**Eritrean Festival DC a Show of Unflinching Unity**

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As usual, on August 17-19, 2012, Eritreans in Metro DC celebrated Eritrean Festival in grand fashion. Eritreans all over have taken these annual rituals as a second nature.  Year after year, for over thirty years, Eritreans have gathered to celebrate each other, music and Eritrean cultures. Eritreans gather to exchange information, educate each other, to get updates on the current developments of their nation and the region. They sell goods and services to each other. It is a festive moment with a purpose that Eritreans look forward-to with great enthusiasm.

Eritrean festival is unique success story, unique to Eritrea that played pivotal role in the fight for independence of Eritrea. Before independence, before Eritrea had a government, the Festival brought Eritreans together from all around the globe in Bologna Italy and, made Eritrean history year after year. After independence, the festivals grew and spread globally reaching Eritreans wherever they are. In North America the charged, festivals are celebrated in every corner where Eritreans reside. The major metropolitan areas draw large crowds. This year for example, Oakland California, Toronto Canada and DC celebrated in a grand fashion.

What is fascinating is the festivals ability to bring Eritrean communities from different areas as one. For example, five million people covering Maryland, Virginia and the District inhabit the Metro DC area. The Eritrean community leaves scattered everywhere but when it comes to the festival, they flourish and show identity of a community inseparable by distance.

Local musicians and musicians from Eritrea come to celebrate. This Year, Faytinga, Bereket Mengisteab, Tareke T-Hiwot, Korchach, Hailom and others came and added color to an already colorful event. Locally, musicians such as Tefeno Aklilu, Sami Berhane and others and added to the fun by singing songs like the new sensation Elele sending the people into frenzy.

This year, the three-day festivities included a seminar given by three intellectuals namely, Isayas Tesfamariam, Dr. Asghede Hagos and Elias Amare. This seminar was a highlight of the event that needs to be shared by every Eritrean.

Issayas Tesfamariam is a historian, film director, writer, photographer, blogger, and head of Microfilming Department at Hoover Institution. He is the author of the book ‘Eritrea, Colors in Motion’, producer of the films ‘Asmara: City of Radiance’ and ‘Eritrea an old new nation. Mr. Tesfamariam presented a paper about Soft Power. He explained what power is, what Soft Power means and, how Eritrea can take advantage of this untapped potential. His detailed presentation is “must” see by every Eritrean. He explained how culture, art, history, human stories, individual achievements, geography, artifacts… etc… can help promote and defend Eritrea. Lack of awareness of this Soft Power is tantamount to wasted opportunities. He showed many slides as examples of Soft Power. Mr. Tesfamariam’s educational seminar is powerful tool that will help Eritreans jump-start businesses and industries all over.

Dr. Asgede Hagos is a Professor of Mass Communications at Delaware State University. He is the author of ‘Hardened Images: The Western Media and the Marginalization of Africa’. He also wrote Media Intervention in Peace Building in Burundi ‘The Studio Ijambo Experience and Impact as part of USAID’s Greater Horn of Africa Peace Building Project**.**Dr. Asghede educated Eritreans how the enemies use their media to demonize and forward their agendas and, gave some solutions to counter their offensive. Dr. Asghede said Western media are businesses, concerned, primarily about their pocket books and, willing to do anything to get exclusive stories. These agenda setting news organizations like the Washington Post get their exclusive stories in a quid pro quo from institutions like the State Department. It is perpetual cycle, hard to break, that the handlers know how to use effectively while keeping the public in the dark. There is no regard to balance or fairness. Hence, it is important to counter their negatives with stories of our own.

Elias Amare, an Independent freelance researcher/writer, a Senior Fellow  with Peace building Center for the Horn of Africa (PCHA), served as an  ERI-TV journalist, a senior book editor, Communications Director and  cultural attach’ with the Eritrean Embassy in Washington, DC and a longtime volunteer community organizer. Mr. Elias Amare presented a paper that explained how they wage Psychological Warfare against Eritrea and what their goals are. Mr. Amare explained “Creative Destruction,” explained how it is applied on Eritrea and provided examples such as the Arab Spring. Mr. Amare noted, even though Eritrea has successfully foiled their ploys, vigilance is still necessary to continue defending the nation by what he called “Writing is Fighting.” Mr. Amare showed historic slides that dated back to the 50s, 60s and 70s highlighting the importance of writing vigilantly. He told stories about Eritrea’s giants such as Aboi Weldeab Weldemariam and Musa Aron and stressed the significant roles they played in challenging the colonial propaganda machinery. Writing played significant role in the fight for Eritrea’s independence and Mr. Amare stressed that the current challenges requires writing, more and, often in order to challenge the barrage of demonizing attempts being waged.

The Eritrean Festival opened on Friday with enthusiasm and, on Saturday, Ambassador Araya Desta briefed Eritreans about the current developments. He spoke about Eritrea’s achievements and said that Eritrea is in a much better position especially when considering the state of Eritrea after independence. He also said that brighter future awaits Eritrea due the strides the people of Eritrea have made in achieving food security. He noted that the abundant rainfalls of this year has filled the dams Eritrea built recently. In addition, he noted that the mining potential such as potash will ensure Eritrea’s long-term economic viability. Ambassador Desta explained the current challenges Eritrea faces at the UN and noted that the resoluteness of the people and government of Eritrea are foiling the evil attempts of the enemies.

The Eritrean Festival is a major cultural event that adds to the luster of DC every year. It is infusion to DC’s robust tourism and cultural diversity. This year dignitaries, diplomats and the media attended the festivities from many parts of the country. Congressman Jim Moran’s office sent representatives. Many nationalities from the horn of Africa were also present adding to the beauty of the festival, a testament to the positive role Eritreans play in bringing the people of the region together.

The Eritrean Festival in DC was significant achievement for Eritreans in the Metro DC and the US, it is even a greater achievement when one considers the large number of youth that participated for it is a testament of the unflinching unity of Eritreans worldwide.

Hence, it is imperative for every Eritrean to play a due role to enrich the festivals since the festival is part of our rich history and reflection of who we are. It is also a way to promote Eritrea by introducing it to other cultures and organizations that could become future friends of Eritrea. Our national expression ought to be service oriented to the nation and each other. That is the only way we can add to our rich, colorful and robust future.

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