



AMBASSADOR SEMERE RUSSOM PRESENTS CREDENTIALS

Ambassador Semere Russom, Eritrea's Ambassador to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, has presented his credentials to Ethiopian President Sahlework Zewde.

At the ceremony, held at the Genet-Leul State House in Addis Ababa, Ambassador Semere delivered President Isaias Afwerki's message of goodwill to President Sahlework and the people and Government of Ethiopia.

Indicating that he will work to strengthen the relations between Eritrea and Ethiopia, Ambassador

Semere said that the new era of peace between the two countries holds great promise for their peoples.

Expressing goodwill to President Isaias, President Sahlework congratulated Ambassador Semere for his historic appointment. President Sahlework also expressed her expectation that Ambassador Semere will play a significant and positive role in strengthening the existing peace and cooperation between the two countries.

President Sahlework went on

to say that Eritrea and Ethiopia, through cooperation and integrated efforts, have the potential and capacity to contribute to peace and development in the region and across Africa.

MEETING ON IMPLEMENTATION OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

The Governor of the Central region, Major General Romodan Osman Awelyai, held a meeting about the implementation of development programs with residents of Serejeka sub-zone on 25 December.

During the meeting, he outlined the significance of scientific and technological support for food security and said that new development programs in several areas will be introduced in 2019, including in natural resources, soil, water, and forestry conservation.

Pointing out that commendable soil and water conservation activities have been conducted thus far, Mr. Kiflemaria Gebremeskel, managing director in the Serejeka sub-zone, called on residents to improve their organization and participation in the implementation of upcoming development drives.

He went on to say that due to awareness campaigns, public understanding of pre- and post-natal health and voluntary counseling have increased, the mortality rate of mothers and children has significantly declined, and environmental sanitation programs have been well conducted.

PRESS RELEASE

Indian Ocean Newsletter: Yet another Wild Allegation

In its publication of 21 December, (No 1488), this month, the Indian Ocean Newsletter alleges that "the Ethiopian and Eritrean Presidents (sic?) have indicated to their Somali counterpart... their willingness to take over from AMISOM when it departs in 2021....Eritrea is planning to dispatch 5,000 soldiers to Somalia as soon as the first AMISOM contingents leave in February".

This is patently false.

Moreover, this is not the first time for the ION to churn out false and unsubstantiated "news analysis" of events and trends in our region. Indeed, this has become almost its trademark.

The ION's penchant to disseminate false information will not serve any purpose and can only corrode its reputation. In the event, we call on the ION to respect its readers and desist from spreading false news.

*Ministry of Information
Asmara
26 December 2018*

SEMINAR ON PRESERVING COMMUNITY-BASED VALUES

Ms. Fauzia Hashim, Minister of Justice, conducted seminar focused on preserving community-based values on 27 December in Assab.

Indicating that the public has a system of resolving issues based on cultural and social values, Minister Fauzia noted that in 2003 community magistrates were established under Proclamation No. 132. She added that the mandate of community magistrates was classified under Proclamation No. 167, issued in

2012, and that this has helped improve the public's access legal services.

During the seminar, Ms. Fauzia also pointed out that legal process has several important pillars, including openness and equitability, timeliness and efficiency, being free, and accountability.

The minister went on to say that the law takes into account the socio-economic, political, cultural, and historical context

of society and she called on the government, various institutions, and the public to work for their implementation.

In the Southern Red Sea region there are 8 community magistrates and 24 judges, including 8 women.

Participants at the meeting conducted extensive discussions on topics raised during the seminar and suggested several steps that should be taken to strengthen community magistrates.



Development

Pharmacovigilance Saves Lives

Lwam Kahsay

Medicines, medical products, and vaccines represent essential components of any healthcare delivery system. Their use ensures benefits for patients, the general public, and the healthcare system. While modern medicines and vaccines are considered relatively safe, the thalidomide incident in the early 1960s brought to light the need to continuously monitor medical products so as to detect rare adverse effects early. A rigorous safety monitoring system also helps to identify increases in the frequency of known unwanted effects, patient groups at risk of specified events from particular medications, specific effects due to genetics, prescription errors, and the circulation of substandard or counterfeit products. The effect of diet, culture, delivery systems, and the use of traditional or alternative remedies on the safety of registered medicines can also be known through safety monitoring of all medicines.

The Eritrean National Pharmacovigilance Centre (NPC) was established in 2003 and became a full member of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Programme for International Drug Monitoring in April 2012. Since 2012, the NPC has made significant strides and progress. It is encouraging to see the NPC ranked among the top four African countries in terms of number of adverse drug reaction reports and their completeness grading. The NPC, housed within the National Medicines and Food Administration,

has the responsibility to monitor medicinal products and ensure their safety for the general public.

In order to carry out its mandate, the Ministry of Health (MOH) developed a National Policy on Pharmacovigilance, which will also be a guide to action. The MOH recognizes the importance of ensuring the health, safety, and well-being of the Eritrean population. This is clearly expressed within the new National Pharmacovigilance Policy. This policy covers a range of topic areas, including the use of medicines, vaccines, cosmetics, blood and blood products, alternative remedies, and other antibiotics.

Modern medicines, vaccines, and biological products are registered and offered for use only when they are considered safe and effective. However, inherently no medicine or vaccine can be regarded as safe for all people or under all conditions of use. The testing processes that provide the data required for the registration of medicines, vaccines, and biological products often are very short, exclude vulnerable populations like children and the elderly, and are carried out in people without co-morbidities. Nonetheless, in clinical practice, such registered products are used by several categories of people, including vulnerable populations like children and pregnant women, and people with co-morbid conditions. It is, therefore, extremely essential that after a product is approved for use, its safety is continuously monitored in order to ensure that it is safe for the general population and that rare occurrences of adverse reactions that may have been missed during the pre-approval process are picked

up and managed appropriately.

In addition to these, prescription errors, inappropriate use of medicines, and the proliferation of substandard or counterfeit medical products can also have a harmful impact on the public. This is the basis of pharmacovigilance, which is defined by the WHO as "the science and activities relating to the detection, monitoring, assessment, understanding, and prevention of adverse effects or any other drug-related problems." Pharmacovigilance also includes vaccine pharmacovigilance, which is defined as "the science and activities relating to the detection, assessment, understanding, prevention, and communication of AEFIs, or of other vaccine or immunization related issues."

The ultimate aim of pharmacovigilance is patient safety. The pharmacovigilance activities of Eritrea's NPC aim to ensure the rational and safe use of medicines, vaccines, and other health-related products. Since its revitalization in 2012, the NPC has made tremendous strides. One of its most notable achievements has been fulfilling the WHO benchmark (maturity level 3) quicker than any other African country.

A number of factors contributed to this important achievement. One of the most significant was the massive sensitization of local healthcare professionals. Specifically, around 90% of the healthcare professionals in Eritrea are aware of pharmacovigilance and a significant percentage are involved in reporting adverse drug reactions. As a result, in 2018, the NPC has

been able to submit approximately 1000 individual case safety reports per million inhabitants to the global database. It has also led to some important safety signals.

Eritrea's NPC shared the story of its experiences and successes during the Uppsala Monitoring Center's (UMC) 40th anniversary celebrations, held earlier this year in Uppsala, Sweden. The UMC, established to support the WHO's Programme for International Drug Monitoring, has recognized Eritrea for its strong

on the idea that good or positive role models are important for the growth and continuity of successful vigilance.

It is quite clear that the success of the NPC is down to the efforts of its hard-working members. During its early days, it had only one member. However, now it has full-time staff members, three pharmacovigilance medical officers, and other professional volunteers. As noted, the Eritrean NPC falls under the umbrella of the Eritrean National

Onsite detection of ADRs (Ghindae team)



record on pharmacovigilance. Eritrea, along with the Netherlands and Peru, was invited to share its pharmacovigilance experience. Mr. Mulugeta Russom, head of Eritrea's NPC, gave a detailed presentation on Eritrea's successes, strategies used, challenges encountered, solutions adopted, and lessons learned. Mr. Mulugeta also announced that Eritrea is working hard to integrate pharmacovigilance in public health and that the NPC has established an annual award to motivate people to report. The award is partly based

Medicines and Food Administration. It has four main sections: data processing, data analysis and signal management, information control and publication, and training and education coordination. The NPC is also the recipient of considerable political backing and stable funding. These resources allow the NPC to carry out its various health-related activities. Furthermore, the NPC has provided support to members to attend pharmacovigilance fellowships, developed training manual, offered sensitization workshops, and established advanced courses and sensitization for higher officials and other institutions.

Despite its great progress and many successes, the NPC is confronted with several challenges. For example, there are no suitable patient reporting systems, there are some delays in the submission of reports, and there have been interruptions during pharmacovigilance harmonization initiatives. However, these are expected to be overcome with continued attention and effort. Moving forward, the NPC has plans to incorporate hemovigilance from the Eritrea's National Blood Bank into the system of pharmacovigilance and to work closely with neighboring countries to develop an effective regional vigilance system.

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Pharmacovigilance Team with one of the Assessors

A Look Back at an Extraordinary Year – Part I

Continued on page 6

Dr. Fikrejesus Amahazion

Undeniably, 2018 was an extraordinary year for Eritrea and the Horn of Africa. The powerful winds of change swept across the region, ushering in the possibility of lasting peace, stability, and security. The year's rapidly unfolding, momentous events have been both highly encouraging and a greatly welcome development in a long-troubled region. For Eritrea, in particular, the year was especially eventful. This article is the first in a three-part series that looks back at some of the important events and developments that unfolded in the country over the past twelve extraordinary months. Parts II and III of the review will be published in subsequent editions of *Eritrea Profile*.

January

As ever, the New Year and holiday period were celebrated with great enthusiasm by Eritreans across the country and around the world. With little doubt, however, the largest party was the one that took place in Sawa, with celebrations organized by the Ministry of Information and Sawa National Service Training Centre.

Additionally, President Isaias Afwerki paid a working visit to Egypt upon the invitation of the President of Egypt, General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. The Eritrean leader's visit, where he was welcomed by a guard of honor, was illustrative of Eritrea's growing regional and international relations. Notably, the visit sparked media hysteria regarding the closure of the border with Sudan and far-fetched rumors of an Egyptian and Emirati military presence in Eritrea. During his traditional New Year's interview, President Isaias dismissed the reports and rumors as a "joke."

Interestingly, as Eritrea began the year by continuing to effectively counter external efforts to isolate and weaken it, more evidence was beginning to emerge that despite the former Ethiopian regime's outward veneer of growth, prosperity, and stability, all was certainly not well. In fact, the country was on the verge of collapse. In highly prescient comments delivered during his New Year's interview,

President Isaias stated that, for the TPLF-led regime in Ethiopia, "the game is over." Months later, he would repeat the statement as events proved him to be correct.

Of course, with it being the beginning of the year, numerous meetings were held by various organizations, government ministries, and local or regional administrations in order to discuss priorities and outline various activities for the upcoming year. Notably, Eritrea and China also signed a loan agreement worth \$US 87 million, which would partly be channeled to construct the first phase of the 29 km-long asphalt road connecting Adi-Guaedad with Habela.

Memorably, the month also saw the visit to Eritrea by a number of distinguished international entertainment figures, such as Eritrean-American comedian and film star Tiffany Hadish and the British musician Joss Stone. Later in the year, Hadish would also wear a dazzling traditional Eritrean outfit to the Academy Awards, proudly showcasing her roots and heritage. Not to be forgotten, Eritrean rapper and entrepreneur Nipsey Hussle would also visit the country later in 2018.

February

February saw Eritrean athletes make history and add to the country's fast-growing sporting legacy. In Rwanda, Eritrean cyclists dominated the 13th African Continental Road Cycling Championships. The Eritrean team won the team time trial competition for an unprecedented 8th consecutive year while there were victories and positive results in numerous other categories, including the junior and women's competitions. Remarkably, since its inception in 2001, Eritrea has won more medals in the African Continental Road Championships than all other African countries combined. Upon the Eritrean team's return to Asmara, thousands of Eritreans poured out into the streets to joyously welcome the athletes home.

Although known for its cycling and long-distance running prowess, Eritrea was also represented at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, South Korea. Shannon-Ogbnai Abeda,

an Eritrean-Canadian alpine skier, competed for Eritrea in alpine skiing, becoming the first athlete to represent the country at the Winter Olympics. Notably, the month also saw FIFA President Gianni Infantino visit Eritrea. During his visit, Infantino met with President Isaias Afwerki and the Commissioner of Culture and Sports, Mr. Zemede Tekle, to discuss the development of Eritrean football.

Eritrea is blessed with a rich diversity of cultures. Late in the month, UNESCO joined Eritrea's Commission of Culture and Sports, as well as high-level government officials and community representatives, in a two-week workshop as part of the UNESCO project: "Strengthening the capacities of Eritrea for implementing the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage". The project aimed to support Eritrea safeguard its intangible cultural heritage through the effective implementation of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which Eritrea ratified in 2010.

A number of development-related activities took place during February. There was the start of a joint Eritrean-Egyptian model farming project in Eritrea to help support agricultural productivity and food security. As well, the Ministry of Health, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), drafted a roadmap for the successful implementation of the country's second health sector strategic development plan and achievement of health-related Sustainable Development Goals. The month also saw the completion of several potable water supply projects, the organization of youth skills development programs, a research workshop in Asmara organized by the National Commission for Higher Education, training programs for teachers and artists, and many other important activities.

Meanwhile, in Ethiopia, Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn resigned after three troubled years in office. Those years were characterized by famine, violence, economic challenges,



FIFA President Gianni Infantino meets Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki



Women were the key to winning independence and they are the backbone of our society today



Shannon Ogbani-Abeda flies the flag for Eritrea at the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea



Eritrea's cyclists: "We are the champions", again, again, again...

Book Review

Hangewta - Stories that Magnify Women

Abraham Habte

No reader can continue reading a book or a story if he or she found it unreadable. To read it, he or she has to find it interesting, informative, or both. Readers assume they will enjoy a book or they will find some useful information in it. Making their writing readable, writers presume, is the least they can do. Many exceed this basic requirement and produce books that are both informative and interesting.

Experienced fiction readers expect to be entertained and their thoughts stimulated. They expect to derive pleasure out of the story they read. They look forward to a tale that keeps them turn page after page until the last sentence. For most experienced readers, a writer that has not kept them glued to their seats reading has failed in his task. Such readers say a good book hooks you at the beginning, won't let you put it down in the middle, and keeps you thinking after you finish reading it.

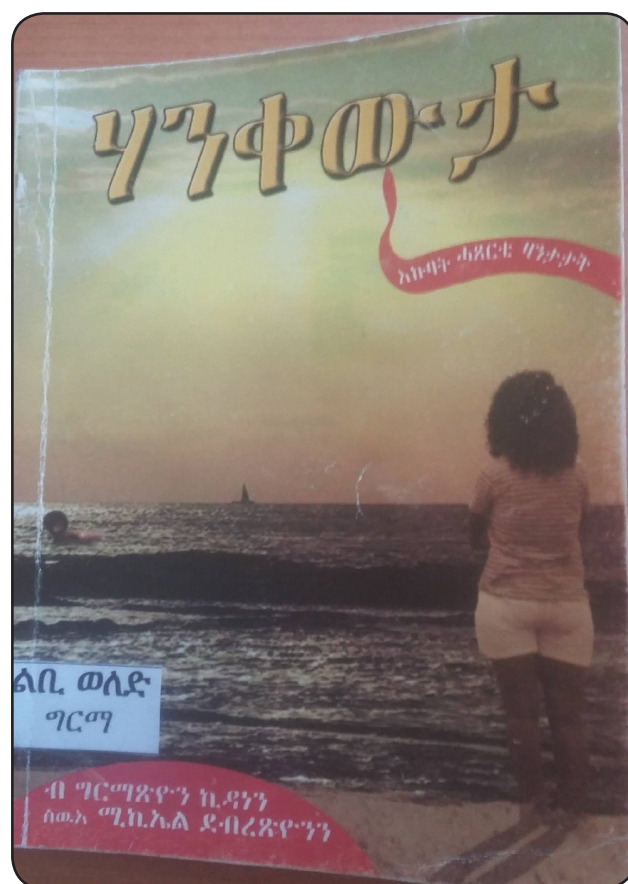
I was introduced to such a book by an acquaintance a few days ago.

"Have you read Ghirmazion's stories?" he asked me. I was in his office. "He has written two good books. I think they are good."

"No, I haven't. But I have seen his books in book-stores, on display," I answered.

"You should," he said. "I think he writes excellent stories. You should read them."

Honestly, I didn't give much thought to his comments. Himself a playwright, a poet, and an essayist, he has a good knowledge about Eritrean arts and literature. "I have not heard about this man before, and beginners often do not write well. Why waste my time reading an amateur?" In Tigrigna literature, I have learned not to expect much from first time authors. Often, they have a lot of zeal but not much writing skills. True, many of them have stories to tell, but many don't have the story-telling skills. Most test my patience, and often I do not go beyond a few pages, where they are supposed to have engaged my interest and should have hooked me, and transported me to the world of the characters. Usually, they don't. For this reason, I avoid



first time authors.

So, I didn't expect much when I started reading *Hangewta*, a book of six stories by Ghirmazion Kidane and Michael Debrezion. As a man that loves stories, I found out that my low expectations were not justified in Ghirmazion Kidane and Michael Debrezion's case. I immediately saw that they have the qualities of experienced storytellers, recounting everyday events as if they were happenings of great importance. They make us want to read until we finished all six stories.

Mr. Ghirmazion's stories begin at very interesting parts of the events he recounts. In *'Mehaza'* (Tigrigna, for Friend), the only story that is not based on a real event, he begins the story with Makda, a young woman, meeting Samuel, her boyfriend absent for two years, returning from the US for their wedding and another man, Daniel, who got involved in a love-affair with her. At this stage of the story, we have no idea who Daniel is. In a flashback, the writer skillfully relates Samuel's and Makda's romantic relationship and how she got involved with Daniel, a relationship that threatened her future blissful married life with Samuel. Readers are made to feel the impending disaster that would destroy her future with Samuel though we also are made to feel that Samuel may never return from the

(The Trip of a Day). In *Yhuda*, he describes the experiences of a woman whose brother drowned as he tried to cross the Mediterranean. While mourning him, she receives a telephone call that informed her that her brother was not dead but still alive in an island, and she could have him back if she paid a huge amount of money. In the middle of the story, readers are made to think about Lula's grief and that her brother's death has brought the story to an end. The writer gives it a turn, and makes his readers feel that they are reading a detective story, in which the detective is at the heels of the criminal. In anticipation, readers keep turning the page. Skillfully, Mr. Ghirmazion doesn't allow readers' interests to flag until the last sentence of the story.

In *Guuzo Hade Mealiti*, a woman whose children were starving, sends a veteran fighter of the EPLF to seek help in early 1992. In a series of dangerous encounters with outlaws, risking his life for others, he comes face to face with the man he was sent to meet.

US, and if he didn't Makda still has Daniel, the new loving boyfriend. At the end, the story makes full circle and comes back where it began.

Mr. Ghirmazion Kidane employs the same storytelling skills in *Yhuda* (Judas) and *Guuzo Hade Mealiti*

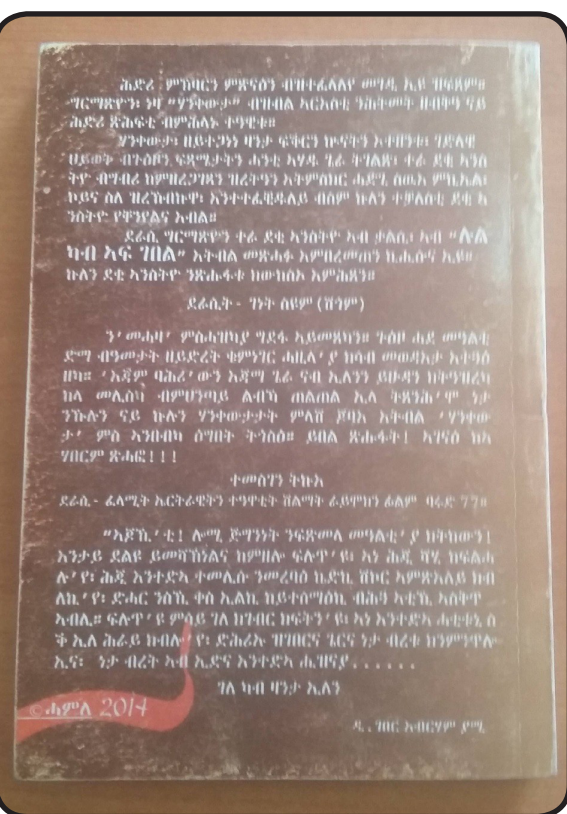
Michael Debrezion (who passed away in 1996) was not less skilful. His *'Ellen'* is an excellent story about the late-1970's, when the EPLF withdrew from Southern Eritrea to the Sahel, its base for more than 15 years. His description of rural Eritrean life in the 1970's is one of the strengths of the story. One feels as if we were transported in time to a rural Eritrean village in the 1970s and through his powerful description, he shows us the confusion that prevailed. As we read the story, we are transported in time and made to recall Eritrea's difficult hour, as some people fought for its independence, and some sided with the Ethiopians, who were burning villages, and fighting the EPLF. Through *'Ellen'*, and *'Hangewta'* Michael Debrezion shows the role of Eritrean women in the struggle

readable book. The authors make us think about the issues they raise, some of them issues raised by other Eritrean writers. They give their points of view on issues such as freedom, sacrifice, dignity, struggle, and other important issues, without which life cannot continue, and make us reflect on them. Though it is hard to distinguish which is fiction and which is fact in the stories, reading them one is forced to reflect on the actions of the different characters and the ideals they embody. Reading them, one questions what one holds dear if trust is absent. One comes to the conclusion that one may ruin one's life by betraying another human being. Reading the stories, one comes to the inescapable conclusion that trust holds the life of people together, and when trust is gone, things fall apart, as Makda and Lula, two female characters in the book, realize.

I was reminded of an article in *Foreign Policy*, in which the writer (whose name I don't remember) argued how President Trump's statements are hurting America's interests, as its allies are made not to take America seriously for its president made statements he didn't follow up on.

The events in the six stories may broadly represent the kind of life Eritreans were forced to live for four decades (1970's to 2000's). Employing women as their central characters, they magnify their role during the armed struggle, and their part in pushing the revolution forward through their perseverance. We see them inspiring men, and supporting them when they wavered. In the stories, the central characters (who represented the aspirations of the Eritrean people for freedom) fight aggression and injustice. They show how lawlessness poisons people's lives at the national level. At the individual level, they show people cannot enjoy their lives as long as the rule of law is not allowed to reign supreme and criminals are at large and are not brought to justice.

Through *Hangewta* I have discovered a writer whose stories I have enjoyed tremendously, and I have come to the knowledge that Eritrea has lost a writer whose potential for storytelling has been displayed through one of his stories.



for independence, and how without them the revolution could have suffered.

It is difficult (but not impossible) to judge a writer's potential from a single story. However, a single story can reveal the potential of a writer and if he could develop into a great writer. *'Ellen'* shows the extent to which Michael Debrezion could have developed as a writer had he not passed away in an accident in 1996. In a vivid, realistic description he showed his storytelling skills, especially in narrating stories about rural life, which he showed he knew well.

But *Hangewta* is not just a

SpotLight

A Discussion with Eritrean College Students

Simon Weldemichael

Since Eritrea's independence, there has been considerable progress in various areas, including education. Through restructuring and various reforms, access to education has greatly increased. One area that has experienced noticeable growth and improvement is tertiary level education. Tertiary education, like all other levels of education, is effectively free of charge, and it has also shown considerable improvement in terms of rates of enrolment, particularly for females.

While several factors led to the restructuring of tertiary education in Eritrea, among the most important was the attempt to ensure equitable opportunity or access for all Eritreans. As well, it was recognized that the youth are the nation's greatest asset and that an educated population is key to growth and development. The education of youth helps ensure that tomorrow's generation acquires the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to fulfill their role as agents of development.

Recently, I had the opportunity to hold discussions with students from the College of Business and Social Sciences, located in

Adi Keih (formerly known as the College of Arts and Social Sciences). With our meetings coinciding with the Christmas and New Year period, discussions mainly focused on the students' thoughts and expectations for 2019 and beyond. Generally, I found that the students had a diverse array of opinions, hopes, and dreams. I was particularly struck by their courage, confidence, and optimism.



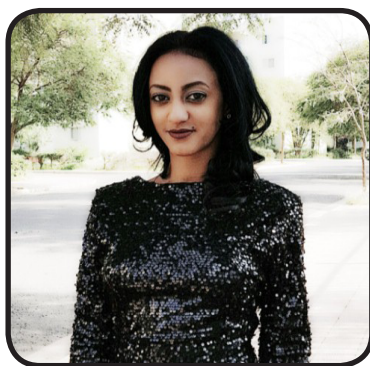
Selwa Kamel Saleh
(Political Science and International Relations)

For Eritrea, 2019 is a lot like 1991. In 1991, after a half-century of struggle, Eritrea achieved independence and began a new chapter. Similarly, in 2019, after a long struggle, Eritrea has emerged victorious and begins a new era of peace and cooperation. Today, as in 1991, Eritrea aims to build a prosperous, harmonious society. And now, just like then, achieving that aim will require the skills, talents, and efforts of its people, particularly the youth.

Before turning to the statements shared by the young students, allow me to wish the people of Eritrea, both in the country and abroad, and in particular the leadership and the Eritrean Defense Forces, a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Now, let's hear from the students!

"In 2019, I anticipate very many changes in all aspects of the Eritrean society. We are ready to create and decorate our future. The removal of the previous hurdles, including the unjust



Simona Andebrhan Mehari

sanctions, will open numerous doors and opportunities. As a college student, I expect higher levels of educational opportunities, with more physical and electronic facilities attached and also more up-to-date teaching materials and equipment to the existing colleges. As a business management and marketing student, I am looking forward to managerial improvements. We hope that 2019 is a year when the hard-found peace is consolidated, our hopes materialized, and cooperation sustained in order to make our lives better." **Simona Andebrhan Mehari (Business Management and Marketing)**

"2019 is the beginning of a new era and a new chapter in Eritrean history. By annulling the previous mistakes and preserving the positive experiences and lessons, we can drive our country forward. During the past twenty years, we were able to overcome massive obstacles that aimed to frustrate the confidence of our people and the independence of our country. We observed that our resilience has allowed us to resist military aggression, unjust sanctions, and attempts at diplomatic isolation. In 2019, we are confident that we can register economic progress with the values that helped us withstand the hard times. I hope for greater cooperation and economic integration with neighboring countries, too. It's going to be a year of prosperity, harmony, and security." **Ermias Gebremeskel (History)**

"We will open a book titled 'Development', but with blank pages." We are going to write the words on the pages by ourselves. The people of Eritrea have been

through a lot over the past several decades. We have resisted overt military aggression, an intense campaign of defamation, and economic and political intrigues, including the unfair and unjust sanctions. We stand for truth, avowing that the truth is resilient and that it will never break, and even when buried will eventually sprout. With the end of the "no peace, no war" situation and the lifting of the decade-long sanctions, our strained conditions will be softened and improved. The youth of Eritrea,



Ermias Gebremeskel
(History)

having strong minds, are looking forward to 2019 with excitement and enthusiasm. The strong winds of change blowing across the region and the country are expected to bring many positive developments. As a journalism student, I wish to play my part in reporting the development and reconstruction projects unfolding across different parts of Eritrea." **Mikal Tesfay (Journalism and Mass Communications)**

"The New Year period is a special one, where people look to make a new start, develop new plans, and make various commitments, resolutions, and promises. Generally, during the period, governments announce new programs and policies to the public. In our case, President Isaias Afwerki has a tradition of announcing the programs for the upcoming year to the public. Accordingly, we are waiting for our President to help us grasp and better understand the national vision and to outline the programs that are in store to help

us reach the vision. Thanks to the perseverance and intelligence of the people and leadership of Eritrea, the obstacles of the past have been overcome and our future has become visible to everyone. This year is going to be different from past years because the long "no peace, no war" situation is over and the unjust sanctions that were hampering our development are lifted. We hope that the best is yet to come for Eritrea." **Selwa Kamel Saleh (Political Science and International Relations)**

"You don't change because it is a new year. Like in accounting, the new year is a fiscal period; that is, reviewing your past, amending your ideas and work, and start marching forward with a new mindset. As a law student, I can say that the law in Eritrea is a strong and deep part of the culture. In the past, because of the sanctions and "no war, no peace" situation, the modest regional and global role of Eritrea was not fully realized. 2019 is approaching with new rays of hope. The international community has now recognized Eritrea's legality. We will extend our domestic stability to the entire region. The doors are opened through bilateral and multi-lateral treaties that can bring economic growth. Regarding law, we anticipate the enforcement and advancement of our domestic laws to insure the sustainability of our stability." **Yoel Kidanemariam (School of Law)**



Mikal Tesfay
(Journalism and Mass Communications)



Yoel Kidanemariam
(School of Law)

A Look Back at an Extraordinary . . .

Continued from page 3

and serious political and social instability. Hours after Desalegn's resignation, the Ethiopian government declared a nationwide state of emergency. Although the regime continued to claim Eritrea was behind its crisis, the situation was largely self-inflicted – a fact that became increasingly difficult to deny. Eventually, by late March, Ethiopia's ruling coalition selected Dr. Abiy Ahmed as its chairman, paving the way for the Oromo leader to become the country's prime minister.

March

On March 8, International Women's Day was commemorated nationwide with different activities under the theme "Women's Empowerment: Prelude to Equality". Additionally, a representative of the National Union of Eritrean Women addressed the 62nd Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, held in New York, outlining the progress and challenges of women in Eritrea.

In March 1988, in the Battle of Afabet, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front dealt a crushing defeat to the Ethiopian occupation forces of the Nadew Command. The momentous achievement was described by the late British historian Basil Davidson as the "African Dien Bien Phu." This past March, the 30th anniversary of the Eritrean victory was marked with celebrations in Afabet and a series of important activities looking back at the historic events.

The month also saw Eritrean delegations participate in a number of international events and meetings. The Eritrean Commission of Culture and Sports, in cooperation with the Catalan Institute of Human Paleocology and Social Evolution, attended the Youth Mobile Festival in Barcelona, which had over 15,000 participants from around the world, while an Eritrean delegation also attended the 53rd World Tourism Exhibition, held in Berlin from 7 to 10 March. As well, early in the month, high-level representatives from Eritrea and Finland held a meeting in Asmara to build on past progress and address various challenges within the education sector.

A fundamental part of being Eritrean is confronting injustice. A reflection of this was how Eritreans in the Netherlands staged a peaceful demonstration



Eritrea and China sign loan agreement



British musician Joss Stone visiting Asmara



"Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world" – Nelson Mandela



Eritrean-American Hollywood star Tiffany Hadish visits the "Tank Graveyard"

on 13 March protesting the unjust manner in which they were treated by the Dutch government in recent years. As well, in Geneva, the Permanent Mission of Eritrea to the United Nations in Geneva, in collaboration with Nevsun Resources Limited, Bisha Mining Share Company, and Danakali Limited, held a seminar titled, "Demystifying Eritrea: the Ground Reality, Mining and Human Rights", which was focused on addressing the outdated stereotypes and misguided narrative about Eritrea.

Locally, March saw the initiation or continuation of a number of community and development projects across the country, including vocational education and training programs, the construction of kindergartens at the Halibet and HazHaz hospitals, the installation of solar power panels at the Hagaz Community Hospital, a workshop focused on the preservation of tourist sites, the launch, by the Ministry of Health, the WHO, and other stakeholders, of a five-year National Action Plan for Health Security, and other activities. Of special note, a report published by the WHO and the Uppsala Monitoring Center ranked Eritrea as the highest of all African countries in terms of completeness and number of submitted drug safety reports to the global database.

April

Eritrea and its people have a long history of resilience and perseverance. Challenges are not to be seen as insurmountable barriers, but as opportunities for learning, growth, and development. This characteristic resilience and perseverance was illustrated by the YPFDJ's annual conference. In 2017, the YPFDJ European Conference was cancelled by local Dutch authorities amidst controversial and unfortunate circumstances. Undaunted, the YPFDJ in Europe came back stronger in April 2018 to hold a highly successful conference, featuring hundreds of participants and a number of important activities.

Of course, April 13th also marked the 16th anniversary of the Eritrea Ethiopia Boundary Commission's final and binding decision on the Eritrea-Ethiopia border. For years, the former Ethiopian regime rejected the EEBC's decision. However, after Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn's resignation in February 2018 and with the country on the verge of

implosion after years of mass protests, Dr. Abiy Ahmed officially assumed office on April 2nd. Abiy, who became Africa's youngest leader and the first Oromo prime minister in the 27 years that the ruling coalition has been in power, would quickly begin to seek change and reform. His reforms would extend to changing his country's relationship and approach toward Eritrea. During his inaugural speech, Abiy promised to make peace with Eritrea. A further sign of the looming changes to the region was the visit by a US delegation, led by then-Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Ambassador Donald Y. Yamamoto, to Asmara from 22 to 24 April.

Other important events during the month included, inter alia: the national celebration of International Health Day at the Orotta Referral Hospital; the founding of the Congress of the National Association of Chemical Engineers on 21 April; the graduation with Master's Degrees from Swiss and South African universities by numerous individuals employed by Eritrean governmental institutions; Eritrea's participation at the 10th African Leaders' Extraordinary Summit in Rwanda; and the celebration of Easter across the nation.

As ever, during the month of April, several activities were conducted to help improve people's standard of living and support development, including training programs focused on pest control in agricultural areas, vocational and skills development programs, erecting electrical lines in rural areas in order to improve electrical access, workshops for teachers, the introduction of modern farming practices in rural areas, and the construction of elementary schools and expansion of the hospital in Agordet. As well, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare reported that the Government of Eritrea has distributed over 786,000,000 Nakfa to war-disabled veterans over the past 15 years.

Undeniably, Eritrea's greatest resource is its people, particularly the youth. However, it also possesses an abundance of natural and environmental resources. This point was underscored by the discovery in April of several new species of avifauna. With Eritrea still so young and unexplored, it is reasonable to expect that many more exciting discoveries lay ahead.

ADS



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Q and A

Healing the Lands of Eritrea

Asmait Futsumbrhan

“Land restoration in Eritrea can be done, even in the worst areas”, Dr. Scott Jones

He has been a friend of Eritrea and its people for many years. Dr. Scott Jones, after seeing how conflict had a negative impact on Eritrea, made a commitment to help restore its lands and revive its once expansive forests. Spending most of his time in the villages of Eritrea, organizing meetings and campaigns with locals, Dr. Scott Jones is happy to see that the restoration programs are going strong. Today, Q and A is thrilled to introduce you to an old friend, Dr. Scott Jones.

Thank you for your time, Dr. Jones. Please tell us about the first time you heard about Eritrea?

Thank you for having me. It is such a pleasure. Back in 1983, while I was working as a nurse, I read an article in a British newspaper about Eritrea. The article said that aid going to Ethiopia was not reaching Eritrea. I thought to myself, where is Eritrea? I was curious to find out about the country and what was going on. That is when I learned about the struggle that the Eritrean people were waging at the time.

I was angry about the situation, because it was like the big guys beating up on the little guy. Afterwards, I joined the Eritrean Medical Association and did some fundraising in Britain in 1984. Subsequently, I came to Eritrea as the UK representative of the first Eritrean Medical Congress in 1984. I stayed here for ten weeks and saw all the base areas, the deforestation, and the dreadful conditions. It was just horrible.

You get inspired by what the Eritreans envisioned and dreamed of achieving. I got more involved and, little by little, I got more interested in biology, traditional birth attendance, and how mother and child health was struggling because of certain challenges. Over time, I kept in touch with the agriculture section in the fields. I asked if I could do my thesis on Rora Habab. I joined the struggle in Rora Habab and finished my PhD in 1990.

Working on something that interested you...how did that go?

During 1992, I wrote about 113 proposals which were funded by the Norwegians. However, these were unsuccessful. Later on, we were able to get a small grant from the agricultural section in the fields. We took over after a year, with the agriculture department and the local people designing the reforestation



program. The plan was designed based on the knowledge of the local people. I stayed in the villages of Eritrea for four years to help implement the program.

You kept working on the reforestation of the hills after the independence, right?

After the dreadful wars, the hills were left with just skeletons. I don't actually know the precise number, but Eritrea was left with less than 1% of trees on its land. This was scary. War was one of the biggest reasons that trees had vanished. However, people also had the habit of using trees for fire and animals would just graze. If you take a look back to less than a century ago, the Eritrean lands were a closed forest.

During my research, I tried to study what was the maximum growth rate possible. We worked on a survey with the agricultural department in Rora Habab and Ruba Anseba. We measured all the land and trees that we could find! We tried experimenting with different types of trees at Rora Habab, but all the trials were washed away. Years of preparation and hard work had evaporated it in a single day. We had to do all the work all over again and I had to do it in Scotland and California.

During the armed struggle, we

used to conserve what we had and restore what we lost. The people did so much with the little that they had. It was inspiring. After independence, when the time was right, we discussed the need to heal the land with the authorities and the Ministry of Agriculture. We worked with the locals, the Ministry, and nurseries in order to pull together a plan to restore the land.

We took “rubbish” land and implemented a plan that we had already drafted. We conducted experiments in the greenhouse and planted trees on terraces to see if we could do agro-forestry.

I remember when we started the work, I was asked to do a presentation. I wanted to speak to the people in the language they understood, so I did it in Tigrigna. I think this is one of the reasons the program has lasted so long and been so successful. The local farmers owned the work and did an amazing job.

Your evaluation of the progress in restoration over the past 30 years?

To be honest, I thought I was documenting the last forest of Eritrea 30 years ago. Rora Habab is the most northerly located of the juniper olive in the whole of Africa. These forests extend from parts

of South Africa, through Malawi, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, all the way up to Eritrea. They finish at Eritrea because the lands fall down to the Red Sea hills and Sudan. This is one of the most important sites in biodiversity. For me, Eritrea is one of the most special places on the planet. I think it should be a world heritage site. It is also the most northerly part of East Africa where local people practice agriculture.

All the achievements that we have seen to date are because of the local farmers. For instance, Sheqa Asmerom, who was in charge of a nursery, was one of the locals who has encouraged others to protect their lands. Through his efforts, we have been able to achieve more.

We have lost many trees due to soil erosion and floods. Also, animals would graze the olives. For that reason, we tried to plant and introduce a mix of plants - olive, juniper and eucalyptus - which was successful. Land restoration in Eritrea can be done, even in the worst areas. The results that we have seen in just 30 years is motivating. If Eritrea keeps working as it has, it is going to be a land of dense forests in the coming hundred years. That is what I believe.

If you look at Bietgiorgis, it has undergone significant positive changes. The locals use fewer kettles and people don't cut trees for fires.

That is what we want to pursue. We also have worked in Sabur and Filfil, and had nurseries in Adi Quala, Adi Keih, and Dekemhare.

The Ministry gave me a space in several nurseries to work with the local people. All the progress could not have come about without the efforts of the locals and the Ministry. The support provided by the Norwegian grant was also important.

Is there anything else that you would like to share at the end?

Now that there is peace on the horizon, we need to work harder on restoration. We need to distribute more seeds. We did this in the 1990s, when it was a totally different era. Thus, we can do it again today.

We should recall that restoration is important in many ways. For example, the fact that the soil gets developed and it is vital for the insects and birds...it is a complete ecosystem that is being restored not just the trees!

We are also looking to increase capacity; each nursery needs to have campaigns and we need to share experiences. We need to work with land management systems, policymakers, and the government.

The vision for the future is to have a stable, independent, prosperous Eritrea. That means we have to have good land and healthy forests.

