

PRESS RELEASE

Wednesday, 9th March 2011

Ethiopian Cultural Evening cements Ethio-British relations

Guests gathered at the House of Commons yesterday evening for the 11th annual Ethiopian Cultural Evening, which Ethiopia's Ambassador to the UK, H.E. Berhanu Kebede, described as "a hallmark of the fraternal relations between the people and Governments of Ethiopia and Britain". The event was hosted by Laurence Robertson MP in the Jubilee Room.



Guests at the Ethiopian Cultural Evening

In his welcoming speech, the Ambassador thanked the British government for the confidence it had displayed towards Ethiopia with its recent large rise in bilateral aid. He mentioned that Ethiopia's governing party has set in motion an ambitious five-year Growth and Transformation Plan under which Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and agricultural production are both expected to double. "The Ethiopian economy has been achieving, over the past seven years, average annual growth of 11 per cent", he said, "and the new plan envisages sustaining the same rate, and even raising it to more than 14 per cent in its best case scenario."

The Ambassador outlined Ethiopian Government policies which fight poverty, empower people and expand education. The Ambassador added that "road construction, telecom expansion, irrigation schemes and power generation will remain Government priorities. In 2015, the number of mobile subscribers will reach 61 million, dwarfing the current 4 million mark. Primary health care will be accessible across Ethiopia. In addition to extending the total road coverage to 140,000 kms, a railway network stretching for about 2,400 kms across the country is part of a grand scheme to completely overhaul a sector which is key to economic transformation".



The Ethiopian Government is also committed, he said, to further consolidating democratic governance as part of its drive to build a political system which embraces diversity.

Ethiopia is an emerging investment destination with wide-ranging opportunities and incentives in all economic sectors and a promising market, comprising of 80 million people, the second largest on the African continent. Trade and tourism are also showing marked growth.

The Ambassador praised UK companies such as Pittards, Nyota Minerals and South West Energy that have invested in Ethiopia and urged others to follow their lead, sentiments that were later echoed by guest of honour Under-secretary of State for Africa Henry Bellingham.

On International Women's Day, the Ambassador recognised their massive contribution to the political and economic transformation of the country through participation of women in government and parliament, particularly in education and health. Over 30,000 health workers, most of whom are women, have been deployed in villages across the nation bringing better health services and providing a strong role model for young girls. Expectations are high that the girl-boy student ratio in primary education will reach parity by 2015.

The Ambassador said the diaspora had played a key role in the political and economic transformation of the country through trade promotion and through valuable investment undertakings and urged others them to do more, sentiments once again echoed by the Under-secretary of State. The national transformation plan will make the Ethiopian Renaissance a reality, he concluded.

In a speech to guests, Britain's under-secretary of state for Africa, Henry Bellingham MP, said :

"We have a new government and one of our key foreign office priorities was to intensify bilateral relations with a number of countries and obviously one of those countries is Ethiopia. And I think we have already made it clear that this is really a serious commitment. Bilateral aid review, nearly £1bn over 4 years, which shows a real commitment to Ethiopia. But it goes deeper than that. We have those fantastic cultural links, the British Council and we also have trade because we are passionate in the coalition government about building up bilateral trade between Ethiopia and Britain."

We have chosen Ethiopia, he said, "for a number of reasons. Ethiopia is a major regional player, you've made the most phenomenal progress over the past fifteen, twenty years, you are an absolute model aid partner. That is why the new UK government is increasing our aid to Ethiopia to almost 1 billion over a four year period. We will be looking at how aid works on the ground what it does to relieve poverty, to create

wealth, to help build SMEs - small and medium sized enterprises – to help people who are in need, but most of all to how it can encourage trade and help Ethiopia become self-sustaining, we put a huge emphasis on commercial diplomacy, so that in future you can rely on trade not aid. I am delighted that our trade relations are really very, very strong. The growth in your economy is increasing at a rate that we in the West can only dream of. There are lots of opportunities for UK companies [in Ethiopia].”



Henry Bellingham MP, addressing guests at the Ethiopian Cultural Evening

He added : “The diaspora in the UK contribute a huge amount to our country, and it’s a way of us cementing those links between our two countries, and we need to make the most of it because we want the diaspora here to do well in the professions, in their chosen walks of life, in their communities. But we want them also to take an interest in Ethiopia, and the way we can build trade is through that two-way relationship, not just UK companies exporting to Ethiopia, but Ethiopians selling goods to the UK and using London as the launch-pad for their business into Europe.”



“Finally”, he said, “we have a superb cultural relationship as well. You have incredible tourism in your country and you want to build that up even more. There’s huge potential for Ethiopia really selling what it has in tourism. We have those other cultural links too, the British Council has been in Ethiopia since 1944 and there are also the Chevening Scholarships, so let’s build those cultural links, let’s move forward, lets enhance relations between our country. And I look forward to working with you. Let us drink to Anglo-Ethiopian relations, he concluded.”

ENDS

**Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
LONDON, SW7 1PZ**

For further information please call the Press Office on 0207 838 3880/3, Mobile 07717 603163

The Ambassador’s speech is available on demand, send an email to angela@ethioembassy.org.uk or visit our website, www.ethioembassy.org.uk.