

A Final Farewell to Our Beloved Dr. Tekie Fessehatzion



A memorial service was held on Saturday, April 24, 2010 at the Hines-Rinaldi funeral home in Silver Spring, Maryland to pay a final tribute to our beloved friend and patriot Dr. Tekie Fessehatzion. The memorial service was attended by hundreds of his friends, relatives and colleagues, as well as by the Eritrea's Ambassador to the U.S., **H.E. Ghirmai Ghebremariam** and several embassy staff.

For those who knew him, Dr. Tekie was a prolific thinker and an outstanding speaker. He wrote beautifully crafted prose and he delivered captivating speeches at various seminars. As many can attest, Dr. Tekie was gifted with a rare ability to explain a complex matter in its simplest form and language in a calm demeanor. And even though Dr. Tekie's profession was in the field of Economics, he had proven to be a seasoned expert in Eritrean history. In addition to writing several articles and research papers on Eritrea, he also served as a member of the **Eritrean Constitution Commission (ECC)** that drafted the Eritrean Constitution, and he was one of three

Eritreans who tirelessly toured major US and Canadian cities between 1994 and 1997 to ensure the participation of all Eritreans in the constitution-making process.

Dr. Tekie's exemplary legacy is a towering monument that shall live forever in the hearts and minds of many Eritreans, and thus the presence of an over-capacity crowd, unseen before in a memorial service, was a powerful testimony to that effect. Furthermore, the emotional eulogy delivered by many of his family members and long time friends, as well as the prayer service led by **His Holiness Abune Shenouda**, Bishop of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church of United States and Canada, and **Qeshi Kiflemariam Yemane**, priest of the St. Mary Eritrean Orthodox Towanda Church in DC, was also a genuine reflection of Dr. Tekie's personality, integrity and work ethic.

In his sermon, the Eritrean Bishop reminded the audience, quoting from Ecclesiastes 7:1, that "*A good name is better than a fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth*", emphasized that it is best to work for a better name than wearing a fine perfume, for the latter evaporates quickly, but a good name, particularly a name associated with working for the good of one's country and people is eternal. Dr. Tekie was a fine example of a man who has a good name among his people.

Following the sermon, a brief yet impressive biography of Dr. Tekie was read by **Michael T. Fessehatzion & Dr. Ghidewon A. Asmerom** in English and Tigrigna, respectively. The biography illustrated Dr. Tekie's past and passion in his personal, professional as well as his service as a public intellectual par excellence.

Dr. Ephrem Tekle read a sampling of the many messages of condolences that were written on dehai.org's Message Board that arrived from Eritrea, India, Turkey, South Africa, Australia, North America, and Europe. These extra-ordinary messages were written by ordinary citizens but also included messages by officials from Eritrean consulates around the world in a display of Dr. Tekie's world-wide recognition.

Dr. Berhe Habtegiorgis, who knew Dr. Tekie for the past 63 years, gave a touching tribute. He conveyed his feelings in a manner that reverberated through the audience. The picturesque account of Dr. Berhe and Dr. Tekie's intertwined life story provided a rare glimpse into the latter's untimely death. It also highlighted how Dr. Tekie's final resting place now completed a full circle to a remarkable voyage of an Eritrean "philosopher" that started as a "bookworm" and a fine goalkeeper (portere) when he was a teenager.

Dr. Gebre-Hiwet Tesfagiorgis, in his signature performance, laced with a good dose of the Eritrean culture, delivered a "melqes". His traditional eulogy was a dynamic presentation rooted deeply in Eritrea's great tradition of delivering the right message to the right audience with the right tone. Dr. Gebre-Hiwet stressed the fact that Dr. Tekie was a cultured man who loved his culture and would surely appreciate such delivery and by the end of his "melqes," there was no single dry eye in the room.

Dr. Tesfai G. Gebremedhin read a short poem. He attributed the simple yet insightful nature of the poem to Dr. Tekie, whom he said placed a great value in the concept of elegance in simplicity when expressing ideas.

Dr. Kiflai Ghebremedhin also read a heartfelt poem. For someone who does not write poetry, it was quintessential piece by a scholar and befitting another scholar. Dr. Kiflai concluded his excellent poem by extending his deepest condolences to the family and the country that Dr. Tekie served with distinction.

Dr. Ghidewon A. Asmerom was somber and sobering as he read a short poem that spoke volumes on what we all thought of Dr. Tekie's untimely death: an irreplaceable teacher and mentor, who was always patient, and yet uncharacteristically chose to leave this world in a hurry.

Messages of solidarity and resolutions were also read by colleagues and representatives from Morgan State University where Dr. Tekie has been teaching in the field of Economics for 19 years.

Dr. Kahsay, brother of Dr. Tekie who had come all the way from Eritrea to be with Dr. Tekie in his final days, thanked everyone for the wonderful and heartwarming support the family received. Finally Dr. Tekie's niece, **Asmeret Ghebremichael**, sang a wonderful tribute song in Latin. And as the Orthodox priests sang, Dr. Tekie's body left the room accompanied by pallbearers that included younger as well as elder friends of Dr. Tekie.

And even though it was a sad day to see one of Eritrea's finest patriot and scholar gone from this world forever, all those amazing messages delivered by his friends and relatives at the service have definitely brought back the life of a true gentleman who loved his people, his country and his family very dearly. And, though the void he leaves behind is hard to fill, his gentle and humble spirit will live on forever.

So long beloved father, uncle and compatriot. May you Rest in Peace!!!

Haile A.
&
Sammy G.