

# For the Grand Opening

This is a day all Eritreans in Australia, and all friends of Eritrea, thought might never come. When most of us began taking a justifiable interest in the struggle of the Eritreans, the war was stalemated and seemed eternal, and the world - taken as a whole - was indifferent to the true story and to the agonies of the Eritreans. Those few who returned with tales of the equities and compassion of the Eritreans, of their extraordinary adaptation to circumstances which would have destroyed other nations, were considered apologists and fantasizers.

Now the obscene war has ended, Eritrea has official existence, and we stand in its Australian mission. What a day, and what a tragedy for me that I am not there for the climactic event of our relationship with Eritrea!

I think we must thank Australian politicians who were open to the Eritrean story. We must thank the governments past and present who gave room to the Eritrean cause. We must thank all the aid workers and NGOs who helped the Eritreans survive. We must thank Senator Schacht, and the four senators, including Senators Sibraa and Alston, who visited the referendum in Eritrea in April. We must thank Fessahaie who in his quiet, persuasive manner drew all of us here, including the late and immortal Fred who is here in his own unexpungeable way, into the Eritrean cause, that cause which was also the cause of humanity. We must honour here the Eritrean people, firstly for the scale of their struggle, and now for the refreshing hope they offer all societies as they try to adapt their remarkable institutions to the demands of sovereign and peaceful existence.

We mean, Fessahiaie, to support the Eritreans in this as much as we can. For the Eritreans are the hope of Africa and perhaps the hope of all of us.

Congratulations Fessahaie! We are glad above all that it's you who holds this position. And so we are all the more ready to continue the friendship in a new, constructive way. I wish I were there to add my Lululus to the singing of the Eritreans, who are - as Martin Luther King said - "Free at last!"

Tom Keenally