

Asmarino Independent
The Summary of an address by H.E. The chief Administrator of Eritrea to The Chiefs of the Beni Amer, Bariya, and Kunama tribes at Barentu.

March, 21st 1951 (part-2).

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After greetings the chiefs, H.E. – speaking in Arabic – reminded them that he had a long acquaintances with their affairs. When the British Army had first occupied Eritrea peace had quickly been restored. The people of the Western province had seen the great power of the army. The British Government had not expected to remain responsible for Eritrea for ten years. But it had stayed to provide the country with a Government until a fair settlement of its future could be made on an international basis. A decision had now been taken by U.N.O. which provided for the federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. In some respects Eritrea would manage its own affairs in future but it was important to remember that the monarch of the new federation would be H.I.M. Haile Selassie I.

H.E. explained that the Western province had enjoyed a high degree of security for many years. The tribesmen must recall what had happened to them at the hands of the Ethiopians in the past century and they must put their house in order as soon as possible.

In recent years the country had been plagued by brigands who had caused much suffering. H.E. said that

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He was surprised on little assistance the tribes were giving the police. He didn't think that the chiefs and the people could hide behind the word shifta. The shifta were common criminals and brigands and in his experience the tribal organization had been evolved from the distant past to protect the tribes from the depredations of such people. Where was the asabiya (the binding force) of these tribes of the western Eritrea? He had always known them in the past as brave and proud people. Had they now become ineffective cowards? He was sure they had not. But why then did they not help the police to capture them? Probably every man in the area knew where they were to be found. Did they leave no tracks? Surely the tribesmen had not even lost the art of their fore-fathers in laying thieves by the heels? It was a disgrace to them all that when some shifta stole cattle from the Hadondoa across the Sudan frontier a single S.D.F. sergeant and a small party had tracked the brigands and the animals they had stolen for five days into the heart of Eritrea and after recovering the booty and arresting the criminals they had handed them over to the Eritrean authorities. Was not this an

example of what the Beni Amir in conjunction with the Eritrean police could also do?

Some people believed that these crimes could be committed in the name of Eritrean nationalism but this was a very false view of the matter. Did the chiefs not realize that in the future these brigand leaders might usurp their positions? It was in their own interests to see that they were brought to justice now.

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H.E. said he realized that much of this disorder was due to unsettled tribal disputes and he called on the meeting to review the many agreements for payment of the inter-tribal compensation which had not been made effective.

It was useless for the chiefs to suppose that all the work was going to be done for them by the British side of the administration. They themselves are chosen by their people to be their leaders and they were paid salaries by the Administration. Therefore he considered them to be as much members of the administration as any other officials. If the chiefs of their tribesmen imagine that everything could be put on the shoulders of the administration, H.E. would have to consider whether it was worth our while to continue to administer this part of the western province. He could quite easily leave them to their own devices at the mercy of the brigands by withdrawing all police, closing the markets and removing the services provided for the people by the administration. They must think carefully on this point. H.E. concluded by regretting that his first meeting with these chiefs should have necessitated his speaking so sternly and he hoped at their next meeting he would be able to congratulate them on having played a more effective part in restoring peace. He proposed to visit all police posts in the area and to ensure that vigorous action was being taken by them. He also proposed to call for a report on the situation in a weeks time, and then in a fortnights time and then to re-visit.

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Re-visit Barentu on March 21st to see what action should be taken.

Representatives of the main tribes then spoke. The Diglal Hussein of the Beni Amir promised full support. The chief of the Baria expressed that his tribe was dissatisfied because the compensation they were due for the depredations of the Kunama in the past had not been settled. A spokesman of the kunama said that his tribe was the only one to have surrendered a substantial number of fire-arms to the Government and were therefore unable to defend themselves or arrest brigands. The chief of the Baria said that the situation would be much improved if the Government would forgive all shifta whether they were murderers or not.

H.E. replied that the Government had already stated its terms as regards surrender of the shifta and it could not agree that the amnesty which covered the capital offence could be considered. He wanted to see a great deal more cooperation from the chiefs before he considered any changes in the present policy.

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“As I promised you on the 1st of March, I have come to ascertain what you have done to secure the peace and live in harmony with your neighbors. I have been informed by the S.D.O. western province that a number of shifta have surrendered since my last visit. This affords me a measure of satisfaction. There are however, many other shiftas at large, and all these persons are to be brought to the police. The terms of the amnesty of 15th January 1951 are still in force, and the remaining shiftas in this district must be brought in. and this in the very near future. I understand that you sheikhs are strongly desirous of bringing in the shiftas, so I still hope that you will not oblige me to take more repressive action. I have asked for weekly reports from the S.D.O. and if the security situation does not improve I will be back. Since I have started to deal with your problems, I will persevere until such time as the people of Barentu are living and working in peace.

It has come to my notice that there are useless arguments about which shiftas should surrender first. I would like the sheikhs to show good faith by inducing their shifta to surrender with their arms, explaining to them the evil consequences of the delays which are being caused.

Faid Tinga is still out. I want the kunama sheikhs to contact him and urge him to surrender. Also I understand that the Baria have many shiftas whom to date have shown no sign of surrendering their arms. There fore I warn the Baria sheikhs that if they do not bring their shifta leader Saleh Wendil in, I will expel them from this area into the area beyond Hanbol and put forces to watch them. This is a solemn warning which will be put into effect if my words pass unheeded. I give you until the 1st day of April 1951 to bring in Saleh Wendil.

I am glad to hear that soon after my last visit the sheikhs decided to forget their past enmity. But I consider that such easy conciliation is not sufficient because there are some individuals whose relations had been murdered and cattle stolen and who will not agree to relinquishing their claims unstudied. Therefore I suggest that there should be a calculation through which each tribe will be aware of what is due to or from them. This will require time, so I give you a period of two months to settle this matter, thereafter we will re-assemble for a final settlement.

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As we are going to hand over this country after a year and a half, it is our intention to keep the peace until we do so. **It is known that many clashes between the tribes are caused by grazing in the Kunama lands.** Therefore, in order to avoid clashes, I propose and order that all tribes other than kunama and Baria will drive their cattle south of the Gash. I am quite confident that the pasture is available this year in every part in Eritrea, and also the Beni Amer and Baria need not graze their cattle in **the land of the kunama.** They may, if they like drive their cattle south of the Gash. I hope that the rainy season of next year will be as good as this year. You can discuss this matter after my departure. I have also ordered that the boundary of the Kunama-Baria lands should be discussed by the D.O.S. and the chiefs.

I warn the Baria to arrange for the surrender of the shifta leader Saleh Wendil, otherwise it will result in their being banned from Barentu District.

MOSAEED OMAR MUSA + BARIA

We will do our best to bring Saleh Wendil in.

NAEIR DAUL –B. AMER.

We are greatly dependents on the Gash and strongly in need of it.

H.E. (in reply)

Owing to the present security situation, I have issued my instructions that you must graze south of the Gash in order to keep each tribe separate.

HAMID FEREG -B. AMER.

The Gash has been populated by the Beni Amer from time immemorial. The history of this country shows that the Beni Amer were the first tribes who utilized this land. The kunama came after us. We have always been living in harmony with the kunama except in recent years. Our enmity was with the Hadandowa. I would also point out that we have been owed diz from the kunama since 1945, and have not yet been paid.

H.E. (in reply)

I hold the opposite opinion and I know your history for the past 500 years. I have also read a book published by an Englishman who came to your country 8 hundred years ago. **I assure you that there is no foundation for your pretence, that the Gash was first populated by the Beni Amir. It has**

been kunama land and the Beni Amer has raided the kunama for years.

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NAEIR DAUD –B. AMER.

If we are to graze south of the Gash, it means that we are put between **two enemies; the Ethiopians and the Kunama.**

H.E. (in reply)

In that case you should stay in your own territory and not move south. There is certainly no need for you to do so this year. The grazing is sufficient to the north.

SHIEKH MUSA ALI SHULI – KUNAMA

I refer to the words of Hamid Fereg the Beni Amer sheikh and strongly protest at his unfounded views; also I claim that such words are the source of the trouble between the tribes

SHEIKH OSMAN ABDULLAH. –B. AMER.

Supported the forces of Sheikh Hamid Farag of the Beni Amer and reiterated that the areas of Gash are first populated by the Beni Amer.

In concluding his address his Excellency said:

For security purpose and to restrain all tribes, I proposed to keep each tribe separate during the period of British Administration. I have decided that all tribes other than kunama should, either stay in their own territory or graze their cattle in the south part of the Gash.

Again I repeat that since I have begun to deal with your problem, I will not give up until I find a final settlement. I have asked the S.D.O. for weekly report through which I can see your progress. I ask the sheikhs to grow faith by inducing their shifta to surrender with their arms.

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