

Regional Youth Peace Forum

Final Report



“Horn of Africa Youth in Action” 22 – 24 July 2008, Asmara

A regional youth forum for peace and development was convened between 22 and 24 July 2008 at the Inter-Continental Hotel, Asmara, Eritrea. The “Regional Youth Peace Forum” was an initiative taken by the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students (NUEYS) to bring together youth organizations of the Horn of Africa to shoulder their responsibilities and consider their contribution to sustainable peace-building and the development of the region.

The intention of the “Regional Youth Peace Forum” was to establish a network of youth and student organizations to generate ideas for regional sustainable peace-building and development. Ten youth organization from the Horn of Africa participated in this forum. These are the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students from Eritrea, the National Federation of Sudanese Youth, SPLM Youth League (South Sudan), Sudanese Communist Party-Students Chapter, the Youth Secretariat of the Democratic Unionist Party, the Eastern Front Youth Secretariat from the Sudan, the Somali Youth Congress from London, the Somali National Youth Union from the Sudan, the Ogaden Students and Youth Forum from London and Mathare Youth Sports Association from Kenya.

The forum was opened Tuesday 22 of July by a welcome speech from the secretariat of the organizing committee. Speaking at the opening ceremony in which ministers, regional administrators, PFDJ heads and invited guests took part, Mr. Yemane Gebreab, Head of Political Affairs at the PFDJ, noted the paramount importance of the prevalence of peace to youths in particular and the people of the Horn region in general. Indicating that it is impossible to talk about peace short of analyzing the root causes of conflict and lack of peace at the regional and international level, he underlined that the issue of peace should be looked at from the perspective of national, regional and international reality. He noted that humankind today finds itself in an inequitable, unjust and unfair situation and that the world is being dominated by the few rich and powerful quarters. Hence, the majority of people in our planet are leading a life of misery and suffering. Mr. Yemane went on to explain that the fundamental cause of such reality is equally the responsibility of African leaders who have betrayed their pledge to the people at the time of independence and are presently striving to amass personal wealth as well as divide the population along ethnic and religious lines, thus serving as a tool of former colonial masters. If peace is to be ensured, the youth should exert relentless efforts to fully comprehend the prevailing situation,

and that fostering cooperation and coordination among youths in the region is imperative to this end, he emphasized. Mr. Yemane asserted that the people and Government of Eritrea would extend the necessary support towards building an effective youth movement in the Horn of Africa.

The Wari cultural troupe made a cultural show of song and dance to celebrate the role of youth in peace and reconstruction.

The forum sessions started with the sharing of experience among the different youth organizations. Representatives of youth organizations presented their organizations, their perspective on Horn issues and their expectations of the forum.

In the afternoon session, a paper by the title “Youth and the Challenges of Development” was presented by Ato Elias Amare, a journalist and peace activist. In a paper he presented, Ato Elias Amare outlined the impressive role that the youth in the region had played over the past 50 years in the search for peace, social justice and ensuring socio-economic development. He also stressed the need for making substantial investment in nurturing dynamic youths. Mr. Elias further called on the youth in the region to enhance their participation in programs that would bring about gratifying development outcomes so as to rebuff conspiracies designed to undermine development in the continent. He particularly stressed the need to actively work for peace and avoid falling into the trap of subservience, in addition to deploying their energy and talent in tackling domestic problems on the basis of internal resources.

On the second day of the forum, forum participants were engaged in a serious business of discussing how to establish a network. First the secretariat gave a briefing on the situation of the Horn of Africa, the challenges the youth face. The briefing also emphasized the need for organizing and mobilizing the youth in order to enhance their contribution to peace building and development of the Horn of Africa, which is suffering from intra and enter-state conflicts.

After agreeing to establish a network of the represented organizations, by the name of the Horn of Africa Youth Initiative (HAYI), participants discussed the values and principles that guide them as they establish the network.

The youth organizations represented in the forum, after having in-depth discussions and deliberations, agreed on a common vision for the network. They also specified the missions and objectives, as well as identified stakeholders which have a direct and indirect bearing on the network’s activities.

Another paper on the “Roots of Conflicts and Peace building” was presented by Sophia Tesfamariam. In her presentation, Mrs. Sophia emphasized that the main causes of the polarization of our region is foreign interference and that the youth should be vigilant to the different manifestations of foreign interference.

In the session that followed, participants intensively discussed ways in which the network (HAYI) may respond to seemingly insurmountable challenges in the region. The Forum secretariat used a direct-participation approach to lead the discussion among participants so as to identify the strategic issues and objectives that HAYI would undertake. The group discussions identified several political and socio-

economic issues after taking into consideration the factors that make them critical to the youth and their communities and which may have serious consequences if the youth fail to address them. The diversified opinions of each participant enriched the discussions and helped identify commonalities of the challenges faced by the countries represented.

As a response to the identified strategic issues, the groups discussed on how the network may contribute to peacebuilding in the region. Furthermore, the participants developed an action plan that would enhance their networking and communication, build a culture of peace among youth and develop youth capacity.

Finally, a committee was elected from each discussion group to draft the organizational structure for the network. The participants agreed on a three layer structure:

1. Secretariat – the highest decision making body composed of representatives from each participating organization.
2. Regional coordinating body – the highest administrative structure, which is elected by the secretariat to administer the activities of the network on a rotation basis.
3. Executive committees – five committees consisting of communications, public relations, fundraising and budgeting, program and project implementation and follow-up and accountability, which will be established within each member organization.

Participants agreed that each organization should nominate executive committee members who will follow activities with their counterparts in corresponding organizations. Each of the five committees will be headed by a representative of that country which will be elected by the secretariat.

As the implementation of the action plan requires financing, participants agreed to primarily depend on their own resources. For commencement of operations, the National Union of Eritrean Youth and Students offered to support the initial steps of the network, such as website building and hosting the transitional secretariat. However, organizations will make a regular contribution in order to sustain network activities. As a starting fund, participants agreed that each organization shall contribute 1000 US\$ (one thousand United States Dollars) annually. The permanent secretariat will review this and decide the fixed annual contribution for each organization.

The forum ended by launching the network, the Horn of Africa Youth Initiative, and agreeing on a resolution supporting the HAYI network, the implementation of peace agreements and the condemnation of foreign interference in the domestic affairs of the region.

At the end of the forum, participants agreed to nominate representatives for the secretariat from each organization by 1 September 2008 and inform the transitional secretariat at NUEYS. The secretariat also agreed to distribute the participants' contact list and copies of all forum documents to all the organizations that participated in the forum.

During the official closing ceremony held on Thursday 24th of July 2008 at Embasoira Hotel, Asmara, participants were awarded certificates of participation from H. E. Ato Osman Saleh, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea. Participating organizations received a NUEYS memento from the hands of Ato Yemane Ghebreab as an appreciation for their commitment to peace in the Horn of Africa. The Sibrit Cultural troupe from Eritrea and a Democratic Unionist Party's Music Band from the Sudan performed music and cultural dances to the participants.

The forum was officially closed on Thursday July 24th, 2008.

On Friday July 25th, 2008, forum participants enjoyed a one day excursion to Massawa via the Filfil-Solomuna (the Green Belt) tourist Road.