

Eritrean Martyrs' Day Observed in Cincinnati, Ohio

By Eritrean National Coordinating Committee

On June 17, 2012, Eritreans and Eritrean-Americans who reside in Cincinnati, Ohio, observed Eritrean Martyrs' Day **at Mt. Airy Forest Park**, which is in the northwestern suburb of the city.

The local Eritrean National Holidays Coordinating Committee organized the solemn day of observance of June 20. Due to some technical difficulties, the time and location was decided to be on 17 June 2012.

Hadese Alem, the chairperson of the Committee, welcomed the participants. He reminded the participants that everyone should remember to set aside a time for reflection on June 20 and to acknowledge the ultimate sacrifice paid by the thousands of Eritrean freedom fighters and soldiers to usher Eritrean independence for their kinfolks. As a result, Eritrea gained its independence on 24 May 1991 and defended its territorial integrity from the onslaught of Tigriyan/Ethiopian attack in 1998-2000. He also reminded the participants to stay united and remain focused on what is good and best in each other's personality. He stated Eritrean martyrs died for a noble cause.

Tekle Asgedom, chairperson of the Eritrean Community in the city, welcomed the participants to the Park and wished the service to proceed with good spirit. He also acknowledged the dedication and commitment shown by the ***local Eritrean National Holidays Coordinating Committee***.

The other members of the National Holidays Coordinating Committee, ***Hadese Alem, Tekle Asgedom, Sereke Gaim, and Zegeye Ghebremariam*** contributed a lot to make the event successful and memorable. Each one did his part very well. ***Tesfai Berhe, Abraham Tesfu, and Mulugeta Misghina***, members of the community also contributed a lot in rising up early in the morning and reserving or holding the shelter at the Park for the participants.

The program began with a moment of silence and to remember those who died for Eritrean independence. New Eritrean flags brought from Asmara festooned the shelter. Flags flying within the shelter displayed the Red, Blue, Yellow, and Green colors of the Eritrean flag. This was another moving moment to remember!

At the center of the shelter was a flatbed container that was full of sand. Each participant took a candle, lit it, and placed it on the trough of sand. This moving moment symbolized the burning and sacrificing of former Eritrean freedom fighters and soldiers in the Eritrean national struggle, which made Eritrea free and independent and kept its territorial integrity intact.

Arsiema Haile, Saron Haile, Yonathan Yemane, Makda Yemane, Wintana Yonas, Nahom Yonas, Leah Bereket and Shewit Sereke, young people in the community, read what they wrote about the meaning of Eritrean independence, an assignment that was given to them during Tigrigna class. Each one of them expressed what Eritrean independence means to them and their family members.

About five years ago, an Association to support the families of Eritrean Martyrs in Eritrea was formed in the city. By June 2012, it was able to collect more than \$14,500.00. At this time, the Association has more than 50 members.

Finally, the participants paid homage to the thousands of Eritreans who sacrificed their lives so that Eritrea would be free and independent, and wished for next year to commemorate June 20 in a better mood, spirit, and dedication. The event ended at 6:15 pm.

News about the ongoing Tigrigna, Eritrean history, and culture classes for the local young people was shared with the participants. Currently, there are about 30 students taking the classes.

These positive efforts have opened good channels of communication to work together in observing the Eritrean National Holidays, which are observed by all Eritreans and Eritrean-Americans in the Diaspora as well as by Eritreans in Eritrea. Martyrs' Day observance is similar to what we observe in the US as Memorial Day. Through these coordinated efforts, various groups in the USA have started working together, produced tangible results, and positive communication within their communities.

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