

**January 31, 1978**

**Memorandum of a Conversation between East  
German leader Erich Honecker and Siassi Aforki,  
General Secretary of the Revolutionary Party of  
Eritrea, in Berlin**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

Aforki briefs Honecker and SED leadership on the current situation in Ethiopia in relation to the Eritrean movement for independence.

**Original Language:**

German

**Contents:**

Translation - English

Memorandum of a Conversation between East German leader Erich Honecker and Siassi Aforki, General Secretary of the Revolutionary Party of Eritrea, in Berlin, 31 January 1978 (dated 3 February 1978) □Honecker: [Welcoming remarks]  
Aforki: We are very proud and very happy about this meeting. It is a historical meeting. The first visit of our comrades in the GDR already brought very positive results. [...] We highly appreciate the good offices of your country and your party. What we have achieved so far is already a turning-point in our fight. The results of the meeting with the Ethiopians are still uncertain, but in any case it will be a historic meeting. In the past 17 years a fierce battle has been waged. Not one meeting took place between Eritreans and Ethiopians. If something developed from this first meeting, this will not only be good for our two countries but for the peoples of the entire world. The only pre-condition for it is goodwill on the Ethiopian and on our side.

[Short review of the Eritrean-Ethiopian conflict.] Comrade Erich Honecker: For the first dialogue with the Ethiopians it will be decisive to consider in which direction one has to become active in the interest of the Revolution. We are deeply interested in the success of the Ethiopian Revolution and in the objectives of the Eritrean People's Liberation Movement. Both sides have the goal to repel the imperialist intervention and build a new humane social order. It is very painful that comrades who are ideologically close are involved in such a conflict. We welcome the fact that Comrade Aforki has the determination and mandate to come to Berlin to find out together with the representatives of the DERG how the problems can be solved. We have used our influence as much as possible to make sure that you will be heard. Now much depends on the dialogue which - after 17 years - can lead to a turning-point. As I understand Comrade Aforki, he is moving in this direction. In his conversation with Comrade Werner Lamberz, Comrade Mengistu indicated his readiness to grant the people of Eritrea full autonomy within the Ethiopian state. What form this should take is a matter to be dealt with by both sides. The national question has immense importance for the whole Ethiopian Revolution. Its solution is also hindered by Somalia's aggression. Somalia currently receives the support of all imperialist governments. Concerning the Eritrean question, one has to see the opportunity given by [the similarity of] the contents of the Eritrean Liberation Movement and the Ethiopian Revolution. I agree with Comrade Aforki that a solution would be of great significance not only for the peoples of Ethiopia and Africa but also for all peoples. We accord great significance to the currently arranged contact and the incipient dialogue. We hope it will lead to agreement. The revolutionary streams belong together. Comrade Aforki has rightly stated that one can then proceed together against the imperialists. From my point of view, the full autonomy within the Ethiopian state is the correct solution in order to pursue together the common task of economic build-up and the creation of a progressive social order in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Your forthcoming meeting can be successful. It is a historic meeting. I am interested in the question if you, Comrade Aforki, in the case one might come to an agreement, will have the strength to implement it. Besides you, there are two other movements in Eritrea. In case of an agreement one would have to carefully plan all steps. Comrade S. Aforki: The main problem is in how far Ethiopia is willing to meet our demands. It is clear from the start that if Ethiopia is not bringing along new proposals, a solution will not be possible. There is no point in discussing the possibility of unifying both revolutions. What we need are guarantees that the fight against imperialism and reaction will continue. Only one principal question is of importance. Everything depends on the capabilities and tactics of our organization. We won't be picky in minor questions. It is totally clear to us that in the case of an actual agreement its implementation is the important thing. Then we will check the details and implement them patiently. Eritrea has many enemies within and without. If they all find out about it, we will have many difficulties. But we are preparing for it. It is true that we are not the only organization. That, however, does not worry us. Because of our great influence and military strength we can succeed. The other two organizations in Eritrea have allied themselves with the imperialists and the reaction in the Arabic region. We have to expect that the imperialists will take advantage of the situation in case of a solution of the Eritrean problem and escalate the situation and heighten the conflict. Therefore it is necessary that the Socialist countries will guarantee a peaceful solution. In the case of an agreement prudent tactics are necessary not to allow the reactionaries to exert their influence. In Ethiopia as well there are forces which are powerfully fighting against a just solution. The current regime cannot proceed against these forces by itself. This is an important question.

Honecker: [Report on GDR domestic and foreign policy] [Concluding remarks]  
[Source: SAPMO-BArch, DY30 IV 2/2.035/127; document obtained and translated by  
Christian F. Ostermann.]