



By Fesseha Nair

The meaning of civil society, although a term used frequently, is elusive. However, there is a fair amount of scholarly consensus around a broad view of civil society as one of the basic elements of a society, alongside the state and the market. A commonly used definition in a academic suggests that civil society is;

An intermediate associational realm between the state and family populated by organizations which are separated from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by elements of the society to protect and extend their interests or values.

Does the above mentioned definition in agreement with the Eritrean civil society organizations mushrooming everywhere in the world or globally? No, I don't think. Our situation is different from the civil society organizations in the western democratic countries. Our civil society organizations are political in a sense that they channel protests against the dictatorship. They are instrumental in the overthrow of the authoritarian and the installations of democratic system in Eritrea. Many scholars (Bratton, van de Walle) place a great weight on the role played by indigenous civil society organizations in the past transitions to democracy in the early 1990.

The aim of a civil society organization is to help us, "gather forces" that is to say coordinate, support and develop human and material resources for use in the best way possible to reach specific goals. What are the specific goals of the Eritrean Civil Society Organizations in Diaspora?

1. Mobilization

The Eritrean civil society organizations is to mobilize the masses and force political organizations to adopt more programmatic appeals than clientelistic exchange strategies. Political organizations can be compelled to resort to programmatic efforts if they are faced by independent civic associations.

2. Creating durable relationships between political organizations and civic society associations

Communication channels between political organizations and civil society associations

through regular dialogue and building trust are the pillars of laying foundations for future people's sovereignty. Democracy is a collective enterprise therefore joint activities of discussion, debate, celebration and commemoration must be encouraged not discouraged.

3. Building Professional and autonomous media

The media is the sharp weapon to defeat the dictatorship now in Eritrea and guarantee for building democratic society in the future. The media of the opposition is not enhancing the trust between the political organizations and civil society associations. The media being independent and non-partisan can increase the level of professionalism and maintain the autonomy of the media. But as we observe today the social media of the opposition is not towards free media but partisan. The role of civil associations is to promote the media for joint actions empowering the forces for democratic change.

4. Civic Education and Empowerment

Empowering the mass or the people for democratic change is a crucial element. It is not

the political elites but the people who should decide how to organize their collective life and choose what suits best for them. Civic education can empower citizens for safeguarding their fundamental rights and freedoms. The role of the opposition of civil society associations must be to give knowledge and skills to the citizens locally by organizing study-circles, encouraging dialogue and interaction within themselves and political organizations, draw ideas and suggestions from citizens and resident country organizations, give a voice to the voiceless and encourage participation.