

**Address to International Community School Alumni Reunion
Embassy of Ethiopia
June 6, 2008**

Good evening and welcome to the Embassy of Ethiopia. It is a true pleasure to welcome so many graduates, former students and staff members and supporters of the International Community School of Addis. Tonight is a special night, and I suspect that most of you also can sense this warm feeling of friendship and camaraderie hanging in the air.

At the onset I would like to thank Larry Schneider, the organizer of this event, who worked tirelessly to arrange this wonderful celebration. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Ethiopian Airlines, whose generous sponsorship helped make this evening possible.

Since its founding in 1966, the International Community School of Addis Ababa has played a lead role in advancing education in Ethiopia. Its holistic approach to education and its commitment to its students have always made the institution a model of educational excellence.

At the time of its founding, the school was unique not just because of its curriculum and staff, but because Ethiopia simply did not have a large-scale educational infrastructure in place to educate our future generations. I am thankful to report that times have indeed changed. Today, unprecedented numbers of Ethiopian children are getting the education that they need to succeed in today's world.

Since 1991 Ethiopia has had tremendous success in expanding education at the primary, secondary, post-secondary and university levels.

The coverage of primary education has risen from just 22% in 1991 to 97 percent today, and secondary education increased from less than less than 20% in 1991 to more than 35% last year. According to current projections, Ethiopia will meet the UN Millennium Development Goals of universal education in 2008, seven years ahead of the 2015 target date.

While there were only two universities in the country in 1991, today there are more than 90 colleges and vocational educational schools providing education to more than 100,000 students a year.

The International Community School has a list of seven belief statements that codify its approach to education. Belief statement number seven asserts that formal education is only one component of life-long learning. Despite the fact that I hold a PhD and am a university professor by trade—not an ambassador—I could not agree more. That is why I have worked to make people-to-people diplomacy a priority here at the Ethiopian Embassy.

While there is important diplomatic and political work to be done in Washington, meeting with policymakers from the Executive Branch and Congress, liaising with representatives of other

countries and so forth, I also believe that the role of an Ambassador and an Embassy is to forge strong bonds of partnership and friendship between people.

During the past month alone, we have welcomed thousands of visitors here to the Embassy for a series of events that put Ethiopian culture on display. We introduced our guests to Ethiopian dancing, music, arts, coffee and cuisine. We shared with them the 106-year old history of U.S.-Ethio relations—at the center of which are excellent people-to-people relations that have continued unhindered by respective changes in government.

Every time that we open the doors to this Embassy, we give our guests an opportunity to see our country for what it is—

-A land of great diversity, where followers of Islam, Judaism and Christianity have lived together in harmony for centuries.

-A melting pot of 80 different nationalities and peoples—each with diverse cultures and indigenous traditions.

-A country that is proud to be the only country in Africa and one of only a handful of nations in the world that have never been colonized.

-The origin of humanity, home to the famous archaeological finding Lucy, and the birthplace and provider of some of the finest coffees in the world.

-A young democracy that is working hard in areas from health, to economics to education to ensure a brighter future for all of our citizens.

All of you here have studied and lived in Ethiopia. You have experienced the warm hospitality for which the Ethiopian people are known. Your presence here tonight is evidence that Ethiopia was and is a part of your lives.

My hope is that you all will join me in being ambassadors for Ethiopia here in the United States. I am asking for your help in spreading the word about our wonderful land on the other side of the world with a storied past and a promising future. Each of you can play an important part in strengthening the bonds between our countries.

Enjoy the rest of your evening, and welcome home.