstatic euphoria. The desire to return home was sky-high, and staying beyond the planned time was unthinkable.

## **My Observation in My 33 Years Away from Home**

When I arrived in Europe 33 years ago, it was a rare and precious occurrence to meet a fellow Eritrean. Whenever such a meeting happened, I would greet them warmly and ask when they had arrived and when they planned to return. Encounters with Eritreans on the street were infrequent, often happening by chance or during events such as visits from Eritrean delegates who would call meetings to update us on the situation back home. In those moments, there was a strong sense of community and mutual support.

When the opportunity arose to meet another Eritrean, we would eagerly exchange addresses, filled with great certainty that we would meet again. The bond of shared heritage and experiences created a deep connection, making each encounter special and meaningful. Despite the challenges and uncertainties of life in a new country, these meetings brought a sense of familiarity and comfort, a reminder of our roots, and the promise of continued friendship.

Nowadays, things are very different from that promising era. When you meet an Eritrean, to ask when they arrived or when they plan to return is unthinkable. If you know them, you congratulate them on their safe arrival and automatically assume they have migrated permanently with little chance of returning. If you don't know them, it is rare to greet them.

## **A Polarizing Eritrean Diaspora Community**

The polarization within the Eritrean diaspora highlights a critical issue faced by many communities that have experienced significant political upheaval. The journey from unity in the face of common goals, such as the struggle for independence, to divisiveness in times of peace and different political ideologies, is indeed a troubling one. Here are a few key points that might shed more light on the situation and possible steps forward:

### **1. Historical Unity and Post-Independence Realities:**

- During the struggle for Eritrean independence, there was a strong sense of unity and purpose among the diaspora. This was driven by a common enemy and a shared vision of an independent Eritrea.
- Post-independence, the lack of a common external enemy often leads to the surfacing of internal differences. This can include varied political views, economic disparities, and personal grievances.

### **2. The Role of Politics:**

- Political polarization is common in many diaspora communities. People may support the government within the home country or have divergent views on how the country should be governed.

- In the case of Eritrea, the government's policies and the international perception of the regime can be polarizing topics, leading to strong emotions and sometimes hostility among community members.
- 3. **Impact on Community Cohesion:**
  - The initial sense of unity and mutual support can erode when political discussions turn personal and lead to animosity.
  - This erosion of trust and solidarity can have severe implications for the community's ability to support each other and maintain cultural ties.
- 4. **Strategies for Rebuilding Cohesion:**
  - **Dialogue and Understanding:** Encouraging open and respectful dialogue where individuals can express their views without fear of retribution can help bridge divides. Community leaders and neutral facilitators can play a crucial role in this process.
  - **Common Ground Activities:** Focusing on non-political community-building activities, such as cultural festivals, sports, and other social events, can help reinforce a shared identity and mutual support.
  - **Education and Awareness:** Promoting awareness about the dangers of extreme polarization and educating community members on healthy ways to engage in political discourse can mitigate animosity.
  - **Conflict Resolution Mechanisms:** Establishing community-based mechanisms for conflict resolution can help address grievances before they escalate into full-blown animosity.
- 5. **Emphasizing Shared Goals:**
  - Reinvigorating a sense of shared purpose, whether it's supporting the development of Eritrea from afar, preserving cultural heritage, or improving the well-being of the diaspora community, can help shift the focus from divisive issues to collective aspirations.

Addressing polarization within the Eritrean diaspora, or any community experiencing similar challenges, requires deliberate efforts to foster dialogue, promote understanding, and rebuild the bonds that once held the community together. While the journey may be complex, the long-term benefits of a united and supportive diaspora community are invaluable.

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