

TIGRAY DIASPORA'S FESTIVAL TIGRAY 2014 IN MEKELLE CITY

By

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Festival Tigray 2014 has been celebrated by Tigrians in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia and other places almost every year; however, Festival Tigray has never been celebrated in Tigray thus far. This time around however, Festival Tigray was for the first time celebrated colorfully in Mekelle the capital city of Tigray National Regional State. And what a wonderful, monumental, unique and historical festival it became. For the last thirty years or more, Festival Tigray was particularly celebrated turn by turn in different North American cities: in the USA and Canada. During those colorful celebrations, variety of activities were held: amongst those activities were workshops and seminars relating to the socio-economic and political conditions and developmental endeavors not only within the context of Tigray but also the rest of Ethiopia were explored, analyzed and synthesized by the attendants and invited guests of the festival. Here, renowned Scholars not only from Tigray and the rest of Ethiopia but also from other African countries, the USA and Canada presented scholarly papers for discussion and for the perusal of policy makers back home. The festival also included entertainment activities accompanied with musical extravaganza presented by renowned Tigrian musical artists such, as the late Kiros Alemayehu and the late Iyasu Berhe and many other new talented musicians as well. Traditional food and beverages made by local residents were also part of the festivity. Further, the Festival also got more color with the service of traditional food and beverages made by local residents. Traditional dress beautified by those beautiful young Tigrians in the Diaspora always attracted more people. Sport activity and sport competitions were also part of the Tigray festival tradition especially attracting young Tigrian Diasporas. Circus show was also presented during the festivity. Speaking of circus, the Tigray Circus Group was the only African circus group that performed at the renowned Kennedy Center and that spectacular show attracted many people of different cultural and national backgrounds. This time around, Festival Tigray 2014 took place for the first time in Mekelle, Tigray, Ethiopia. The Tigray National Regional State has been ready and

willing to host the event after learning about the decisions taken for the event to take place in Tigray. Soon an International Committee that includes the Addis Ababa committee, the European committee, the Australian committee and the Middle East committee were formed to run the event. All made a thorough preparation and coordination way in advance in order to make the festival truly unique, truly historic and truly remarkable. On arrival on the 31st of July 2014 of the Tigrayan Diasporas, a warm reception was made at the Addis Ababa International Airport and especially at the Mekelle Alula Aba Nega International Air Port. High level officials from the Tigray National Regional State inculcating the President of the Region received the Tigrayan Diasporas and the Ethiopian Ambassadors who coincidentally had to conduct their meeting in Mekelle. Their presence also added more flavor and more color to the festival. The Regional police music band delighted the Diasporas and the Ambassadors with their beautiful musical performances. Then the guests were accompanied to the Grand Martyr's Monument for a welcoming reception. There, the President of the Region made a spectacular speech to the standing ovation of the audiences. Variety of musical performances, dramas, poems, and a spectacular circus show were performed at the Grand Hall. Following those performances, a grand cocktail reception accompanied by yet more musical shows delighted the Diaspora guests and the public at large on open space within the Martyr's compound. The day after, variety of events were held according to the program; the most important of which were the Regional Bureaus' presentations on: Education, Health, Good Governance, and, the Role of Diasporas, the Role of Woman, the role of Tigrayan Intellectuals and more. Here it is important to note that all discussions were open and transparent. Gaps and challenges were explored and options and solutions were forwarded. Tigrayan Diasporas also had their respective forums on those and other relevant issues. Union of Tigrayans in North America (UTNA), The Tigray Development Association (TDA) also presented their respective Association's performances over the years. By the way, UTNA celebrated its 40th Anniversary while TDA celebrated its 25th anniversary colorfully in their own city Mekelle to the great pleasure of all. In addition, the Youth Association and Women's Association also had their own meetings. Tigrayan Diasporas also paid visits to many development firms such as the Mesfen Industrial Engineering, The Mosobo cement factory and the next day a visit to the Tekeze hydroelectric power and to Hagere Selam among others. On the Educational sector, it was the Nichoalas Elementary and High School that attracted the

Tigran Diasporas . Nicholas school is owned by TDVA. Majority of the school children over 75% are children of the Disabled Veterans; therefore, the school carries a special significance to everyone alike. The school is equipped with modern teaching, library and laboratory equipments. Yearly, 100% of those who took exams pass; therefore, the school has an impeccable reputation in terms of its high quality of education and high quality ethical standards. Here, it is worth while mentioning two British Humanitarians: Max and Katherine who with TDVA established this wonderful and exemplary school that is helping many otherwise could not have had the opportunity to get into a quality school such as the mentioned one. The school is named after their child Nicholas who unfortunately died due to accident at a very young age. Festival Tigray brought thousands of Tigrians back to Tigray. This kind of Diaspora festival is the first of its kind in Ethiopia. The festival encompassed and explored varieties of issues such as those mentioned above that carry Regional and National values. Therefore Festival Tigray is more than a festival. It enhances people to people connection and cooperation in a variety of developmental activities. Further, it is a catalyst to creating employment and investment; it promotes not only the Region's but indeed the Nation's good image to the rest of the world. Therefore, this kind of initiative must be encouraged and must be made to continue not only in Tigray Region but also within the rest of the regions of our nation as well. It is a noble and excellent initiative that must be replicated by all Regions of our nation. Finally, awards and certificates were given to those who made valuable contribution to make the festival a success. The festival ended with a spectacular musical and dramatic extravaganza throughout the night to the delight of all.