

Successful Meeting of Tigrrians in Toronto and Surrounding Area

Tigrrians residing in Toronto and surrounding suburbs held a meeting on Saturday Dec. 07, 2013 at St. Michael Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church Toronto, Ontario.

The aim of the meeting was to tackle the community's issues of great concern which are negatively impacting the community from having a unified existence, and thereby to come up with workable solutions that will help in revitalizing and strengthening the community's endeavors.

The meeting was jointly organized by the Tigrrian Community Association, Tigrrian Women's Association and Tigrrian Youth Representatives. After the welcoming speech, the facilitator shared the ground rules for the meeting: sticking to the agenda, allowing people to express their opposing viewpoints freely; attacking ideas not personalities and etc. The members accepted these abiding rules that can be sensed the presence of positive moods from the get-go.

Subsequently, the representatives presented the reasons behind the need and the expected outcome of this meeting. The moderator briefed the audience the state of the community. Referring back to the history of the association, after the down fall of the Derg, Tigrrians regardless of their political stands and religious affiliation came together and formed a social club - Tigrrian Association of Toronto. It started on a solid base in which it was incorporated with tax exempt status, opened a center, provided Tigrigna class for minors and social/employment guidance to newcomers. Unfortunately, after few years of success, the association deviated to a point where now it barely exists only by name. Similarly, the community chairman and the youth representatives expressed the obstacles that the community has faced from moving forward. The youth representative has humbly expressed their roles as a 'bridge "in linking the generational gap between the parents and their kids. At last, the representatives hoped that this forum will provide an opportunity to share and voice our experiences/frustrations and thereby affirm our hopes and dreams for our community.

With that reasoning, all Tigrrians were invited to participate in this open and free discussion forum which was focused on identifying core problems, soliciting solutions and reaching common level of understanding and commitment that strengthens the community's future endeavors.

The discussion was then opened to the floor and lists of issues were entertained. The major ones being:

- **Unable to focus on the bigger picture and common ground that unite us i.e. "TIGRAWAYNET"**: It is an identity that encompasses our history, culture, language, way of life etc. that we all have to cherish, protect and pass it to the next generation

without any adulteration. Unfortunately, the major victims of this issue are our kids that we all collectively failed them miserably by not putting them as the center of our communal life. Side tracked by squabbles on petty issues among ourselves, we completely abdicate our generational obligations in helping them to uphold their identity which emanates from the reach history and culture of Tigrai/Ethiopia. This is the “survival kit” they need in order to be successful, respected and law abiding citizens of Canada; and by the same token, to be proudly connected with their roots and be positive contributors to their motherland needs. Besides to our kids, we adults are also on the receiving end of this problem. We have no communal support groups in times of great need as we all know it.

- **Adhering to backward behaviors:** These are the feeble causes for the disruption of peace and harmony in our community in the truest sense. Elements of undesirable behaviors such as dissemination of misinformation, attacking personalities as oppose to ideas, unwilling to accept failure and mistakes as learning opportunities are detrimental to our social fabric. As much as the perpetrators are responsible, the silent majority who are bystanders are equally responsible for this crisis. So in the interest of our kids and ourselves, we should condemn these divisive and irresponsible acts of the few vocal individuals from destabilizing the community.
- **Failure to fulfill obligations on assigned duty:** Pointing fingers between the leadership and the members is a common occurrence. The truth is both of them are responsible. Leadership weaknesses include ineffective management styles such as absence of clear action plan, inability to delegate etc., and on the other hand, unfulfilled duties of members such as unpaid membership fees, poor attendance of meeting, uncooperativeness, etc. are reality.
- **Mixing politics and /or religion issues with community affairs:** This is not the majority’s agenda but few who are responsible in doing so have to come to their senses as these actions disrupt our communal cohesion.
- **Absence of clear benefits and privileges of association involvement:** The viability of an association is measured by the provision of services it renders to its members. There are no social and personal advantages that the members receive from getting involved. Having a cultural center, receiving a planned support in times of need and providing guidance for personal and communal growth are expected at least.

After a thorough discussion on the issues that matter, intensive positive responses were entertained and suggested. The members realized that all these problems should have been corrected early on and affirmed a collective responsibility for the weakening of the community; however, they vowed to revitalize and strengthen it with a renewed commitment. To that end, all the attendees voluntarily signed up to be members of the community. In addition, the participants suggested reviewing the old bylaw and thus a committee of 7 people was elected to

do so. In keeping the momentum rolling, the amendment & ratification of the bylaw and election of new leadership would be materialized in one month's time.

Throughout the meeting, the participants have expressed gratitude to the organizers for this one-of-a-kind and timely meeting aimed at bringing us together as one group. Similarly, the organizers greatly appreciated the audience for the prevailing harmony, collaboration and absolute "CHEWANET" that they exhibited in the extended 5 hour meeting. They also stated that the exemplary effort and engagement of the Tigray Women's Association cannot go unnoticed. Their participation was stellar and the food and refreshment were all served from their own pocket with joy and love. **YEK'ENYELNA!!!**

In closing, the organizers stressed the message that our individual goodness will bring us to our collective greatness. So there is no turning back except marching ahead with this clear new level of communal understanding, commitment and "**HABO!!**"