

### Cause of Ethiopia, Common Denominator for Diaspora

The Government of Ethiopia is working in tandem with the Ethiopian Diaspora to make use of their untapped assets such as financial resource and knowledge transfer, among others. Likewise the Diaspora are also organizing themselves to contribute to the development endeavor of their motherland. Ethiopian National Consensus Forum - UK is a case in point. In this edition, Mulugeta Asrate, Deputy Director General of the Secretariat Office for the Millennium Celebration and former Deputy Chairman of the Ethiopian National Consensus Forum - UK told Newsletter Ethiopians need to stand together regardless of their political orientations.

*Newsletter-When was the Ethiopian National Consensus Forum founded and what were the real motives for its formation?*

**Mulugeta** - The Ethiopian National Consensus Forum was founded seven years ago. What brought Ethiopians together in recent past was the blatant invasion of Ethiopian sovereign territory by the Eritrean government. During that time an unprecedented number of Ethiopians flocked to the Ethiopian Embassy in London. And there was a general sense of patriotism and desire to form some kind of association for the common good of Ethiopians. Out of that came the idea of forming a national consensus, based on the common good of Ethiopia.



**Ato Mulugeta Asrate, Deputy Director General of the Secretariat Office for the Millennium Celebration**

*Newsletter - which cross section of the society does the forum include?*

**Mulugeta** - It was a cross section of all political spectrum. There were supporters and opponents of this government. After all what makes us Ethiopian is not our political stand but our unconditional love for our country. And that was the essence of the national consensus. And

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membership is open to all Ethiopians who voluntarily accept the objectives of the National Consensus Forum. And on May 2006, we had 170 full members. So, the more people come and visit Ethiopia the more they realize that they have to do something towards alleviating the problem of Ethiopia.

**Newsletter - *Could you tell us the major objectives of the Consensus Forum?***

**Mulugeta** - The first one is Ethiopians will form a common platform and stand side by side with the government and the people when it comes to the question of sovereignty. If war breaks out at any time, I can assure you that multitude of Ethiopians will form a common stand. Then there is a question of eradicating poverty. Therefore, the National Consensus believes that there is this national understanding amongst Ethiopians that we will do whatever it takes to eradicate poverty. We have also HIV as one of the concerns of the National Consensus Forum. We have been in touch with pharmaceutical companies to lobby so as to decrease the price of all kinds of medicines that they export to Ethiopia. We also raised the awareness among our compatriots with regard to the status of women in our society. Though Ethiopian women are far better off than generations ago, there is still room for improvement and we are trying to bring to light what needs to be done.

**Newsletter - *could you tell us some of the activities the Forum has carried out so far?***

**Mulugeta** - The forum has carried out a number of activities. The first was to organize an awareness conference and seminars on Ethiopia. This was done in various forums like universities. In 2004, we had a very good conference at the renowned London school of Economics. We also had other awareness conferences and seminars in different parts of London. We decided that Ethiopians should also have access to the embassy and get firsthand information about situation in Ethiopia from the horse's mouth. For example, we have been arranging different sessions for the Diaspora to

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be able to exchange views with Ethiopian dignitaries when they come to or pass by London. A number of Ethiopian Diaspora lack first hand information and they tend to be victims of misinformation that stems from confused and confounded sector of our community.

**Newsletter - *What was the support of the Ethiopian Embassy in London to your Forum?***

**Mulugeta** - The support ranged from allowing us use of their function room to giving us newspapers and magazines from Ethiopia. They have been very helpful in allowing us to bringing Ethiopians to take part in different sessions. The support that we as an association have been getting from the Ethiopian embassy in London is immense and of a paramount importance to our activity.

**Newsletter - *What is your future plan?***

**Mulugeta** - National Consensus is now planning to get engaged in the millennium celebration. It believes that it has this historic role to play bridging the gap among Ethiopians. So, together we are striving to celebrate the millennium with patriotism.

**Newsletter - *Do you have any message for the Ethiopia Diaspora?***

**Mulugeta** - My message to my brothers and sisters in various parts of the world is that the cause of Ethiopia should be our common denominator. Put political difference aside, we are all Ethiopians. As Ethiopians we should celebrate and not saphocate our differences, we should tolerate each other and at this juncture when the nation is preparing to celebrate the millennium we should voluntarily stand together and work for our country.