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ADDRESS TO THE CHICAGO ASSEMBLY

Founding of the Ethiopian Students Association in North America

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On behalf of the Planning Committee of this Assembly, I assure each one of you here that we are simply overjoyed to see so many of you at this – the first meeting of the Ethiopian Students Association in North America. We welcome you all very heartily. [Those present represent almost a quarter of the about 300 Ethiopian students in the USA and Canada in 1959-60.)

I hasten to add a sincere expression of gratitude for your willingness to consider our humble invitation so earnestly and for having really done your best to be present in our midst at this moment – coming from the different corners of North America, overcoming the obvious obstacles of your “pocket” (or “purses”) and sacrificing your most precious and valuable time of study for the sake of this gathering. It is unnecessary to mention that you must have realized that by virtue of such a weighty purpose as is now before us, every minute you lost you shall gain, every cent you spent you shall get back double. Not today, nor even tomorrow but, if we be found faithful – as we have already been, and as our mere presence here witnesses – time will indeed reveal the fruits of this gathering. As our Ethiopian proverbs says, “Step by step an egg will walk”. When men and women of one country are united by one noble objective to move towards that lofty goal of creating and strengthening friendship and promoting mutual service, as well as service for their fellow country people, remaining true to their vow in spite of obstacles from many sides, all their efforts shall be blessed richly, their sweat shall turn to salt, that necessary extra breath they may have to gasp shall inspire a due satisfaction with a fuller life of gratitude. We await patiently to see that the fruits of our thoughts and labors shall not indefinitely remain

stagnant and everlasting wishes, as so many other things, but shall turn **to become as real as concrete service – for ourselves and for our fellow Ethiopians.**

After this long and involved introduction, for which I beg your apology, I hope I have not led you to a wilderness of confusion. So, without further ado, we shall immediately turn to strike with a hammer the purpose why we have come here together. To do so, I shall first read the opening paragraph of our invitation circular that has a brief summary of some of the reasons why we posited the idea of an **Ethiopian Students Association in North America**. In the paragraph there is but the minimum number of thoughts that express our objectives. We hope, more and better ideas will come from you. Thus reads the paragraph:

“There are at least three hundred Ethiopian students scattered all over the United States and Canada. Some of these students probably know each other; nevertheless, it is still not surprising to find a good segment of our fellow Ethiopians not at all acquainted with each other in any cross-section of our student body. Only a few now probably have the rare privilege of being in areas where more than one or two other Ethiopian students are found, and consequently able to be in touch with each other and some “home atmosphere”. But a larger number of our fellow Ethiopians are scattered all over the the USA and Canada, unfortunately separated from any possible happy contacts with fellow Ethiopians. Still, more importantly, several students have probably never had the most beneficial and worthwhile opportunity of discussing together with one another, while they are yet in school, **in what ways they could cooperate to be of the greatest services for their own country in the future in their respective fields**. Because of these facts and other reasons – or even some other important reasons that we suppose you might have, and are most welcome to suggest – some of us Ethiopian students in the Midwest feel that periodical meetings of Ethiopian Students be organized. Such a meeting, me believe, can be of the greatest significance and advantage for everybody – **whereby old acquaintances are renewed, new friendships established, personal problems shared with friends, useful, enlightening, and lasting ideas exchanged and shared, and mutual understandings created –**

all with the objective of better, greater, and more effective and efficient future cooperative services for the best of our beloved homeland, Ethiopia.”

We render our gratitude to those who had labored in the past whether it be in the production of a *Newsletter* or attempts at creating an Ethiopian Students' Assembly. But, we regret to say that we have failed – may be due to our own indifference, lack of sufficient interests, or some kind of short sightedness to form a union. So, we regret to say that in spite of the past efforts we, the Ethiopian Students in North America, still lack an adequate organ whereby we could effectively express ourselves and our unity of purpose and fellowship by such means as a General Assembly like this one and an established active association. Secondly, we raise here the other burning issue of our present Newsletter-- to foster that official literary organ.

In short, ***our ultimate objective is to establish greater contact with other fellow Ethiopians in this country as well as at home and abroad, and even with other African students – so that we may be able to exchange our useful ideas in order to prepare ourselves for a more efficient future service for our beloved country.***

Friends, I speak to you as to my own brothers and sisters. I hope I am not committing a gross mistake if I say that ***we have failed to meet our responsibilities to make intimate contacts with one another or, for that matter, even to take interest in one another as individuals of one country, that we have failed to represent satisfactorily firstly our own country and secondly our continent of Africa,*** that we have even failed to give moral, financial, and temporal support for our paper. Am I not right in saying simply that there is at the present hardly anything in which we can take pride?

Yet, however, I hesitate to go any further and stick unnecessary tape of blame on anyone. For, I stand here convinced that had our efforts been manifested to our general student body, and had we been able to come together in meetings like this one, we would have undoubtedly already considered more seriously each one of the things that I mentioned above.

Now *the prima facie consideration is not, “what can we do about the past?” but “what can we do about the Future?”* What is past is no longer in our hands; the only way to remedy it is by consulting the future. But what is to be done for the future should not be put off until tomorrow, for tomorrow is not; tomorrow may not exist unless we create it; and concerning that common temptation of postponing things for tomorrow, we get no better warning from anywhere else but from our own simply Ethiopian story about the farmer who used to say, “Naggay!” So we must act today, we must act now, right away. Why should others keep accusing us forever, and why should we be branded as dormant, unoriginal, and lacking initiative?

Now is the time when we sow the seed of our future potential activities. We can do great things, if we will! As it has been said, “the difficult is that which can be done immediately, the impossible that which takes a little bit longer.” We can even accomplish more things than we can probably imagine at the moment, for numerous are our great blessings and the favorable conditions on our side. We have a wise and brilliant Emperor, a great lover and supporter of education and students, who is ready and willing to assist us in every step that we may take to serve our country rightly. *We have a rich country, for instance, we have some of the richest soil on earth – at least, 180,000,000 virgin acres of the world’s most fertile soil belong to us. We have a good starting point: a solid culture and history of which we can honestly be proud. We have a cooperative people, a people of high moral standards and noble virtues.* And moreover, we, as college students, by virtue of the fact of our being in the top 5% of the educated populace – even according to the standard of any respectable education anywhere in the world – have not only many responsibilities but also many advantages . . . Certainly, all of these and many more other benefits and privileges the Almighty God has bestowed upon us. We did not cause them to come into being; we got all of them free so from the Almighty. Surely, we have something, *we are getting something all the time in all ways, but what have we given away (contributed)? Is not the “joy of giving greater than the joy of receiving”?* Yes, we must learn to give of our time, of our money, and of all our efforts. Who can say, what can I do? Who dare say, I am too busy? Is it not paradoxical indeed if we on one hand claim to be dedicated for the service of tomorrow

for our country, yet now on the other hand would overlook the importance of the germ of our collaboration and cooperation today and refuse to give of our time, our money, and our energy for the sake of service? So, how long shall we dream? Now is the time to wake and work. Now is the time to begin the beginning. What we might be able to accomplish in the future may even be measured by what we can do now by the means of our Assembly. This might be the testing ground for tomorrow's service. Today is the time when we should begin to build up the reputation of and set the peace for our beloved homeland.

Friends, lest I weary you too much by words any longer, I must conclude at once. But I want to emphasize again the obvious value of our cooperation whereby we can make ourselves felt here and at home, whereby we can establish greater contact with other Ethiopian students here, in other lands, and at home, whereby we can more faithfully represent our continent of Africa, whereby we can exchange useful ideas, study together various topics of interest, and whereby we may attempt to help solve certain personal problems of individual student's and so on and so forth. All these can be carried out through well organized, well represented, regional as well as general assemblies, and secondly, through an interesting, well-prepared and informative newsletter or journal.

For such a noble purpose as that which we now have in mind, all of us must be willing to contribute time, money, and energy, realizing that this is not only part of our education but also an essential and effective arm of our future service to our beloved country. ***If we then immediately take a step towards this goal and remain faithful to the relevant responsibilities, we are going to bring many blessings for many who are naked, who hunger and thirst, to many who are sick and weak to many who have no rest or peace within or without, in or outside our own province, country or even continent.*** In this way we show our gratitude for what our Emperor our beloved country, and people have done for us. Our ultimate goal is service and the way to go is the road of sacrifice, and the time to begin is now, this moment. May God bless our country and bless us in our endeavor. "Let him who would move the world first move himself."
(Socrates)

Ephraim Isaac, President,

Ezra Gebremedhin, Vice President

Gannat Awalom, Secretary

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