

**International Ethiopian Women Conference in the Diaspora Completed with Resounding Successes!!!!!!**

**March 9 to March 11, 2012**

**Washington, DC**



**Press Release**

Ethiopian women from various ages and background met for a conference in Washington DC from March 9 to March 11, 2012. The conference participants came from various States of America as well as from Canada and Europe. The theme of the conference was “Empowering Ethiopian Women and Advancing Their Rights.” The three-day conference discussed issues that are pertinent to inter-generational Ethiopian women at home and in the Diaspora. The first session was open to the general public and started its program with a one-minute silent prayer for the late Congressman Donald Payne. Two prominent speakers, Dr. Tsehay Berhane Selassie and Ms. Anuradha Mital, presented their papers via Skype from Ireland and California respectively.

The Taitu Cultural Center performed two short plays about two courageous Ethiopian women, Empress Taitu Bitul and Shewaredged Gedle. During this

session, the International Ethiopian Women Conference honored Judge Birtukan Midekssa, former prisoner of conscience. Ato Shambel Belayneh and Woizero Maritu Legesse also performed for the audience.

On March 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> the conference was open only to women. During this session several issues that have direct impact on women were discussed including,

1. the current socio-economic status of Ethiopian women;
2. employment opportunities to women with particular emphasis on the complexities of migration of Ethiopian women to Middle East Arab countries; and
3. violence against women as well as health issues afflicting women.

On March 10, 2012, Dr. Melaku Tegegn from Kampala presented a paper via video that provided an analysis of the socio-economic impact of poverty from the Ethiopian women perspective. Other authors who sent their respective papers for presentations were Ms Sosesna Demissie, Ms Sihin Teferra from Ethiopia, and Dr. Hirut Haile, from Malaysia.

Shewaye Molla, the former Ethiopian domestic worker at Kaddafi's family house and who suffered horrible abuse by her employer, gave interview via satellite. A letter sent by Ato Dawit, who works for an international organization, who also firsthand visited and witnessed the conditions of Ethiopian women in Middle East Arab countries was read. The letter described the vivid atrocities being committed on Ethiopian women and the lack of support from international organizations. In the context of the letter read, the importance of civil societies and the media in promoting women's causes were discussed.

On March 11<sup>th</sup>, the focus of the conference was on issues that Ethiopian women in the Diaspora are facing. Live testimonies by Ethiopian immigrants to the USA were part of the presentation. Furthermore, presenters reviewed past experiences of Ethiopian women's organizations and the challenges they had faced.

In the last session, the participants discussed the way forward. Participants agreed **to create a new strong women's organization that will address the issues discussed at the conference.**

The conference was well attended by diverse groups of Ethiopian women.



A number of young Ethiopian women who attended signed up to join the organization that will be formed soon. The organizers are delighted to report that the first International Ethiopian Women Conference in the Diaspora completed its mission with resounding Success. For example, the following e-mail was sent by one of the young Ethiopian women participant.

...The exposure I had to such educated, experienced women in life's trials and black women but more so African women had an enormous impact on my life in the past 2 days. To be in the midst of such powerful individuals has given me more confidence in understanding my purpose in life. You all have encouraged me beyond words can express. To know and witness the realness of such individuals has given me confidence for hope to make a difference first in the lives of my peers, second the lives of my country, and third the world because I am now more powerful with the information you've carved in me in the past 2 days...

Resolutions of the conference will be posted on <http://www.ethiowomenconference.org>/shortly.



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