**Historic Weekend**

 It was Friday evening and the venue was Sheraton hotel, Arlington. We already bought discounted three day bundle tickets from the Eritrean Cultural & Civic Center in Washington DC. I was, (as my family and friends were) looking forward to the DC Eritrean Festival 2013. We set off from Washington DC on Friday 2nd August towards Arlington. This year's Eritrean Festival was going to be different from the recent years because 'Hade Lbna' cultural troupe with Zainab Bashir, Dawit Shilan, Yowhans Tukabo and Melekin Atombes; as well as the Kunama cultural group from south Dakota were going to entertain the crowd that was flocking to Washington DC area from all over USA and Canada. Since the of struggle for independence, Eritrean festivals have been the sign of Eritrea, where the unity in diversity of this unique nation is presented to the world. Tigre, Kunama, Arabic, Tigrigna and Bilen was the songs that were entertaining thousands of Eritreans who enjoyed one of the electrifying Eritrean festival weekends. During the fantastic three days, I had the opportunity of meeting many friends and family members I have not seen for many years.

 Eritrea was abandoned and ignored by most of the outside world, but through unconditional love and support of Eritrean people, the strong and visionary leadership brought independence that was perceived as a dream by many observers and preserved it. Eritreans have developed a spirit of confidence and self-reliance. The secret of this success is unity. Tribal division and sectarian wars have destroyed many parts of the world, but Eritrea has refused to be dragged into that nightmare. To the contrary, regional harmony and cooperation is being advocated by Eritrea. Only united and self-reliant Africa can bring peace and prosperity for the African people.

**Sheraton Hotel- Arlington**

 We arrived at the venue around 8:00 pm and the place had lively and festive atmosphere. Eritreans and friends of Eritrea were making their way in and the venue was filling up slowly. We got our drinks from the bar and secured a table around the middle of the hall. After about an hour or so, the festival was officially opened by Eritrea's ambassador in UK, Mr. Tesfa-Michael Gerahtu with a ribbon cutting ceremony. The Ambasador was accompanied by permanent representative of Eritrea to UN ambassador Araya Desta and charge d'affaires at the Eritrean Embassy Washington, DC Mr Berhane G Solomon. The master of ceremonies Haile-Michael (Lingo) welcomed the guests and opened the night with a minute silence in remembrance of the Eritrean martyrs followed by Eritrean national anthem. The audience then were treated to the beautiful show that started with a stage drama titled "Bahlna' which was about respecting Eritrean cultures. Then Kunama cultural group from South Dakota took the floor to the delight of the audience who joined the beautiful dance. Eritrean Festival Washington-DC is underway. Then came the beautiful Zainab Bashir who made the audience flood the dance floor with her beautiful Tigre song 'Sabrki'. That was followed by Yewhannes Tukabo with his Tigrigna song 'TsibbLaliE' which kept the dance floor flooded. Came then Melekin Atombes with his Bilen and Arabic songs and that was followed by Dawit Shilan and his Krar. People kept on dancing nonstop until 2 AM. The festival continued at the Eritrean Cultural & Civic Center in Washington-DC until dawn.

**Saturday August 3**

 The days began with sport competitions which involved basketball, soccer and golf. These competitions were being held as part of the festival at the Trinidad recreation center, Washington DC. In parallel to this, Washington Convention Center was hosting exhibitions which had inspirational exhibitors and entrepreneurs. I wanted to attend the panel discussion about 'human rights' and how it's used as a political ploy to destabilize nations and the case of Eritrea. The scheduled time for this was 11:00 AM and made my way to north west Washington, DC. When I got there, the has house was already full and as I was a little late, the program was already underway. Panelists talked about how 'human right' is being used for geopolitical agendas. The sketchy blood-soaked realities of the so called superpower nations and consequences of their lethal hypocrisy is turning this world into a war zone. In the name of 'human rights' nations are targeted and puppets are installed to cater for those who are exploiting nations with natural resources. After a few minutes break, the day continued with public seminar by the guest of honor ambassador Tesfa-Michael Gerahtu. He talked about current affairs of Eritrea, the developments, achievements, shortcomings, challenges and the way forward. The eloquent ambassador said, "our promise to the sacred Eritrean martyrs is under any circumstances, we will never compromise Eritrea's security and interests". After the questions and answers the seminar concluded with a standing ovation.

The invited guests and attendees of the festival then made their way to the exhibitions. Artists, entrepreneurs, PFDJ youth, Eritrean women's association, investors, etc exhibited their inspiring work to the invited guests and attendees. Eritrean artifacts, music instruments, cultural clothing, CDs and DVDs were on sale. Washington Convention Centre turned to little Eritrea where Eritrean songs were echoing and Eritreanism was being displayed. It was a very well organized even that showed the dedication and unity of Eritreans. As the evening approached, thousands flocked to the venue. And I had the opportunity of witnessing one of the best Eritrean events in America. 'Hade Lbna' cultural troupe literally shook the venue.

**Sunday August 4**

 After the electrifying previous night, last day of the festival began with final sport competitions in the morning and youth meeting in the afternoon. Around 4:00 pm I arrived at the convention center where I had the opportunity to briefly attend the youth meeting. There were young women and men having an open discussion with ambassador Tesfa-Michael Gerahtu. The topic was Eritrean culture and festivals. "Why are we here?" the ambassador asked. A young lady replied "Because we are Eritreans." Ambassador continued with his question, "Why do we care about being Eritreans?" A young man replied, "Because Eritrea is our root and if we don't look after the root, then we can't have a healthy tree." Indeed. The reason we Eritreans nurture our root is because, we want to have healthy future generations with confident, self-reliant and progressive Eritrean attitude. What we sow now, we will reap later. Because the youth in the 1950 were courageous enough to fight against the monsters that were colonizing Eritrea, we now have perhaps the best opportunity in the world. As Eritreans we can decide, speak and think for ourselves. We have our destiny in our hands.

 Big thanks to those who organized this beautiful & historic festival and I look forward to the better next year. We should all be very grateful for the time and dedication of the organizers. One of the positives of the festival was the involvement of many youth during seminars, workshops, exhibitions, stage dramas and all the organization. Overall, the experience of the festival weekend was a real pleasure. Congratulations to all those who worked hard so that we could have a weekend to remember. Your good work will be engraved in the history books.

God/Allah bless the Eritrean Martyrs.

Wetru Awet N'Hafash.

Samson Negassi,