

**EMBASSY OF THE FEDERAL DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ETHIOPIA,
LONDON**



Ethiopian Cultural Evening

March 8, 2011

Jubilee Room, House of Commons

Speech by H.E. Berhanu Kebede, Ambassador for Ethiopia in the UK

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Press Office, Embassy of the FDR of Ethiopia

Your Excellency Mr Henry Bellingham, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State
My Lords
Honourable Members of Parliament
Excellencies
Distinguished Guests
Fellow Ethiopian Compatriots

On behalf of myself and of the staff of the Ethiopian Embassy, I would like to welcome you to this annual cultural event, which is a hallmark of the fraternal relations between the people and Governments of Ethiopia and Britain.

This annual event enjoys the full support of friends of Ethiopia because of the outstanding leadership and support of Laurence Robertson MP, Chairman of the All Party Group on Ethiopia, and his assistant, Annie Adams.

As you all know, a new Government was formed in Ethiopia by the incumbent ruling party, the EPRDF, following the majority of votes it won in the May elections last year. The Ethiopian electorate who went to the polls for the fourth time since the ouster of the Derg, to decide on their future by voting overwhelmingly for the party of their choice, a party which has a track record of successful development strategies that have lifted the nation's economy which was previously in the doldrums.

Having conducted a free, fair and peaceful election, the Government set in motion a new and ambitious five-year Growth and Transformation Plan that will see the nation cruise to a new high. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and agricultural production are expected to double. The Ethiopian economy, which is among the fastest growing in Sub-Saharan Africa, has been achieving, over the past seven years, average annual growth of 11 per cent and the new plan envisages sustaining the same rate, and even raising it to about 14.9 per cent in its best case scenario.

Poverty eradication programmes focusing on agriculture, education, health, infrastructure, on industry, trade and investment were the hallmarks of a massive nation-building scheme now bearing fruit by opening up new and equal opportunities.

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

Government policies, from foreign policy through to development policy, were crafted to reflect the needs and aspirations of the Ethiopian peoples, giving utmost priority to the fight against poverty, with a vision to realize a viable and prosperous Ethiopia. Putting empowerment of people at the centre of its major objectives and with due emphasis on the expansion of education, the Government has successfully implemented these policies over the past years allowing about 19 million Ethiopian children to go to school and we hope to achieve universal education by the year 2015. In an unprecedented turn of events, hundreds of thousands of young Ethiopians have joined the mushrooming higher learning institutions. The number of public universities has grown to 22 from a mere two over the past two decades. This number is expected to rise to 31 in the next few years. Moreover, private universities and colleges are now thriving in all the regional states, making tertiary education accessible to many.

Road construction, telecom expansion, irrigation schemes and power generation will remain Government priorities. In 2015, the number of mobile subscribers will reach 61 million, dwarfing the current 4 million mark. Primary health care will be accessible across Ethiopia. In addition to extending the total road coverage to 140,000 kms, a railway network stretching for about 2,400 kms across the country is part of a grand scheme to completely overhaul a sector which is a key to economic transformation.

The Ethiopian Government is also committed to further consolidate and deepen democratic governance by fighting malpractices including corruption through an all-out and broader community participation. As part of its drive to build a political system which embraces diversity, the Government is committed to enhancing and entrenching the nascent democratic institutions which are at the centre of the new political order. This course is indispensable for a stable democratic Ethiopia, home to citizens with equal opportunities and rights as enshrined in the constitution, the supreme law of the land.

Ethiopia is an emerging investment destination with wide-ranging opportunities and incentives in all economic sectors and a promising market, comprising of 80 million people, the second largest on the African continent. Trade and tourism are also showing marked growth.

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

Companies from the UK have been active in Ethiopia and more investors are showing a growing interest following the footsteps of Pittards, Nyota and South West Energy, just to mention a few.

Pittards, a company reputed for its technically advanced leather products, is among the leading manufacturers in Ethiopia. It has been there for the last four decades and symbolizes the amicable and excellent bilateral ties between Ethiopia and the United Kingdom. Nyota minerals is engaged in gold exploration and development in Ethiopia, earning the country revenue crucial for development and generating jobs for the local people. South West Energy owns shares in the famous Ambo Water Factory and has plans to involve itself in other lucrative sectors in the near future.

British companies in a range of sectors have taken part in promotional workshops organized by our embassy, in collaboration with the British Embassy in Addis Ababa, Chambers and other stakeholders at which they displayed an interest in becoming partners in development with the Ethiopian people. Some have indeed started the process of investing in Ethiopia and others have dispatched missions to further discuss with Government officials and other stakeholders.

At this juncture, I would be honoured to call upon UK companies to join the numerous local and foreign investors, presently benefiting from the generous and attractive incentives offered in Ethiopia.

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

The UK's development assistance to Ethiopia has risen over the years and it was announced on 2nd March that Ethiopia will receive 331 million pounds on average for the next four years, reflecting the strong bilateral and people to people relations. In his recent visit to Ethiopia, His Excellency, the Secretary of State for the Department for International Development (DFID), Mr. Andrew Mitchell, expressed appreciation of Ethiopia's efficiency in managing the funds made available to it.

Allow me to seize this opportunity to express my heart-felt gratitude to the Honourable Members of Parliament and to the UK Government for their unwavering support for our battle against poverty, which has made possible the lifting of tens of millions of our people out of abject poverty. And once again I urge them to join hands with Ethiopians in the monumental task of implementing the Growth and Transformation Plan.

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

As we mark International Women's day, March 8, it would be remiss not to mention how much Ethiopian women have paid in sweat and blood for the successful culmination of the struggle. A struggle that has opened up opportunities for them, which has guaranteed their equality and which has recognised their contribution to the political and economic transformation of the country.

Participation of women in government and parliament, particularly in education and health, has seen a meaningful boost, which in turn has greatly contributed to the empowerment of women in Ethiopia. Expectations are high that the girl-boy student ratio in primary education, which currently stands at zero point 93 girls to 1 boy (almost parity), is expected to be at par by the end of 2015. We believe a lot remains to be done, but we feel we are on the right track.

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,

The Ethiopian diaspora has so far participated in the political and economic transformation of the country through trade promotion and through valuable investment undertakings. I urge the Ethiopian diaspora to do more by intensifying their engagement with their country of origin, through buying government bonds, sending remittances, promoting Ethiopian export products, encouraging knowledge and technology transfer, and actively involving themselves in the country's image building endeavours.

Ethiopia was a source of inspiration and a beacon of hope and freedom for many in many different parts of the world. It is the cradle of humanity. The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, the Walled City of Harar, the Axum Obelisks, the Castle of Gondar, are all part of UNESCO designated world heritage. And now, we have embarked upon a huge national transformation plan with the lofty ideal of making the Ethiopian Renaissance a reality.

Once again, pledging to re-double our engagement and cooperation, may I seize this opportunity to thank every one of you for your sustained support, which has been a source of inspiration.

Thank you and enjoy the evening.