

Eritrea - A Peaceful Country at War

By Fr. Wolfgang Schonecke W.F.

ASMARA EPARCHY CELEBRATES ITS FIRST EVER SYNOD⁽¹⁾

Waking up in the early morning in Asmara one has a strange sensation. The light shining through the window seems purer and brighter than anywhere else. Is it the altitude of 2,200 metres or the absence of pollution? Not only the brilliance of the sun is unusual. There is an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity about the town. Traffic moves at a slow pace and people feel so secure that they hardly lock their cars or houses. Compared with the violence of most African cities, Eritrea looks a lost paradise.

But appearances are deceptive. The country is once again on the brink of war. If you see only elderly people and schoolchildren in town, it is because everybody else has been recruited into the military and is waiting on the front-line for the third round of fighting in a war that is hard to understand. Ten years earlier the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), in spite of ideological differences, joined together to overthrow the communist regime of Menghistu.

After a referendum Eritrea gained independence, and both countries cooperated in a remarkable effort to rebuild their economies after thirty years of civil war. The people of Tigray and Eritrea share the same language and culture. The Presidents of both countries are related through family ties. So why fight? Officially, it is a border dispute. Eritrea considers the old Italian colonial borders as binding. But much of the disputed areas were always administered by Ethiopia and the local population consider themselves as Ethiopians. Both countries accuse each other to have started the

conflict. Eritrea started large scale military action, but accuses Ethiopia to have provoked the conflict. In June, 1999, the Ethiopian army regained some territory but at a staggering cost of human life. Could international arbitration not settle a border dispute? Eritrea claims that more is at stake than borders. They believe the people of Tigray who presently control power in Addis Ababa want to create a 'Greater Tigray', incorporating parts of Eritrea, and gain access to the port of Assab. And so a border conflict has escalated in a prolonged trench war. Eritrea cannot afford to keep its whole workforce on the frontline for ever. But should the fighting resume a whole generation of young people may never return home.

A REMARKABLE RECOVERY

The war is all the more tragic, as both countries had engaged in an impressive development programme. Contrary to most African countries, Eritrea had heavily invested in improving its infra-structure. Roads have no potholes, telephones actually work and the barren hills are being systematically reforested. There have been great investments in agriculture to improve food sufficiency. Massawa, the picturesque Red Sea port is being rebuilt. All gives the impression of a Government that is trying to develop their people rather than filling their pockets. Most remarkably, Eritreans want to do it by themselves and have refused to submit to IMF and World Bank conditions, which have wrought so much havoc elsewhere.

THE DOWNSIDE

But all is not glitter and glory. One cannot help feeling that the EPLF has not quite shaken off its socialist past. As for guerilla movements the world over, Marxism-Leninism provided

the ideology and the strategies during the successful liberation struggle. The Communist rhetoric is gone, but totalitarian attitudes persist, visible in an excessive desire to control everything, including people's minds. There is only one Government T.V. and Radio and editors of private papers have to be careful what they write.

Ominous was a Government request that the Catholic Church hand over its twenty-five schools and thirty-five dispensaries, which was not carried out as war broke out. Equally disturbing is a surprise announcement, never put into writing, to stop all religious teaching in schools, although an ecumenical syllabus had been agreed upon earlier.

One explanation why the Government wants to keep religion on a short leash is the fear of 'Islamic Fundamentalism'. After independence Eritrea was infiltrated by Sudanese and Iranian 'Fundamentalists' of the violent breed. The Government reacted swiftly and decisively, arrested them and cut diplomatic ties with Khartoum. Although diplomatic relations have been restored

recently, fear remains that religious radicalism could undermine the efforts of nation-building in a country that is half Christian and half Muslim. But some measures to keep religion out of public life clearly infringe on fundamental human rights, like preventing soldiers to have access to religious services or refusing fallen freedom fighters to be buried according to their faith.

INVASION OF THE GLOBAL CULTURE

More challenging than any political, nationalistic indoctrination of the youth is the growing influence of the media culture. Videos of all sorts are available everywhere and Eritrea will be connected to the internet this year. Some service providers explicitly target the youth, which will be flooded with the best and the

worst of Western media culture. It already shows strongly in their way of dressing and their choice of music. It also reflects on their religious practise. While most remain rooted in their faith, the younger generation find the traditional Gheéz⁽²⁾ rite liturgies too long and ask for Masses in Tigrinya⁽³⁾ where they can sing new songs to the accompaniment of a keyboard. Many are also strongly attracted to Charismatic forms of prayer and influenced by the very active Pentecostal churches. All these changes call for an open discussion to look for appropriate pastoral solutions.

A SYNOD UNDER THREAT OF WAR

It was a courageous decision by the Eparch of Asmara, Abune Zacharia, to hold the first Synod

(1) An Eparchy is the equivalent of a Diocese.



(2) Gheéz and (3) Tigrinya are languages - see the 'Facts and Figures' on page 12.

Gheéz is the liturgical and literary language

Picture Above: part of a procession in the Orthodox Cathedral, Asmara



ever in the history of the Eparchy at a time when the menace of renewed fighting seems imminent. After two years of preparation with questionnaires and 'mini-Synods' in the parishes, some eighty-five delegates, a third of them lay people, met for six days to discuss how the Church could respond to these profound changes in society. Liturgical change was one of the thorny questions. In a spirit of ecumenism the tiny Catholic Church does not want to move too far away from the Orthodox Church. Yet if the Church does not want to lose the youth, it has to give room to new liturgical expressions and adapt some rites to modern urban conditions of life.

Traditionally, the young were initiated into the faith through the liturgy. How to transmit a more personally reflected Biblical faith in a

new secularised setting is one of the great challenges to the Church. A catechetical centre and other diocesan structures will be set up to study different pastoral challenges. As is the case in most Churches in Africa, the Eparchy is still heavily dependent on outside funding, a heritage of the missionary past. Financial self-reliance is as urgent as it is difficult but not impossible. The Orthodox Church is able to run her own structures and builds beautiful new churches with local contributions, even if it takes thirty years to realise the projects.

How to evangelise with courage and creativity a new secular culture without losing the depth of faith and the riches of tradition, is a challenge, not only for Eritrea, but for the whole Church at the start of this third millennium.

Eritrea - Evangelising a Changing Culture

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Let us Walk in Unity

Let us Witness with Faith

Let us Work with Determination

Let us Be Led by Christ

THE FIRST SYNOD OF THE ASMARA EPARCHY

Asmara seems one of the most peaceful towns on the continent. People hardly lock their houses and cars. Few people walk around and the traffic moves slowly. But these appearances are deceptive. If only schoolchildren and elderly people are on the streets, it is because all able-bodied men and most young girls and women are on the war front waiting for a third round of fighting in the war with Ethiopia. It is a sign of great courage that in such circumstances the Eparchy of Asmara decided to go ahead with its first Synod in its 70 years of history,

called in the Oriental Rite (4), Eparchial Assembly. Some 86 delegates, one third of them lay people, gathered in Dekomhare around their Eparch, Abune Zacharias Yahannes, for a week to work out a pastoral plan for the next five years. The Synod was prepared over a long period by the pastoral co-ordinator Fr. Menghsteab and a strong Synod committee. 'Mini-Synods' were held in all bigger parishes, and with the youth and other groups. Based on the teaching of the Vatican Council and the African Synod and the contribution of consultations, the pastoral team proposed a basic text to be amended and

approved by the Synod assembly. AMECEA Pastoral Department (5) was invited to be present at the Synod and Fr. Wolfgang Schonecke reports on the cultural and social background and some of the decisions taken to respond to the challenges.

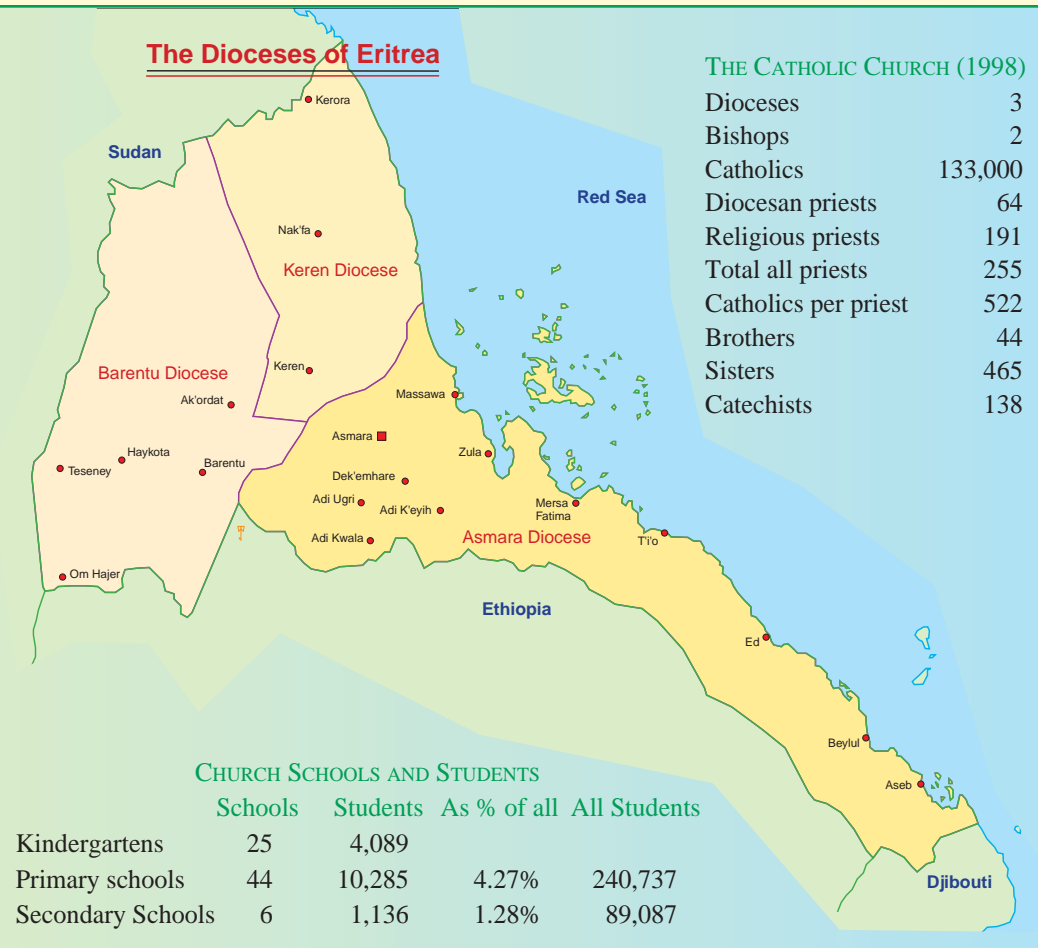
THE EPARCHY OF ASMARA AS A UNITED FAMILY

This was the theme of the Synod and its main aim. Inspired by the ideal of the African Synod to see the Church as a family, the Synod makes the participants realise that the challenges posed by the situation in their countries can only

be met when clergy, religious and laity work together. The Synod itself was a living experience of how fruitful a true dialogue can be.

INCULTURATION: EVANGELISING A CHANGING CULTURE

Christianity in Eritrea and Ethiopia dates from the fourth century and is the oldest and most inculturated on the continent. Christian thought has penetrated the language and the daily life of the people. But thirty years of liberation war, the influence of the thousands of Eritreans returning from exile abroad and the radically



Above is the Moto of the Synod (4) The Oriental Rite in this sense is the Catholic Church (5) AMECEA = AMECEA is the 'Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa'. It consists of the Episcopal Conferences of Eritrea (1991), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961),

Sudan (1979), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). The Episcopal Conferences of the Seychelles (1979) and Somalia (1995) are Affiliated Members. Map Above: The Dioceses (Eparchy) of Eritrea



secular stand of the present Government is creating a new mentality.

It is estimated that by now 10-15% of the population has no longer any concern for religion while another 10% are thoroughly westernised. The Government has recently taken out religious instruction from schools and instils its own brand of nationalistic and secular ideology into the youth during summer camps and military service. And so one of the key questions was: 'how can the Church continue to evangelise a new generation and make it feel at home in the Church?' Some of the resolutions taken were:

- * To start a youth association in each parish
- * To make efforts to revitalise the family
- * To have a full time chaplain to the university.

LITURGICAL ADAPTATION

The long liturgies in the Gheéz language are deeply moving and much more participatory than Latin rite celebrations. But the young generation is changing fast. They no longer feel at ease to pray in a language they do not understand and prefer to sing modern hymns in Tigrinya to the rhythms of an electronic keyboard. In fact, many parishes are already using Tigrinya and more texts are being translated. They are also influenced by the different style of praying practised in the Charismatic Movement and in the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches. The great discussion of the Synod was how to preserve the richness and beauty of the Gheéz tradition and yet create a space for new liturgical expression to grow. The clergy, particularly the married priests who have come from the Orthodox Church, pleaded to teach the youth the traditional Gheéz songs. The young demanded to be accepted with their own expressions. As the discussions about the liturgical language, the age of confirmation and changes in the funeral rite were inconclusive the Synod recommended:

- * To go on with current practise for the time being
- * To thoroughly study all necessary adaptations.

THE MODERN MEDIA CULTURE

Compared to other AMECEA countries the availability of information is still quite limited. The options are a dozen weekly papers that must be careful not to be too critical of the status quo and only one state-run T.V. channel that is free from the excesses of pornography and violence. But change is underfoot. Eritrea will be connected to the Internet and some of the Service Providers are targeting explicitly the youth. Eritrea's youth in towns will have to cope with an avalanche of information that will reinforce a secular mentality. The Church has little to offer to counterbalance the effects. Two Church papers are losing readers in a highly competitive market. The Synod recommended:

- * To keep up to date and use different new media in a professional way
- * To use video and other visual aids in evangelising the illiterate part of the population.

FORMATION AND PARTICIPATION OF THE LAY PEOPLE

As the present regime does not allow religion to hold an important place in the public arena, effective evangelisation can only be done through the laity. According to Oriental Canon Law lay participation is limited to one third of Synod members. After some initial shyness the representatives of the laity and the youth expressed clearly the changes they expect to see in the Church. To fulfil their role in Church and society, the laity need formation in their faith. And so the Synod decided to:

- * Set up a diocesan or national catechetical centre

- * Make the laity council more representative and allow women and youth to participate.

SELF-RELIANCE

Like most other Churches in Africa, the Eparchy is still heavily dependent on outside funding. Yet, the example of the Orthodox Church shows that self-reliance is possible. The Synod recommended to actively pursue a policy of self-reliance through

- * Sensitising all Church members of their responsibility to support their Church
- * A policy of transparency and accountability
- * Setting up financial committees at diocesan and at parish level.

SETTING UP EPARCHY STRUCTURES

Asmara Eparchy so far managed to live with minimal structures. To respond to the new pastoral challenges of the times, the Synod

recommended to set up the structures foreseen in Canon Law and define the functions of:

- * The Vicar General and the Chancellor and the Deans
- * The Financial Administrator and the Eparchy Financial Council
- * The Pastoral Office
- * The Duties of Priests and Parish Teams and Parish Pastoral Councils
- * The Place of the Religious in the Eparchy
- * The Laity Council.

JUSTICE AND PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

As in many countries in Africa the Church has invested greatly in education and medical

services. Although the Government has done remarkable achievements in developing the country since independence, it retains from its socialist past some totalitarian tendencies. It requested the Church last year [1999] to hand over all its social institutions, as it had done with all NGOs earlier on, a move only interrupted by the war. In spite of such threats and limitations, the Eritrean Church continues to offer its co-operation with the Government and contributes substantially to the relief efforts of some 350,000 people displaced by the war. The Synod recommended:

- * To form a Justice and Peace commission
- * To continue its co-operation with the respective Government ministries.

Picture Above: Women from the Adi-Keyh region



A SYNOD AS PILGRIMAGE

This first historical Synod of the Eparchy of Asmara took place during the Jubilee Year and so it was decided to give it in the form of a pilgrimage. It started on the day after most popular Marian Feast to Our Lady of Perpetual Help in the hall of the yet unfinished Eparchial centre where the major seminarians expressed the major themes of the Synod in a delightful play. The whole assembly in cars and buses followed a two metre high new image of Our Lady through the streets of Asmara to Decamhare, some forty kilometres out of town, where the working session took place. For the closing session all delegates moved in the early morning through the rugged mountains to the tomb of St. Justin de Jacobis in Hebo to pray to the founding father of the Catholic Church in this region for a successful implementation of the Synod and for peace, which is so desperately needed. During the Mass a message to all the faithful in the diocese was read out to appeal to them to take the implementation of the Synod at heart.

FROM THE SYNOD MESSAGE

The Synod delegates address a message to Catholics in the Eparchy and all people of goodwill. In it they thank God for allowing the Synod to take place and to be so successful in this precarious situation and remembered those thousand of displaced people from both countries and those in the trenches at the frontier. It summed up the inspiration of the Synod in five points

1. That the youth are the backbone of the Church be given special attention, show creativity and participation and yet stay true to the faith of their Foreparents.
2. That the laity participate fully in the liturgy and in the administrative structures of the Church and contribute to self-reliance.
3. That the participation of women be strengthened and that they be given a space in the liturgy.
4. That priests and religious increase the contribution to the pastoral work in the Eparchy.
5. That all may pray and work for Peace. ⁽⁶⁾

central highlands, the coastal region, and the western lowlands.

The highlands: are densely populated and intensively cultivated. The hottest month here is May (85°F. [29.4°C.]) and the coldest December-February (32°F. [0°C.]). The highest and lowest temperatures in a day can vary by 33°F. (18°C.). There are two rainy seasons March-April and June-September with up to 24 ins. (61 cm.) rain annually.

The eastern slope and coastal region: is hot, dry desert, or semi-desert, with a fertile agricultural area around Ghinda (in the central part). The people along the coastal region are pastoralists. The hottest months are June-August with temperatures between 72°F. (22.2°C.) to 105°F. (40.6°C.). December-February are the coldest months with temperatures between 65°F. (18.3°C.) to 90°F. (32.2°C.). The rainy season on the coastal plain is December-March, but it does not often rain on the southern coast.

The western lowlands: are from Keren to the Sudanese border (south-west).

It is a semi-arid with just the two seasonal river systems of the Barka and the Gash. The temperature can reach 105°F. (40.6°C.) in April-June and can drop to 55°F. (12.8°C.) in December. The highest and lowest temperatures in a day can vary by 38°F. (21°C.). There are two rainy seasons March-April and (heaviest) June-September - [see the map on page 13](#), for a simple outline of the major towns, rivers and region.

ENVIRONMENT: The problems have been made worse by the decades of war and the many recurrent severe droughts. They include deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, and overgrazing.

Eritrea - Some Facts and Figures

Compiled by Fr. Bill Turnbull W.F.

THE COUNTRY

NAME: Hagere Ertra, The State of Eritrea.

CAPITAL: Asmara (formerly Asmera).

MAIN TOWNS: Asmara (390,000), Massawa (80,000), Assab (Aseb)(25,000) ⁽¹⁾

COUNTRY AREA: 46,482 sq.mls. (121,320 sq.kms.) including the 354 islands.

DENSITY: 28 per sq. km. (0.3861 sq.ml.)

LAND USE: arable land: 12%

permanent crops: 1%

permanent pastures: 49%

forests and woodland: 6%

other: 32% ⁽²⁾

Irrigated land: 108 sq.mls. (280 sq.kms.) ⁽³⁾

COUNTRY BORDERS: Djibouti (E) 70 mls. (113 kms.), Ethiopia (S) 567 mls. (912 kms.), Sudan (W) 376 mls. (605 kms.)

COASTLINE: 1,388 mls. (2,234 kms.) in total; 715 mls. (1,151 kms.) on Red Sea mainland, and 673 mls. (1,083 kms.) on the islands.

ELEVATION EXTREMES: the lowest point is unnamed at -515 ft. (-157 m.), the highest point is Soria 9,806 ft. (2,989 m.).

CLIMATE AND TERRAIN: Eritrea is mainly an extension of the Ethiopian Highlands and can be divided into three major zones: the

THE PEOPLE

POPULATION: 4,135,933 ⁽⁴⁾ (est. 1 m. in 'exile').

	Total	Urban	Rural
1988	2,956,231	455,2602	500,972
1998	3,879,000	700,547	3,178,453

An estimated 60,000 children were disabled and 45,000 orphaned as a result of the war. UN sources reported that as a result of the recent border dispute/war with Ethiopia 1.3 million Eritreans were displaced from their homes. Of these internally displaced persons (IDPs) it was estimated that about 25% were women and 65-70% were children. After three years of drought food was a problem with 600,000 people at risk of famine. ⁽⁴⁾

Picture Above: One of the shops in Keren Market



⁽⁶⁾ This article is from ADS 5/2000 No: 514, 15th. March, 2000. AMECEA Documentation Service (ADS), P.O. Box 21400, Nairobi, Kenya. Reproduction authorised with the usual acknowledgement. You can access ADS on the Internet at: <http://www.dex-netcom/cc478>



AGE STRUCTURE:

1-14 years	1,744,611	44.97%
15-64 years	2,031,425	52.36%
65 and over	103,364	2.65%

People per Physician: 36,000⁽⁵⁾

ACCESS TO:	Total	Urban	Rural ⁽⁵⁾
safe water	22%	60%	8%
sanitation	13%	48%	-

BIRTH RATE: 42.71 births/1,000 population⁽⁶⁾

DEATH RATE: 12.3 deaths/1,000 population⁽⁶⁾

MORTALITY RATES: 1960 1998 2000

Infant	61	-	72
Under-Five	196	90	136
Life Expectancy	40	51	56

Maternal Mortality Rate: 1,400/100,000 live births⁽⁵⁾

INFANT HEALTH:

U-5 malnutrition	25% ⁽⁷⁾
U-5 stunted growth	50% ⁽⁸⁾
U-5 underweight	44% ⁽⁸⁾

Daily per capita calorie-intake is estimated at 1,750 Kcals, only 83% of the minimum provided by WFP as emergency food rations.⁽⁸⁾

U-1 immunization against:

diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis	46%
poliomyelitis	46%
measles	38%
tuberculosis	52%

ADULT LITERACY RATE:

1980	1998
18%	38%

THE MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGES

LANGUAGES: No official language. There are three distinct linguistic families.

Cushitic languages are spoken by the Afar, the Beja, and the Saho.

Semitic languages are the largest family spoken by the Tigrigna (50%) and Tigré (25%).

Nilotic languages are spoken by the Baria and the Kunama (in the lowlands between the Gash and Setit rivers).

English is used in business and for teaching in Secondary Schools and University. Arabic and Tigrigna are the main working languages. The spoken Arabic is Hadrami, Sudanese, and Ta'izzi-Adeni.

MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS:

Tigrigna (Tigrinya) [1,900,000] 50%, in the highlands; Tigré and Kunama [140,000] in the western lowlands, 40%; Afar [300,000] 4% in the south; Beja (Bedawi) [120,000] and the Nara [63,000] in the west; Bilen [70,000] around the town of Keren; Nara [63,000] in the west; Saho [144,000] along the Red Sea coast, the eastern highlands, and the south; 3% and Somali.⁽⁹⁾

RELIGIONS: Muslim 46%, Orthodox 41.76%, Catholic 3.5%, Protestant, and Traditional Religion 8.74%.

THE GOVERNMENT

INDEPENDENCE: 24th. May, 1993 (from Ethiopia).

NATIONAL HOLIDAY: 24th. May, 1993.

PRESIDENT: Isaias Aferwerki (elected 8th. June, 1993, with 95% of the vote from the National Assembly).

CONSTITUTION: transitional constitution (19th. May, 1993); a new constitution was adopted (23rd. May, 1997) but not implemented.

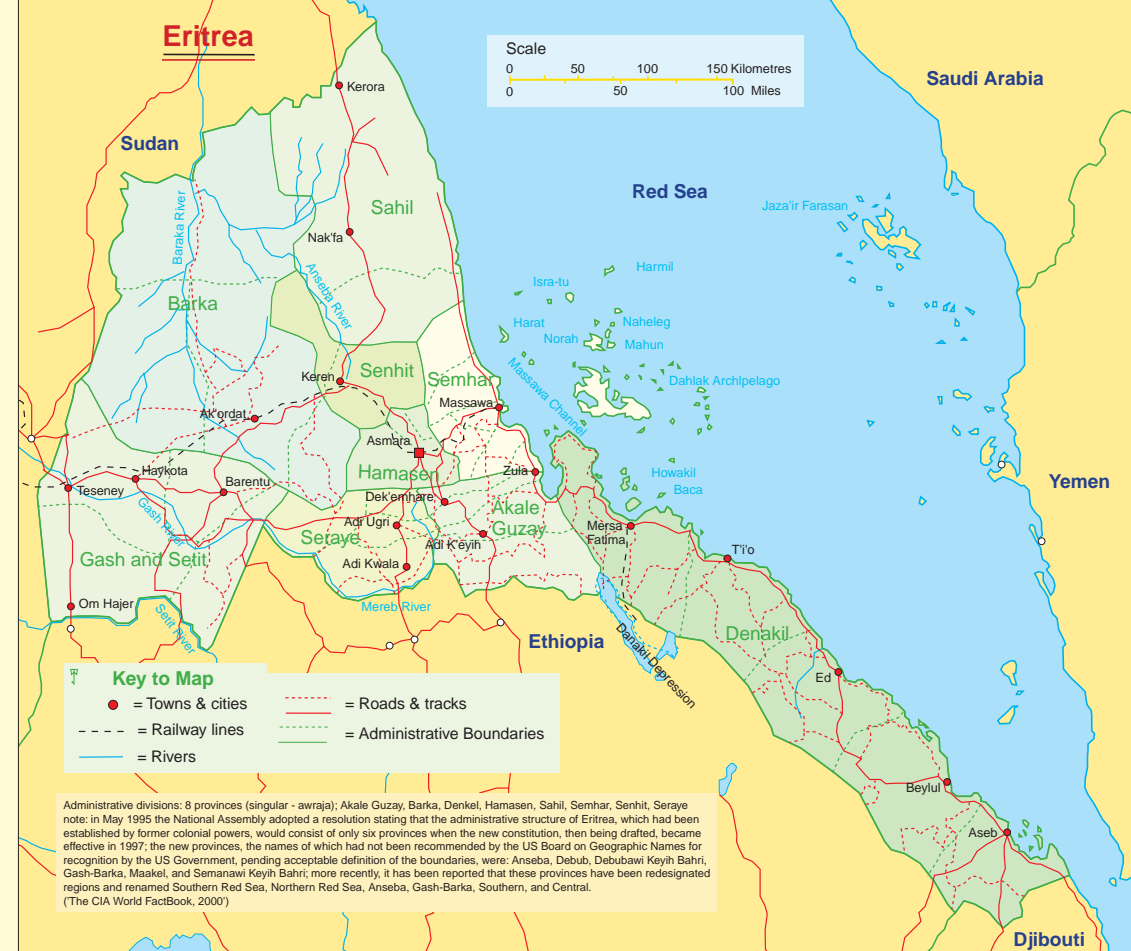
SUFFRAGE: 18 years of age; universal.

TYPE OF GOVERNMENT: transitional.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS: 8 provinces - Akale Guzay, Barka, Denkel, Hamasen, Sahil, Semhar, Senhit, Seraye - for further details, and for clarification concerning the provinces, [please see](#) the note at the bottom of the map on the opposite page.

EXECUTIVE BRANCH: The President is the Chief of State, and the Head of Government and the State Council is the executive authority.

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH: The Transitional National Assembly (150 seats, unicameral). The membership is as follows: 75 from the PFDJ



Central Committee, 60 from the Constituent Assembly, and 15 from Eritreans living abroad.

JUDICIAL BRANCH: The Judicial branch is made up of the Supreme Court, 10 provincial courts, and 29 district courts. The legal system is based on transitional laws, revised Ethiopian laws, customary laws, and post independence enacted laws.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND LEADERS: the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) (Isaias Aferwerki, Petros Solomon) is the only recognised party. It is the ruling party and was formerly the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

Political pressure parties/groups and leaders: Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ); Islamic Militant Group; Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF) (Abdullah Muhammed); Eritrean Liberation Front - Revolutionary Council (ELF-RC) (Ahmed Nasser); Eritrean Liberation Front - United Organization (ELF-UO) (Mohammed Said Nawd).

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS:

UN Membership: 28th. May, 1993.

OAU Membership: 24th. May, 1993.

Other Organisations: ACP, AfDB, CCC, ECA, FAO, G-77, IBRD, ICAO, ICFTU, IDA, IFAD, IFC, IGAD, ILO, IMF, IMO, Intelsat (nonsignatory user), IOC, ITU, NAM, PCA,

UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WFTU,
WHO, WIPO, WMO.

THE ECONOMY

GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT:

GDP per capita: \$202 ⁽¹⁰⁾

GDP: purchasing power parity - \$2.9 bn. ⁽¹¹⁾

GDP per capita: purchasing power parity -
\$750 ⁽¹¹⁾

GDP real growth rate: 6.8% ⁽¹⁰⁾, 3% ⁽¹¹⁾

GDP composition by sector:

agriculture: 18%

industry: 20%

services: 62% ⁽¹²⁾

INFLATION: 9% ^(7 & 5)

GNP: \$165 (1994), \$170 ⁽¹⁰⁾

GNP per capita: \$170 ⁽¹⁰⁾, \$200

GNP real growth rate: 8% ⁽¹³⁾

LABOUR FORCE DISTRIBUTION (1990):

Agriculture	1,274,939	80%
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Industry/Services	309,334	20%
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Total Labour	1,584,273	
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INDUSTRIES: food processing, beverages, cloth-
ing and textiles.

ELECTRICITY PRODUCTION: 177.6 m. kWh. all
produced from fossil fuel and used in local
consumption. ⁽⁷⁾

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS: barley, beans, cotton,
coffee, fish, fruit, lentils, livestock, maize,
millet, pulses, sesame, sisal, sorghum, tobacco,
vegetables, wheat.

EXPORTS: \$52.9 m. ⁽⁷⁾ commodities: livestock,
sorghum, food, textiles, footwear, household
goods, small manufactures.

EXPORTS TO: Ethiopia 64%, Sudan 17%, Italy
5%, Saudi Arabia 2%, US, Yemen ⁽⁷⁾

IMPORTS: \$489.4 m. ⁽⁷⁾ commodities, processed
goods, machinery and transport (37%), petro-
leum products, basic manufactures.

IMPORTS FROM: Saudi Arabia 16%, Italy 14%,
UAE 13%, Ethiopia 9%, Germany 6% ⁽⁷⁾

EXTERNAL DEBT: \$75 m. (1995) \$76 m. (1997 est.)

INTERNATIONAL DEBT ⁽⁵⁾

Total Debt	Debt per person	% of GDP	% of Exports
\$149,300,000	\$38	0	1

FOREIGN DEBT: \$150 m. ⁽¹⁰⁾

TRADE BALANCE: -\$374 m. ⁽¹⁰⁾

MILITARY BRANCHES: Army, Navy, Air Force

MILITARY EXPENDITURES: \$196 m. (FY97)

MILITARY EXPENDITURES: 28.6% of GDP (FY97)

ECONOMIC AID: \$123.1 m. ⁽⁷⁾. 70% of the pop-
ulation rely on aid for all or part of their food
supply. Aid from the USA is equal to 30%
of the GNP.

CURRENCY: 1 Nafka = 100 cents (first intro-
duced in November, 1997, equivalent to the
Ethiopian Birr).

NATURAL RESOURCES: copper, fish, gold, potash,
salt, zinc, possibly oil and natural gas.

COMMUNICATIONS

MAIN TELEPHONE LINES

Telephones: 23,578 ⁽⁸⁾

Per 100 inhabitants: 0.9 ⁽¹⁰⁾

Households: 736,000 ⁽¹⁰⁾

Residential main lines: 11,400 ⁽¹⁰⁾

Per 100 households: 1.5 ⁽¹⁰⁾

Main lines per 100 inhabitants: 0.5 ⁽¹⁰⁾

Waiting list for telephones: 40,000, >10 years ⁽¹⁰⁾

RADIO STATIONS: AM 2, FM 1, shortwave 2 ⁽⁸⁾

RADIO SETS: 345,000 ⁽⁷⁾

TELEVISION STATIONS: 1 ⁽⁸⁾

TELEVISION SETS: 1,000 ⁽⁷⁾

TRANSPORTATION

RAILWAYS: total of 197 mls. (317 kms.) narrow
gauge. The railway lines from Ak'ordat and
Asmara to Massawa have been out of action
since 1978. In 1994 three miles (5 kms.)
were reopened in Massawa port and the
remainder is being repaired at present. ⁽¹⁵⁾

ROADS: total: 2,492 mls. (4,010 kms.)

paved: 543 mls. (874 kms.)

unpaved: 1,949 mls. (3,136 kms.) ⁽¹³⁾

MAIN PORTS: Assab (Aseb), Massawa (Mits'iwa)

AIRPORTS: 21 ⁽¹¹⁾

3 with paved runways:

over 3,332 yds. (3,047 m.): 2

2,666 to 3,332 yds. (2,438 to 3,047 m.): 1 ⁽¹¹⁾

18 with unpaved runways:

over 3,332 yds. (3,047 m.): 2

2,666 to 3,332 yds. (2,438 to 3,047 m.): 2

1,667 to 2,665 yds. (1,524 to 2,437 m.): 6

999 to 1,666 yds. (914 to 1,523 m.): 6

under 999 yds. (914 m.): 2 ⁽¹¹⁾

International Airport: Asmara-Johannes IV ⁽¹¹⁾

AIRLINES SERVING: Egyptair, Saudia, Yemenia ⁽¹¹⁾

Foot Notes: (1) Populations in 1996; (2) 1998 est.; (3) 1993 est.; (4) July 2000; (5) 1998; (6) 2000 est.; (7) 1997; (8) 2000; (9) The population figures in square brackets, e.g. [120,000], are from Ethnologue; (10) 1996; (11) 1999 est.; (12) 1995 est.; (13) 1996 est.; (14) 1997 est.; (15) 1999.

Abbreviations used: °C. = Centigrade; °f. = Fahrenheit; \$ = US\$; bn. = billion; cm/cms. = centimetres; est. = estimate; ft. = feet; FY = financial year; in/ins. = inches; km/kms. = Kilometres; m. = metres or millions (according to context); ml/mls. = Statute Miles; sq. = square; U-1 = under one year old; U-5 = under five years old; yds. = yards.

Sources: AMECEA documents; Africa Review; New African YearBook; UN and UNHCR sources; 'CIA - 'The World Factbook 2000' on Eritrea at <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html>; SuttonLink's Fact Sheet on Eritrea http://www.thewhitefathers.org.uk/er_fct.html; Catholic Missionary Union's Fact Sheet on Eritrea http://www.cmu.org.uk/stats/afff_eri.htm; Ethnologue Eritrea Page <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/countries/erit.html>; HealthNet web site <http://www.healthnet.org/index.html>; World Health Organization (WHO) <http://www.who.ch/eha/>; The U.S. Committee for Refugees <http://www.refugees.org/world/countryindex/eritrea.htm>; Asmarino web site <http://denbe.asmarino.com/>.

Picture Above: Taking a rest at a water source in the Mendefera region

