

SAS/SG/OAU: DIARY/NOTES
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1996

Mrisho Kikwete. Among other things we discussed Mwalimu's visit to Burundi and Rwanda which begins tomorrow. Kikwete is to accompany Mwalimu during his visit.

- From 2030 - 2110 - Hon Rostan, MP for.....came to visit me. Rostan is one of the close friends of Jakaya. He was actively involved in the campaign for Kikwete to become a CCM Presidential candidate. Later he was among the youths actively involved in Mkapa's campaign for the Presidency of the United Republic.

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Working Visit to Eritrea

Just before I left Addis Ababa to come to Dar es Salaam for a short Xmas and New Year vacation, I had received an invitation from President Isaias Afewerki of Eritrea to pay a visit to his country. In his message the Eritrean leader had insisted that I should do so before December 31, 1995 - the day the UN Secretary General Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali was expected to visit Asmara. It was also clear that my visit was within the context of the continuing dispute between Eritrea and Yemen over the Hanish Archipelago. I had confirmed that I will undertake the visit from December 27 to December 29 and then proceed back to Tanzania to continue with my vacation.

I have never been to Eritrea since the EPLF took power in 1991 and thus leading to the birth of Independent Eritrea. But to be more precise, except for short stop overs at Asmara International Airport I had never been to Eritrea at all period. This therefore is my first ever visit to the country which until 1991 and after 1962 was considered and run as an integral part of Ethiopia.

Though not intentionally, the fact that I had never visited Eritrea after its independence was being misinterpreted by several Eritrean authorities. I had indeed been given a general invitation by President Isaias on more than one occasion. Indeed in response to these invitations I had planned to visit Asmara during the first week of December. This was before my sudden trip to Nigeria - but again the visit did not materialize as the Eritreans had other

commitments. Nonetheless, while I expected a somewhat cool reception given the background and in particular given that I was quite involved in the Eritrean issue for many years - an involvement which was appreciated by both Eritreans and Ethiopians since I was trying to promote a negotiated settlement of the conflict which had been more than 30 years of bloody war, as it turned I went to Asmara at the right time and was given a very warm reception by the Government and ordinary citizens. The background to the warm reception lies in the principled and objective stand which I took in the wake of the regrettable dispute between Yemen and Eritrea. Immediately after the fighting erupted in Hannish Islands between Yemeni and Eritrean Forces, a spokesman of the League of Arab States issued a statement brandishing Eritrea as the aggressor and supporting Yemen. In an interview with BBC Swahili service (Jumbe Omar Matata) on Tuesday, December 19, I described the statement by the Arab League as unfortunate and asserted that what was important was to seek a peaceful solution to this regrettable conflict between two brotherly states which have a long history of good relations. I insisted that this conflict should not be allowed to escalate and furthermore, it should not be viewed as Arab-African conflict. As I was to find out when I was in Eritrea this statement was highly appreciated by Eritreans.

Accompanied by Ambassador M.T. Bandora, I left Dar es Salaam for Asmara via Addis Ababa by Ethiopian Airlines ET 830 (Boeing 767) with a stopover in Bujumbura. We left Dar es Salaam at 0600 hours and were at Bole International Airport, Addis Ababa at 1125 hours. Then I was met by Ambassadors Gayama (ASG, ESCAS), Daniel Antonio (ASG-Political), Djinnit (D/Cabinet), Professor Johnson (Senior Scientific Analyst) and Yohannes Kifle (Chief of Protocol). As we had less than two hours before our flight to Asmara, I decided to remain at the VIP Lounge at the airport.

Around 1335 hours, we left Addis for Asmara. In addition to Bandora, my delegation was joined by Ben Kioko, Chief of Section in the Legal Division of the OAU General Secretariat. Eritrea's Ambassador to Ethiopia and the OAU, Haile Menkarios also accompanied me. He was with us for the duration of our stay in Eritrea and returned to Addis with us at the conclusion of the visit which though was supposed to be a working visit, the Eritreans characterized it as an official visit with all the pop that go with it. Example - I was driven with an escort of four or three police outriders wherever I went for an appointment.

We landed at Asmara International Airport at about 1440 hours and I was met by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ato Petros

Solomon, the Director of the African Department Ato Girma and the Chief of Protocol.

From the airport VIP Lounge (where I had brief remarks to the local media and television) we proceeded to Ambassoi Hotel where we were accommodated for the duration of our stay in Asmara.

Talks with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ato Petros Solomon

My first substantive appointment was a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Eritrea, Ato Petros Solomon. The meeting which took place in the Foreign Minister's Office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lasted more than one hour. It started at 1600 hours and ended at 1720 hours. The Minister was with the Director of the African Department, Ato Girma and Eritrea's Ambassador to Eritrea and the OAU, Ato Haile Menkarios. On the OAU side were Ambassador Bandora and Ben Kioko. Our discussion focused on the dispute between Eritrea and Yemen over the Hannish Islands.

Foreign Minister Petros Solomon gave us a briefing on the evolution of the situation (from an Eritrean perspective). The review included the historic, the most recent and current situation on the conflict. The Minister inter alia expressed satisfaction and appreciation at the sensitivity and objectivity demonstrated by the Secretary General of the OAU (i.e. myself) in addressing this unfortunate conflict. He made special reference to my remarks calling for deescalation, resolution of the conflict to allow it be given a different dimension, like making it an Arab-African conflict. Analyzing the attitude and reaction of the Arab countries over the conflict, the Foreign Minister observed that while Sudan and Jordan and until recently Saudi Arabia (though the statement by Prince Abdalla) have taken a pro-Yemen stance, many other Arab States have maintained a neutral position.

Following is a detailed record of my discussion with the Eritrean Foreign Minister as prepared by Ben Kioko.

Walk about in Asmara

Asmara is a beautiful and historic city. It is 2300 meters above sea level. Its current population is 400,000.

At the suggestion of Ambassador Haile we - Bandora, Ben Kioko, the Chief of Protocol and Haile dispensed with our cars and the police escort and decided to have a walk about in the city. We did so from 1730 to 1845 hours. It was quite an experience. The city is clean and peaceful. People are friendly and there are no beggars (quite a dramatic contrast to the experience in Addis Ababa).

In the course of our walk about we stopped at a coffee shop and had some juice or beer (in my case I had a delicious papaya juice). We also did some shopping - all of us bought some shoes. Eritrea is famous for making shoes (a tradition presumably inherited from the Italians) and sweaters/pull-overs. Finally we stopped at another coffee shop where we had some ice cream. What was most impressive is not only the sense of security that we had but also how tranquil the city is.

Dinner in my honour by the Foreign Minister

From 1930 to 2130 I attended a dinner at Bologna (?) Restaurant hosted by the Foreign Minister Ato Petros Solomon. This is a restaurant which specializes in Italian food and is owned by Eritreans. The food was great and the ambiance was just right. It was a dinner with limited number of invitees making the atmosphere informal, friendly and conducive to discussion.

Those present at the dinner included the Minister of Interior, Mr Ali Said Abdalla, the Minister of Justice Ms. Fawziya Hashim, the Director of the African Department Ato Girma, Eritrea's Ambassador to Ethiopia Ato Haile Menkarios. Both Ambassador Bandora and Ben Kioko were also present.

By the time the dinner was over, I was very exhausted and quite sleepy. I had not slept since the night before. Last night, I stayed awake since I had to be at the airport early this morning around 0500 hours for our flight which left Dar es Salaam at 0600 hours. It has now been my practice that whenever I leave DS for Addis I choose not to sleep but instead sleep in the plane. This time around however I could not sleep in the plane - neither the leg from DSM to Bujumbura nor from Burundi's capital to Addis - thanks to the constant interruption. And as already stated, I had been kept busy both at Addis International Airport and from the moment I landed in Asmara.

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Thus by 2300 hours I went to bed. But at about midnight my sleep was rudely interrupted by a persistent telephone call. It was BBC calling from London. I politely asked them to call me in the morning. They apologized but by then my sleep had been interrupted. It was only after an hour or so that I fell asleep again. Incidentally, this is the time of the cold weather in Asmara. I had been forewarned. Luckily however it was not as cold as I was made to believe - at least not today or tonight.

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THURSDAY, 28 DECEMBER 1995

This is my second day in Eritrea. And it was quite hectic. I had engagements in Asmara and also visited the Port of Massawa where I was taken by a helicopter. But first, Julian Marshal of BBC interviewed me by telephone from London in connection with my current trip and more specifically regarding the Eritrean/Yemen dispute. Robin telephoned me at 0700 hours and the interview lasted some six minutes. It was broadcast around 0735 hours.

My engagements of the day in a nutshell were as follows :

0830-0935 - Meeting with the President of the State of Eritrea Isaias Afewerki;

1040-1100 - Interview by Michel Montot, AFP Correspondent based in Nairobi but currently visiting Asmara.

1110 - Left Asmara for Massawa by helicopter.

1130 - Arrived Massawa

1230-1340 - Boat riding in the port of Massawa and visiting of the surrounding islands notably Sheikh Said Island.

1400-1515 - Lunch at Hamsien Hotel.

1530 - Left Massawa for Asmara.

1555 - Arrived in Asmara

1730-1810 - Visited the Graveyard for tanks & vehicles destroyed in

the battle for Asmara.

1900-1930 - Meeting with the U.S. Ambassador in Eritrea, Robert Houdeck.

1945-2130 - Dinner in my honour hosted by the President of the State of Eritrea, H.E. Isaias Afewerki.

Meeting with President Isaias Afewerki

The meeting took place at the State Guest House. President Isaias was with several senior officials including Foreign Minister Petros Solomon, Director of the African Department, Ato Girma, Eritrea's Ambassador to Ethiopia and the OAU, Ato Haile Menkarios and with senior officials. I was with Ambassador Bandora and Ben Kioko.

The meeting which started at 0830 and ended at 0935 hours exclusively focussed on the Eritrean/Yemeni conflict over the Greater Hannish Island.

In his expose, President Isaias expressed his appreciation for the role that the OAU has taken on the issue (referring to the statement I had made calling for a peaceful resolution and regretting the partisan approach adopted by the League of Arab States). He reiterated Eritrea's desire to see an end to the conflict/dispute which has no winners but only losers. He called for a deescalation of the conflict and its peaceful resolution through negotiations, mediation or arbitration.

As to the modalities of ending the conflict, the President stated that they are flexible. They support the efforts of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia and the Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin (I learnt that Meles was today going to Sanaa in pursuance of Ethiopia's mediation efforts). They are equally supportive of efforts deployed by Egypt and its President Muhamed Hosni Mubarak. Eritrea will also like to see mediation efforts by the USA and France. At the same time he is going to propose to the UN Secretary General, Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali who is due in Asmara on 31 December 1995 that an umbrella committee/group composed of the UN, OAU and LAS be created to follow up mediation efforts.

President Isaias who gave me a very historical expose on the evolution of the dispute also called for an African commitment not in support of Eritrea "but in support of justice".