STATE OF ERITREA

BRIEF REPORT ON NATIONAL POLICIES

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This Brief Report on National Policies gives a glimpse of Eritrea's efforts towards achieving the objectives of the Istanbul Programme of Action. It is limited in its scope. It covers a brief summary of those developmental principles that are most relevant to the IPoA.

Context

Eritrea, one of the youngest nations in the world, is located in the Horn of Africa along the Red Sea coast. Its recent history is marked by Italian colonialism, British protectorate administration and Ethiopian forcible annexation until it became independent in 1993, after 30 years of debilitating war. It has culturally and linguistically diverse population, estimated at over 4 million, consisting of nine ethnic groups. Eritrea launched its national reconstruction program from scratch and within a few years significant economic recovery and improvement in the standard of living of the people was witnessed.

The post independence period was characterized mostly by rapid development in both social and economic fronts. Some of this progress was, however, undermined by another cycle of war with Ethiopia that erupted in 1998 lasting until 2000. The border war ended with the signing of the Algiers Peace Agreement which established and mandated an independent arbitration Commission to demarcate and delimit the boundary in a final and binding manner.

The Commission fulfilled its delimitation mandate in 2002 and its demarcation mandate in 2007. However, Ethiopia's illegal occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories continues to this day. The United Nations, African Union, United States and European Union who explicitly committed themselves to guarantee the implementation of the Algiers Peace Agreement have failed to shoulder their responsibility. Moreover, Eritrea has been subjected, since 2009, to unjust sanctions by the UNSC which has further emboldened Ethiopia not only to maintain its occupation in violation of its treaty obligation but also to engage in a regime change scheme.

Despite these challenges of underdevelopment, occupation, and sanctions, Eritrea's development strategy has focused on two broad objectives: developing basic socio-economic, political and administrative infrastructure that would meet the needs of the general population; and preparing the ground work for productive investments and sustainable development.

I. Developmental Principles and Strategies

Eritrea's developmental strategy is anchored on the principle of self reliance. Accordingly, Eritrea's development agenda primarily depends on locally mobilized skills, man power and resources. Ownership and leadership of the development policy and the integrated national development plans are stressed and broad participation of the people regardless of their religion, gender, ethnicity, or residence (within the country and abroad) is also ensured. Furthermore, every citizen is entitled to equal access to the country's resources as well as opportunities of access and enjoyment to basic social services. Not to give any room to
corruption, proper utilization of the scarce human and natural resources are also highlighted and the principle of accountability is upheld.

II. Challenges in building productive capacities

The Government is committed to the full alleviation and eradication of poverty by ensuring food security, building up its social and physical infrastructures and boosting the stock of its human capital. Yet, it is facing multiple challenges including: low agricultural productivity and food insecurity, mainly due to unreliable rainfalls and recurrent droughts; shortage of skilled workforce, especially teachers for higher education; shortage of foreign currency that hampers the active participation of the private sector and that limits the government's role in providing and securing essential elements for the economic growth; and the unjust sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council and the continued occupation of sovereign Eritrean territories by Ethiopia that create obstacles to the government's efforts to establish a life of prosperity and dignity for everyone. To address these challenges, the Government of Eritrea is undertaking the following steps:

- Making its continued appeal to the international community to shoulder its responsibility in urging Ethiopia to respect its treaty obligation;
- Urging the UN Security Council to lift the unjust sanctions;
- Mainstreaming the policy to improve productive capacities of key sectors, such as agriculture, fisheries, mining, manufacturing and services;
- Prioritizing the attainment of national food security which includes enhancing the domestic food production capacity and increasing the national capacity to import an adequate quantity of food supply. This policy was instrumental in ensuring food security, even in the face of the drought that affected the Horn of Africa in 2010-11;
- Transforming the agriculture sector, where over 65%-70% of the population depends on subsistence farming;
- Investing in fisheries. The Red Sea coast is very rich in marine resources and potentially 80,000 tons of fish could be caught annually which the country is far from having the optimal level of capacity to fully exploit its natural resources. It has started to export fish and sea cucumbers from the Red Sea on small scale to markets in Europe and Asia. To facilitate the export of high valued perishable seafood, a new airport has been constructed in Massawa, cold storage facilities have been built, artisanal fishing system rehabilitated and the port has also been upgraded;
- Exploring and developing natural resources. The recent licensing of a number of mining concessions is expected to make the mining sector one of the main drivers of growth. Exports are projected to grow in 2014, driven by the onset of copper and gold mining at three mines. Recently, commercial quantity of oil and gas reserve has also been confirmed. Even though the country's full potential has not been exploited fully, it is reported that it has a potential of producing up to 200,000 barrels of oil per day;
- Promoting tourism. The country's location in the Horn of Africa with its natural resources and rich historical sites and its close proximity to the European and Middle Eastern market, makes it an attractive destination for tourism as well as strategic trade point. To boost the tourism industry, basic infrastructure is being put in place and training of the needed work
force is done on ongoing basis. This sector has the potential of being a good source of foreign exchange earnings if well developed and managed;

- Promoting in services and manufacturing: The country, strategically located in the Horn of Africa with its 1200km of coastline along the Red Sea, is easily accessible from Europe and Asia and serves as an important maritime trade route. The two ports, Massawa and Assab, still have potential of becoming the country's foreign exchange earners by also serving other countries in the region. To facilitate this, efforts are currently being made to attract investment services to the port and shipment sectors as well as to the Free Trade Zone (FTZ). The completion of the free-port in Massawa is expected to also give a boost to the export services, especially transport and logistics services. Furthermore, more opportunities are opening up in small and medium-sized enterprises in manufacturing, trade and services.

III: Promotion of Good Governance

Fight against corruption: There is zero tolerance for corruption in the country. Proper use of resources is stressed at all levels of the government structure and there is no impunity for any person that is involved in corruption.

Respect for human rights: Eritrea believes in constructive engagement in the promotion and protection of human rights. Last June, Eritrea presented its second cycle of Universal Periodic Review to the Human Rights Council and accepted broad range of recommendations in the field of economic, social cultural, political and civic rights as part of its commitment to advancing human rights. Reorganization of government institutions has been initiated. Earlier, the Government has also promulgated new proclamations that have a cross cutting effects on human rights. The new laws introduced include access to water, food security, privatization of state owned enterprises and access to justice and accountability of judicial services as well as expansion of community magistrate courts with extended jurisdiction.

Social Protection: The State of Eritrea is committed to secure the social welfare of all persons and particularly of those that are disadvantaged. To this end, several mechanisms are put in place. The Government with the support of Eritreans in Diaspora has taken the responsibility to support families hard hit by the war. The Government also provides monthly monetary and in-kind support to martyr’s families and their children. Several saving and micro-credit facilities have been operational with special focus on women-headed households with the aim of enhancing their economic empowerment. A Pension Fund has also been established.

Health: Eritrea’s vision is the development of a healthcare system in which all persons have easy access to quality health services at affordable cost. 60% of the population has access to health care within 5km while 40% have access to health facility within 10km radius. Reduction of maternal and infant mortality rate has scored big achievements and Eritrea is amongst the few countries in the Sub Saharan Africa that has met the Millennium Development Goals MDG 4 (on reducing child mortality) MDG 5 (on improving maternal health) MDG 6 (on combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases). The Government has adopted a strategy that places Non-communicable Diseases (NCDs) high on the agenda of health issues by building the capacity for community-based action, and strengthening health services for integrated prevention
and management of chronic diseases. Life expectancy at birth increased from 46 years in 1991 up to 63.0 years at the present moment (World Health Report 2010).

**Education:** Eritrea has adopted a policy of universal free education from pre-primary to higher education. This policy ensures that every child, irrespective of family economic background, gets the opportunity to enrol in education. Basic education is compulsory. Gross enrollment ratio at primary level is above 62.8% for girls and 71% for boys. Six specialized colleges located in the different regions of the country have been established giving certificates, diplomas, undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. Literacy rate for population aged 15 and over is 67.4% (2010).

**Water and Sanitation:** Basic infrastructure has been developed to ensure efficient and equitable distribution of water to household, farms and manufacturing plants. As a result, remarkable progress has been made in the preservation and distribution of water, particularly in the improvement of livelihood of rural population. The most common source of improved drinking water is piped water. In 2002 only 37.1% of households had direct access to piped water whereas in 2010 47.7% have access to piped water, an increase of 28.6%. The improvement is more reflected in the rural area i.e. from 18.2% in 2002 to 36.2% in 2010. Approximately 26% of urban households depend on tanker truckers categorized here as not improved source.

Significant progress has been made in accelerating rural sanitation coverage through the adaption of the community led total sanitation approach. According to the Ministry of Health Report (2011), the improved sanitation coverage has progressed from a low of round 2% to 16.3%.

**Empowerment of women:** Women's issues are mainstreamed in the political, social and economic life of the Eritrean society. Women's position in decision making and power is increasing at all levels, starting from the village level. By decree, 33% of the National Assembly seats are reserved for women, with no limits for higher representation. The same applies to Regional/Zoba Assemblies. The Government is also striving to bring about gender parity in governance and legislative bodies. Currently, women make up 22% of the National Assembly members and 18% of ministerial positions in the cabinet. Women's participation in the judiciary is also improving. Currently, 11.4% and 10.5% of the High Court and Regional Court judges, respectively, are women. Furthermore, waged and salaried women workers averaged 64% of men's earning while the mean wage of self-employed women was 112% that of men.

**Culture:** Eritrea is a multi-ethnic society composed of nine ethnic groups. This diversity is considered a source of strength. Children are instructed in their mother tongue at the primary school level of education. All ethnic groups have the right and are indeed encouraged to develop their own language and culture through the provision of commensurate time in all media outlets.

**Environmental sustainability:** As a country located in arid and semi-arid region, Eritrea is highly affected by desertification, land degradation and drought. Eritrea is signatory to all of the relevant multilateral agreements and protocols related to the safeguarding of human health and the environment (biodiversity, desertification and land degradation, climate change and chemical management). Among other things, the Government has put in place guidelines for environmental assessment and protection against pollution in the mining sector in accordance
with international standards. Accordingly, activities and projects pertinent to conventions and protocols are being developed and implemented. Large-scale soil and water conservation works and afforestation programs have been undertaken with full public participation.

Eritrea is making great efforts to expand electrification to promote improved traditional stoves nationwide and, to introduce and disseminate alternative energy sources, such as solar energy. In addition, there are on-going initiatives to set up high speed wind farms, with one already established in Assab.

**IV: Cooperation and Partnership**

Eritrea values international cooperation on the basis of mutual trust, mutual understanding and mutual benefit and based on the principles of partnership. Eritrea believes that the international cooperation programs should be supportive of the integrated national development plan.

Cooperation with the UN has been intensified by signing a strategic partnership framework of cooperation in 2013. The 11th European Development Fund (EDF) is also to be signed in the context of the ACP-EU Cotonou Agreement. In the spirit of South-South Cooperation, China and other states are also involved in several development projects.

Eritrea views investment and trade as key factors in attaining economic growth and in creating employment. In this regard, several foreign companies, including from China, Canada, Australia, UK, South Africa and Russia are engaged in the exploration and development of the extractive industry.

**V: Conclusion**

The Istanbul Program of Action is comprehensive and is useful in building partnership and addressing the overarching challenge of poverty eradication. Eritrea views the IPoA in conjunction with other international development agenda and Eritrea will continue to develop and strengthen its own mechanisms for ensuring that the areas identified in the Programme of Action are tackled in an effective and country-owned manner. Without minimizing the potential contribution of other sectors, the discovery of substantial mineral deposits in parts of the country and large foreign investments in this sector will significantly add to the economic growth of the country and in the creation of employment opportunities. However, Eritrea’s developmental agenda faces serious challenges from several angles. Ethiopia’s continued occupation of sovereign Eritrean territory needs to be recognized as in impediment to the national efforts of the country and should be addressed appropriately. The sanctions regime imposed on Eritrea is another challenge that cannot be underestimated in its negative impact with respect to the security dimension and the overall social and economic wellbeing of the country.