

### A longtime friend of Eritrea.

It was during the period of the British Military Administration following World War 2, that I remember travelling up from Sudan through Tessenei, Barentu, Agordat to Asmara, and then down to Embatkala where I was posted as a young officer in 1948. I have formed a great affection for Eritrea from then. But in the course of later work with IofC in the Horn region, I was helped to realise what I had not understood earlier, that our administration could and should have taken much more time and care to listen, to help secure the aspirations and integrity of the Eritrean people. There is no doubt we made mistakes and left loose ends, and for that I feel deeply sorry. There was little or no objection by Britain at the time of the transition to the Federation system in 1952, when Eritrea was virtually taken over by Ethiopia, with Western backing on account of the Cold War pressure for strategic places such as the American Kagnaw Station and Massawa Naval base. There seems to have been little serious attempt to discover what the Eritrean people really wanted. But no one could fail to admire and honour the endurance and bravery of the 'Tegadelti' during your long costly freedom struggle that followed, and to assist now in any possible way the efforts for reconciliation you are making, between the two Faiths and between the highland and lowland people, and the ongoing struggle to build trust and a united front of leadership and spokesmanship among the diaspora. That is why IofC offers our wholehearted help,... in the form of the global experience and positive evidence of the factor of reconciliation and peace-building, from other relevant situations of conflict. Some resource material of true stories is available, included in this film today.

After leaving university, I took a life-decision as a full-time voluntary worker with this programme of IofC International, and eventually found myself back in Asmara for five years, together with my family, on the invitation of a committee of Eritrean (and Ethiopian) friends, instead of as part of an occupation army! We held two international Conferences there, when friends came to help from India, other parts of Africa and elsewhere, to share their own initiatives of change. Although working in many countries, I have always felt my main personal commitment must be to East Africa and the Horn region as a whole, where the arrogance and insensitive prescriptions of our colonial history, with its partitions and policies, is partly reflected today in the cross-border flows of refugees from the conflict areas. During the painful period of Mengistu, we were working in Sudan and were able to assist some of our Eritrean and Ethiopian friends to find their way out and into UK, Switzerland and North America with their children. Recently in Bristol we had an emotional visit with one of these families, the Mebrahtus, who are deeply concerned and committed with IofC for the new Eritrea. Others such as that brave woman Abeba Tesfagiorgis keep in close contact. Her remarkable book, with her Asmara prison experience, is a classic of survival,... with her personal Faith and vision in a reborn Eritrea. With other British colleagues I feel strongly motivated to support and facilitate these training sessions you are undertaking together, in the healing and trust-building process for Eritrea after so much suffering,...when the creative energies of your great people can be released into the mainstream and reconstruction of your nation, to play its unique role in that crisis-torn Region.

Jim Baynard-Smith