

December 20, 2011

This is a brief report of a seminar that was held in Fresno on December 18, 2011 from 2:00 – 4:30 PM with a filmmaker, historian, and researcher Issayas Tesfamariam. He works and teaches at Stanford University.

Our first seminar of an educational nature in Fresno, CA was a success. 26 people from the small Eritrean community in Fresno County came out to hear the presentation titled "[Soft Power: Lessons for Eritrea](#)" by Issayas Tesfamariam, 18 of whom were youth living in Fresno and Visalia in the State of California. The event was held at Fig Garden Regional Library which was quite convenient in terms of location, facility and friendly environment.

The event commenced with a tribute to the martyrs (*ziKri nsemaetat*). Although the flyer says "Soft Power: Lessons for the Diaspora", it is of benefit to all Eritreans wherever they are and whatever they do. Issayas explained 'soft power' in contrast with 'hard power' and the background to the development of the concept of 'soft power' in much detail. He revealed that the phrase 'soft power' was originally coined by Joseph Nye of Harvard University in the late 1980s.

'Hard Power', where either coercion or inducements (usually referred to as carrot or stick) are used to change behavior are becoming imperfect and don't produce the desired outcomes. Knowing the significance of 'soft power' and endeavoring to exploit the positive aspects of our culture, tradition, history and recognize every Eritrean role model engaged in art, theatre, literature, fashion, athletics, science and technology all over the world is useful to every Eritrean as an individual and to the national strategy as well.

The benefits of 'soft power' were shown with clear examples and brilliant analysis. A lot of slides and pictures were used to support his argument that Eritreans need to identify, channel, and harness their talent, experience and passion to their benefit individually and as a community. He dealt on how to galvanize 'soft power' through the powerful attraction of our culture and heritage around the world which is defined by information flow these days. Examples were given on how culture was used as a commodity by being creative in whatever venture one chooses. Case in point was how the shape and design of '*meshrefet*' was used in custom made lady bags. A lot of other instances were shown where the Eritrean Diaspora is excelling in various fields.

The presentation was so captivating that it continued for 2 1/2 hours without pause after which a question and answer session was conducted. Many of the participants were happy with the lessons they learned from the presentation and urged that such seminars continue in the future. Some of the pictures of the event are below. The attached flyer exemplifies '[Unity in Diversity](#)' theme of the event on a gold bullion and pictures of beautifully dressed ladies from the nine ethnic groups of Eritrea as well as a Christian boy and a Muslim girl dancing together.

Awet N'Hafash
Eritrean Community in Fresno County



