

Reportage

The 24th Joint Annual Eritrean Festival

EDP/EPP Joint Media Team

August 8, 2009

The second day of the 24th Joint Annual Eritrean Festival began with guests and participants arriving at the festival site from Europe and United States of America in the early hours of the day. Yes, it would be incomplete Eritrean festival without Eritrean style grand festive. So, before the festival program started, guests were served delicious food, as well as soft drinks. The festival organizers were busy serving the guests and assisting guests in finding the festival auditorium where the entire festival program took place.



Once guests got their seats, two noted Eritrean artists: Eyob Haile and Ibrahim Mahmud shared the stage and welcomed the guests by performing Eritrean traditional music and songs. The former played Eritrean traditional songs, and the latter featured Eritrean contemporary songs.

Following the musical introduction, Mrs. Tserha Solomon, chairperson of the festival preparatory committee, officially opened the festival. Mrs. Tserha thanked everybody and delivered her welcome speech on behalf of the committee to the festival participants.

Then, Mr. Yonas Bahta, the chairperson of the host organization, the Eritrean Democratic Association, made a statement on the current state of affairs of Eritrea. Pointing to the plight of Eritrean People, Mr. Yonas narrated the violence, killing and torture, and arresting citizens without charge or committing any crime as

the most prevailing situation in Eritrea under the repressive regime of PFDJ. On the other hand, speaking on the opposition, Mr. Yonas described the situation as one that is evolving to show results. In particular, the united popular protests by Eritrean Diasporas against the regime of PFDJ are growing. Mr. Yonas also described the unity process underway among the Eritrean People's Party, Eritrean Democratic Party, and Eritrean People's Movement as a measure of strengthening the Eritrean opposition. He called on others to follow suit. Mr. Yonas concluded by saying what Martyr Suim Ogubamichael said: "that people must gain their rights and protect them instead of expecting to be granted those rights by others."



In addition, the following invited guests made statement of support to the festival:

Mr. Rudi Fredrish, representative of Connection, a non governmental agency that opposes forced military conscription.

Mr. Gebrezghi Nashih, representative of Democratic Development of Sweden.

Engineer Eyob Maasho, representative of Civic Society network of Europe.

Mrs. Alganesh Gebre, Chairperson of independent Eritrean Women Association.

Mrs. Gergish Negash, Assistant EPP Women's League.

Mr. Amanuel Berakhi, representative of EPP Youth Association.

Mr. Kelati Kidane

Mr. Salih Haburai, representative of CidRie.

Mr. Rezene Tesfazion, represented and read Eritrean Democratic Alliance's message.

Mr. Tewolde Birhan HabteMichael, representative of Eritrean People's Movement.



Following the support statements, Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar, Chairman of EPP and Mr. Hamid Dirar, representative of EDP, delivered brief speeches on behalf of their respective political parties. Both leaders underlined the positive impact that the process of unity currently underway among the Eritrean People's Party, Eritrean Democratic Party, and Eritrean People's Movement will bring to the Eritrean national unity. The leaders also spoke of the current sad state of affairs of our country.

Late in the afternoon, three invited Eritreans presented papers to the festival participants. The presentation covered different areas of studies:

Dr. Daniel Rezene presented a paper on '*non violent resistance*' against the dictatorial regime of Isayas Afeworki. Dr. Daniel was unable to attend the festival; and Mr. Asfaw Berhe delivered the speech on his behalf.

Mr. Solomon Abera presented a paper on '*free press*' and

Mr. Habtom Yohannes presented on '*unity is power, but what kind of unity*'.

The first part of the festival was concluded late in the evening with important speeches and presentations where festival participants were let go for their lunch break. After lunch, the stage was opened for discussions on the presented papers and speeches made by speakers. Mr. Woldeyesus Ammar, Mr. Hamid Dirar, Mr. Solomon Abera, and Mr. Habtom Yohannes took the podium and led the discussion.



Close to midnight local time, the Eritrean culture kicked in, with talented singers and musicians descending to the stage and entertaining the festival participants. In between the colorful Eritrean dancing night, Mr. Yitebarek Gebretensae enlightened festival participants with his speech focused on "*our culture from where to where.*" And there were poems presented by Mr. Dirar Mantai, Mr. Mehari Tekeste, and Dawit that inspired the festival participants. With their live music and performance, the singers kept the festival participants all night dancing and bringing the spirit of Eritrean culture back to live. Saturday's festival program and the spirit it brought will mark the beginning of new era of buttressed cooperation among

Eritrean opposition forces, including new stage of political inclusiveness and sustainable democratic culture in our struggle.



