

Ethiopia: Ethiopia's GERD 4th anniversary celebrated in Somaliland

Resident Ethiopians in Somaliland on Thursday (April-02, 2015) celebrated the 4th year anniversary of the commencement of construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) in 2011 and scheduled to be finalized after two years. Jointly organized by the Ethiopian Consulate General in Somaliland and the Ethiopian Community associations in Hargeisa, Somaliland, the celebration was held with a theme of "we already halve the Dam's construction and we will finalize it as scheduled". The celebration was held in the attendance of several hundreds of Ethiopian communities and other invited dignitaries from Somaliland as part of the national campaign week which was held from 26 March to 02 April. The aim was to provide an updated information about the current status of GERD construction and ensure a sustained public participation in financing it through bond purchasing and donation based on willingness as the entire budget of the Dam is being covered by the sole contribution of national coffers. The event included a salute to the Ethiopian National Anthem followed by brief documentary films about the GERD overall status and subsequent public opinions and a bond purchasing ceremony.

Speaking at the opening, Brigadier General Berhe Tesfay, the Consul General of the Ethiopian mission in Somaliland, who briefed resident Ethiopians in Somaliland and invited dignitaries that the Dam's construction has so far reached 42% by means of domestic financing also noted that this is an indication of how desperately committed the Ethiopian Government and people are to complete the Dam. He said GERD is among the multi-billion-dollar mega public projects being entirely financed by domestic means, manifesting the fact that the current Government and people are able not only to repeat the proudly history of their forefathers who sacrificed their lives against any foreign aggression and internal repressive regimes and pioneered to the world the living traces and testimonies of ancient civilization as can be seen in a number of historical, cultural and natural heritages found in all corners of the country. But this generation, Consul General Berhe said, can also make their own unique living history as seen from their active participation in the development and democratization process of Ethiopia as well as in ensuring peace, security and stability both at home and across the Horn of Africa region.

He said the participation of the Ethiopian people living both at home and overseas on the development process in Ethiopia including for the construction of GERD has so far been very

overwhelming as the financial support obtained from their contribution in bond purchasing and in donation so far reached nearly 20 billion birr which met the expected level. Brigadier General Berhe speaking with particular reference to Ethiopians residing in Hargeisa as well as from Somaliland brothers and sisters said their contribution towards GERD in the past four years was **over 350,000 US dollars (over 7 million birr)**. This, he said, was very significant as seen from the perspective of the relatively irregular meager income which characterize their standard of life.

Speaking about this year's contribution, the Consul General, said nearly 13,000 USD (over 250,000 Ethiopian birr) has so far been secured in cash and more is expected in the upcoming bond selling campaigns scheduled to take place in other parts of Somaliland in the remaining few months of this budget year. This being coupled with the over 15,000 USD promised from Ethiopians and Somaliland citizens if materialized makes the total bond sell revenue obtained from Ethiopians in Somaliland so far to be nearly USD 28,000.00.

What's more overwhelming, General Berhe said, is not only the desire of Ethiopians residing in Somaliland and the Somaliland brothers and sisters to sustain their financial contribution but also the ever-growing moral and political support being accorded to the Government's march towards the GERD completion on schedule as GERD is growingly perceived as an African project which ushers a new era of equitable utilization of common resources to all Africans as far as the Dam will benefit all the riparian countries including those downstream. Such a belief, the Consul General said, is now becoming a shared one on the side of the downstream countries of Nile River as Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt have recently signed an agreement to put in place mechanism of cooperation for common benefit while on the other hand the GERD's construction continues uninterrupted and in full swing.

Once GERD is completed in 2017 as scheduled, General Berhe said, it will pave the way to downstream countries to better understand that Ethiopia's march to build GERD is mainly meant to generate electricity but not cause harm to any riparian countries particularly Sudan and Egypt. In fact the Dam will ensure a sustained and regular flow of sufficient water and helps to avoid flooding and siltation downstream as seen in a previous project undertaken in Ethiopia but has cherished the aforementioned benefits to a river named Atbara in Sudan. Having Ethiopia's desire on GERD well understood downstream coupled with the Ethiopian Government's and peoples' desire to ensure rapid development will create huge capacity to do similar projects over

the Nile mainly for electricity as Ethiopia has the gifted potential to generate 45,000 MW only from hydropower, and another huge amount from wind, solar energy and geothermal power.

In fact, he said, the democratization process being built by the Government inside was and continues to be the major factor guiding the country to an irreversible path of renaissance as the new Constitution enables plurality as it ensures equality of all nations, nationalities and peoples, freedom of expression, respect to human and democratic rights as well as group and individual rights and freedom of religion. The Consul General who underlined that self governance is among the fundamental provisions enshrined in the current Constitution also noted that differing views are well tolerated by the Ethiopian Government as over 60 opposition parties are in active exercise and are freely competing to the 5th Ethiopian national elections of which over 12 opposition political parties are partaking at the Federal level. The election has been peaceful from the very start as over 36 million eligible voters were registered to cast their ballots to elect a party which they believe will serve them better. He also expressed his belief that the 5th national election will have a peaceful ending as the previous four elections were and these is a clear indication that there is a public consensus that power in the current Ethiopia can only be obtained in a democratic vote and ballot. This, Brigadier General Berhe Tesfay said, is the foundation of Ethiopia's path for renaissance which is now put in to a state of irreversibility.

Answering queries from people on the current Government's Revolutionary Democratic (Abiotawi Democracy) and the opposition parties liberal and social democracy ideological orientations, the Consul General said he and his office are neutral as they belong to the Ethiopian Government and people (not to any party) so that neither his office nor him as head of the mission can't comment on the matter on an official footing. But, he said, as any ordinary Ethiopian citizen who can exercise his/her own personal opinion, he expressed his personal belief that the current Revolutionary Democratic path has been the best path with best mixes of scientific policies and strategies being crafted and implemented in the country's history that changed and continues to change the lives of the people in an equitable manner. The positive changes in every aspect were rapid and real and this has continued to float in an amazingly speedy and deep trajectory. This, he said, has been made possible because of the very real reason that the path was crafted and implemented in the active and direct participation of millions of Ethiopians and their representatives with the subsequent best mixes of participatory policies,

strategies and approaches. The path will undoubtedly continue to be the best choice of the people as it has been crafted being tailor-made based on the complete understanding and analysis of the actual and practical internal and external situations. And of course, he said, opposition parties are proposing that liberal democracy could be best path to Ethiopia, adding that he personally doesn't believe that such an ideological path could enable Ethiopia and its people to get their biggest possible or reasonably equitable share from the interdependent global system as opting for liberal democracy is just like opting for eating with many individuals with well-prepared and well-trained-to-eat feasts in one serving dish so that we willingly surrender the biggest chunks of the food to them. But, Brigadier General Berhe Tesfay concluded, it's up to every individual to decide as to which party should they cast its vote to, adding that what's expected from every Ethiopian is to say no to and stand against any acts of deliberate incitement of violence of any form which will compromise the peaceful conclusion of the election and ensure a stable aftermath as there might be some external anti-peace and anti-Ethiopia-development elements such as the Asmara regime and the likes deliberately orchestrating plots to incite violence as seen in their failed attempts before.