

## Eritrea demands formally to rejoin IGAD

Sunday 31 July 2011

By Tesfa-Alem Tekle

July 30, 2011(ADDIS ABABA) - Eritrea has requested to reactivate its membership in the regional Inter-governmental Authority on Development (IGAD) bloc, one day after a UN report accused the red sea nation of planning to carryout coordinated terrorist attacks on its neighbor countries including at an Africa Union leaders Summit held in Addis Ababa earlier this year.

Four years after suspending, Eritrea said on Friday it has decided to rejoin IGAD due mainly the current developments in the east African region including the independence of Southern Sudan and humanitarian crisis at the Horn of Africa.

"I have the honor to inform you and through you the member states of IGAD that the State of Eritrea has decided to reactivate its membership in IGAD with immediate effect," said a letter sent by its ministry of Foreign Affairs to the IGAD executive secretary this week.

IGAD member states have a right to suspend and reactivate their membership. Eritrea was the first member state to suspend bloc's membership in 2007 to what Asmara said was in protest to member states refusal to condemn and take actions against Ethiopia for sending troops to Somalia.

In the letter sent by the ministry of Foreign Affairs Eritrea affirmed that the government in Asmara will be determined to play active roles to bring regional peace.

However Ethiopian government said Eritrea's decision alone is not enough to reintegrate the regional bloc political process and won't be on bloc's best interest.

"The question must not be whether IGAD will welcome its return or not but the question should be - is Eritrea's decision a genuine one and not one of its tactics" said Getachew Reda, Media and Communication Director within the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in statements to *Sudan Tribune*.

Last month, leaders from the Horn of Africa region have openly condemned the Eritrean state for sponsoring activities that potentially harm peace and stability in this fragile region calling on African Union and the UN Security Council to impose more sanctions including fully implementing existing sanctions, freezing remittances from Diaspora and incomes from mining and ensuring Eritrea's compliance with the previous decisions of the UN.

The latest report by the United Nations Monitoring Group said the Red Sea states intelligence officers are active in Uganda, South Sudan, Kenya and Somalia, and posed a threat to regional peace and security. It also accused the country of using its embassy in Kenya to bankroll the al-Qaeda-linked Somali rebels.

Eritrea has long been under fire for alleged wide interference in the internal affairs of neighboring countries and sponsoring terrorist activities in the Horn of Africa, an allegation Eritrea denies instead says the accusations are anti-Eritrea campaigns spearhead by arch-foe Ethiopia.

Eritrea earlier this year established an envoy to Ethiopia to represent the country at AU headquarters in Addis Ababa after boycotted the African Union (AU) for over ten years.

The investigation by the UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea suggests that the bomb plot at AU summit which was made public by Ethiopia at the time was genuine and representing "a qualitative shift in Eritrean tactics" in the Horn of Africa.

Getachew also a domestic and international law expert says IGAD member states can't be sure if Eritrea's latest intention is one of Eritrea's maneuver.

"It is quite difficult for IGAD member countries to easily bring Eritrea on board "

"Eritrea reinstated its ambassador to AU while the country was conspiring a massive bomb plots at AU summit so from realities on ground you can't be sure if Eritrea's decision to return to IGAD is a plot to exercise one of its ill strategies or not" he said adding "it is some thing Eritrea needs to prove practically beyond words"

The country is facing UN imposed arms embargo, as well as a travel ban and an assets freeze on its leaders alleged to be breaking an arms blockade on Somalia.

The UN Security Council voted unanimously on Friday in favor of extending the mandate of its Monitoring Group on Somalia

and Eritrea for another year, which is tasked with monitoring an arms embargo on those countries.

(ST)