

Remarks by Ambassador Samuel Assefa
SCAA Conference and Exhibition
May 2, 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a delight and a privilege to be with you for the Specialty Coffee Association of America's 20th annual Conference and Exhibition.

I am honored to be joined here in Minnesota by a stellar delegation from Ethiopia that includes:

- H.E. Mr. Yacoeb Yalla, State Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development;
- Mr. Getachew Mengistie, Director General of the Ethiopian Intellectual Property Office and chief architect of the Ethiopian Coffee Trademarking and Licensing Initiative;
- Mr. Tadesse Meskela, the illustrious President of the Oromia Farmers Union whose sensational performance in film Black Gold has made him into something of a rock star;
- many of the country's leading coffee exporters; and
- key representatives of relevant government agencies.

This is indeed a remarkable gathering. As one looks around this room, one sees the best and the brightest in the specialty coffee business. One sees the most knowledgeable people in everything about fine coffee – from the intricacies of roasting, to the analysis of subtle flavors and to all the complexities of procuring, marketing and finally retailing this fabulous drink for the handsome price it no doubt merits.

But from where we – the members of the Ethiopian delegation – stand (or sit), one sees a great deal more. We bear witness to the nothing less than a new dawn in the lives of the millions of Ethiopia's coffee farmers — the most deserving and yet also the neediest members of the global coffee economy.

On behalf of Ethiopia and its coffee farmers, I would like to thank the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) for the great honor bestowed on Ethiopia as the first ever African nation to serve as a Portrait Country sponsor of this year's annual coffee conference and exhibition. I

also want to extend my appreciation to Starbucks Corp, Oxfam International, and USAID for their strong support of our participation as a Portrait Country.

Given that this year's conference theme is *Roots*, it is particularly fitting that Ethiopia has been selected as the Portrait Country sponsor. After all, Ethiopia is not only the birthplace of all humanity, but the birthplace of coffee as well. The word coffee itself is derived from Kaffa—one of many regions within Ethiopia where coffee is grown. Just as Ethiopia is the first country to grow coffee; we are also the first nation to produce it and to export it.

Permit me then to try to take you away from this room for a moment, to a place roughly 8,000 miles from here.

On the other side of the globe in the tiny village of Kellinso Mekonisa, Haleke Beriso awakens each day in a grass hut on his quarter-acre coffee farm. He works with his wife and children to grow some of the best coffee in the world – Sidamo. And for that he earns about a dollar a day – in a good year. Life can be hard for him and his family, but they have great pride of work and attachment to the crop and wish nothing more than to live on the land and build a viable coffee business.

About 1 in 5 Ethiopians relies on coffee for his livelihood. That's 15 million people. And you know better than anybody that they produce some of the most magnificent coffees in the world. More than ever before, coffee connoisseurs around the globe are celebrating the unrivaled attributes of Ethiopia's fine coffees: their remarkable bright appearance and flavor; the distinct fragrance and aroma of each.

Now let me weave together the story of Haleke Beriso with the routines of your daily business activities as well as your Sunday-like moments of leisure.

Each of you here, when you buy Ethiopian coffee, when you sell it in your stores, when you make money and run successful businesses – and when you enjoy it yourselves: please remember that every cup is making a difference in the lives of Haleke Beriso and millions of other people in a far-off land on the other side of the globe.

You are not doing this for charitable reasons. You are building good businesses. Yet each sip of coffee you take rewards our farmers for their efforts, and helps build schools, improve housing and advance social services in Ethiopia. On behalf of Haleke Beriso and the millions of Ethiopian coffee farmers who never get this chance to meet you face-to-face, let me simply say: thank you.

Through our partnership with you we are forging a powerful alliance that bridges the gap between the ancient Ethiopian coffee culture and modern-day powerhouses of global business and social responsibility.

I am pleased to report that Haleke Beriso and all others who cultivate and protect Ethiopia's "black gold" are beginning to reap the financial benefits from the coffee crops they harvest. This is due in large part to the Trademarking and Licensing Initiative that Ethiopia launched in partnership with local and international organizations who share our concerns.

We have acquired protection for our country's premium coffee brands: Sidamo, Harar and Yirgacheffe. By securing trademarks in 28 countries and signing licensing agreements with more than 70 foreign firms as well as 50 local export companies, we have built a network of partners committed to protecting Ethiopia's coffee brands and helping our farmers garner a higher price for their beans.

We are already the biggest producer of coffee in Africa, with a reputation for turning out some of the world's finest coffees. Ethiopian coffee is pesticide-free, and the naturally enriched soil in our coffee-growing regions makes fertilizers unnecessary. Our coffees continue to meet "organic" and "fair trade" certification standards.

So it is with great confidence that I can say to you: a new day is truly dawning for Ethiopian coffees. That is the story reflected in our newly-launched branding, which shows a glowing sun rising in the sky, with rays of light emanating from an Ethiopian coffee bean.

To what heights we will be able to take Ethiopian coffee? We don't yet know. But with hard work and dedication, and in partnership with all of you we can accomplish amazing things in the pursuit of protecting and promoting Ethiopia's wondrous gift to the world.

We are here at this conference to share with you the history, customs and strong coffee culture that define Ethiopia. For Ethiopia, our relationship with coffee is as ancient as it is deep. Coffee is part of our daily lives. The coffee ceremony is one of our most cherished social traditions—an opportunity to bring together our own families and to extend our legendary hospitality to visiting guests. We will be hosting coffee ceremonies at the Ethiopia booth –booth 1952— throughout the conference, so I encourage everyone to come by and witness this ritual for yourself—it is an experience you won't soon forget.

As we open a new chapter in the story of Ethiopia's coffee, and as this national treasure gets its day in the sun, I leave you today with the blessing that is bestowed at the end of the traditional coffee ceremony:

Let your families live and your houses stay in peace;
let your children grow up good and strong;
and may God grant you the grace that he has accorded to coffee.

Thank you.