

Remarks by Ambassador Samuel Assefa
Passport D.C. Around the World Open House
Embassy of Ethiopia
May 17, 2008

Good afternoon. Looking at the crowd here I am reminded of an article I recently read in *The Los Angeles Times* about an exciting new discovery by geneticists. Scrutinizing DNA from around the world, they have created a detailed map showing that all of mankind spread across the planet starting from one place—Ethiopia.

This study, coupled with the fact that the 3.2 million year-old human skeleton of Lucy was also found in Ethiopia, makes it more apparent than ever that if every single one of us here were to trace our family trees back to their roots, we would all wind up in Ethiopia. So let me start by saying...Welcome Home!

I would like to thank the organizers of Passport D.C. for putting together such a wonderful event, which enables Washingtonians to travel the world without even leaving the District. We are so pleased that Ethiopia has been included in the short list of countries selected for featuring this year.

From Ethiopia's prehistoric past through the 21st century, our story continues to inspire. The unbroken continuity of Ethiopia as a state dates back to the Axumite kingdom as early as 1,000 B.C. Ethiopia is the only African nation that was never colonized.

Ethiopia continues to set an example for other African nations—and indeed the rest of the world—through our open and tolerant culture. For centuries, Ethiopia has been home to members of the world's three Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Judaism and Islam—and the members of these great faiths have lived together in mutual respect and peaceful coexistence for centuries.

Today, Ethiopia has begun opening a new chapter in our proud history—and the world is increasingly coming to see that we are both a nation steeped in history and tradition and a pioneering dynamo setting a new standard for Africa.

We are proud of our young democracy's many advances in providing social services and better lives for our people. Over the past 15 years we have reduced our child mortality rate by more than 40 percent. We have cut the number of deaths caused by malaria by 55 percent and have reduced by 60 percent the number of our children who need to be hospitalized for malaria treatment.

Today, you have visited the traditional gojo and hopefully taken part in a coffee ceremony, so let me say a few words about coffee.

Coffee, which owes its name to the Kaffa region in Ethiopia where it was first discovered, is more than just a commodity in Ethiopia. For us it is a national treasure and a way of life. The Ethiopian coffee ceremony is a wonderful tradition that provides an opportunity to experience Ethiopia's legendary hospitality.

As you may have heard, during the past three years, Ethiopia's effort to protect and trademark its finest coffees by using intellectual property laws are yielding fruit. We have formed partnerships with companies in 28 countries around the world including the two biggest coffee companies in America: Starbucks and Caribou Coffee.

Together, we are showcasing and bringing to market some of the finest organic and fair trade-certified coffees the world has ever seen. A new day is truly dawning for Ethiopia's coffee and the possibilities are endless. When you leave today I hope that you will seek out and enjoy Ethiopian coffee. Please remember that with every sip that you take, you will be rewarding our farmers for their efforts, and helping build schools, improve housing and advance social services in Ethiopia.

So in conclusion let me just say again how pleased I am to have you here to experience many of the cultural aspects that make Ethiopia the unique and vibrant place that is.

In the time that is left, I encourage you to soak up the sounds of the music and the tastes of the food and coffee. Enjoy the fantastic art, the dancers and the traditional Ethiopian fashions that are on display.

And if you like what you see here today, then please come and visit Ethiopia to get the full experience. I guarantee you that you will be dazzled by the places that you visit and the people that you meet.

We look forward to sharing our country with you...and to welcoming you home.