

**Dear Mr Laurent Brihay, Executive director of
Brussels Euro press club**

**Representatives of tour operators and tour
Agents,**

Friends of Ethiopia,

Representatives of Media,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to warmly welcome you and thank you all for being here with us to attend this event, an event aimed at presenting and informing the possibilities and opportunities that

Ethiopia is endowed with to attract more tourists and visitors to this great land of ancient and one of the oldest civilizations.

Since my arrival in Europe four years ago, one thing I observed was a serious knowledge and information gap in depicting the right and contemporary image of Ethiopia to the public in Europe. Many still think Ethiopia as a land of famine, drought and conflict. In the last 24 years, Ethiopia has changed and changed for the better. It is in the right trajectory of transformation and renaissance. I am hopeful that programs like this

one would contribute to the efforts we are making to provide the old and contemporary facts and realities of the country, its heritages and rich cultural diversity of the peoples. In this connection, I hope the event would be informative about Ethiopia's tourism potential, and at the same time entertaining.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ethiopia is old and big, its history dates back to over 3000 years. Ethiopia is a great tourist destination endowed with untapped wealth of

historical monuments, natural and archeological attractions coupled with diverse peoples and cultures. It is a leading country in Africa in inscribing nine world heritages sites to date and owns 21 national parks.

Ethiopia is the birthplace of mankind, the oldest human remain, Lucy, have been found in one of its regions, it is also home of the arc of the covenant, the origin of coffee and the source of the Nile waters. It is a nation of accomplished and legendary great runners.

It is the land of numerous cultural and historical tourist attractions 9 of which have been inscribed by UNESCO as world Heritage sites. The sites include Axum obelisk, Lalibela rock hewn churches, Fasil castle of Gondar, Harrar jogol wall, Konso cultural landscape, Lower valley of awash, Lower valley of Omo, Tiya carved stones and Semien National Park.

Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia called also Africa's diplomatic capital, is the seat of the AU and the UNECA, and a place where numerous international and regional organizations and

diplomatic missions have representations. With splendid AU and UNECA conference facilities and more star rated hotels, the potential for conference tourism is very huge.

Moreover, the country's flag carrier, Ethiopian Airlines, has become the continent's leading carriers unrivalled in Africa for its efficiency and operational success, turning profits for almost all the years of its existence.

Operating at the forefront of technology, the airline has also become one of Ethiopia's major

industries and a veritable African institution, serving 49 destinations in Africa and 83 international destinations.

Brussels, the capital of Europe is one among the dozen of Ethiopian's destinations in Europe and has currently five flights a week (six during July and August months) between Brussels via Paris and Addis Ababa, connecting practically all African destinations.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, Ethiopia is not only a nation with very rich history and culture but also a rapidly growing non-oil economy which has registered double digit economic growth for the last 12 consecutive years. With the implementation of the growth and transformation plan, we are redoubling our efforts to not only maintain the pace of the growth but also to do even more.

Tourism sector development is one of the priorities of the government. In this regard, the

Ethiopian tourism development policy was recently formulated with the aim of accelerating development of the sector which is believed to greatly contribute to rapid growth of the country's economy. The government has attached great importance by creating new institutional arrangements at the federal and regional states levels. There a national Tourism council chaired by none other than the country's Prime minister, as a testimony to the commitment of the government. A new Ethiopian Tourism

Organization is also created with aim of developing and promoting the sector.

The government has also made huge investment on infrastructure expansion and is encouraging the private sector to increasingly involve in the development of the sector.

Ethiopia is politically stable, safe and secure in a region that is facing more than its fair share of crisis and conflict. Our resolve to protect our citizens and our visitors is simply unquestionable and uncompromising.

In this regard, I would like to invite and encourage All Benelux Tour Operators to take advantage of our tourism potential and consider Ethiopia as one of their destinations. We are here to help you link with Ethiopian Tour Operators and assist you in any way we can, to that end.

Finally, I wish to thank Ethiopian Airlines office here in Brussels, and its area manager, Mr Bisrat Tedla for working with us in this endeavor. My particular thanks goes to UNIBRA for sponsoring this program. I would like to seize this opportunity to express my appreciation to Mr

Laurent Brihay, Executive Director of Brussels Euro press club for his support.

Last but not least I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Ethiopian restaurants in the Benelux, for their contribution in familiarizing and promoting some aspects of our culture particularly, the Ethiopian traditional cuisine. The dance and music group who will entertain us this evening also deserve our sincere appreciation.

My gratitude goes also to all those who have in one way or the other contributed to the success of this program.

Let me once again thank you for coming to this tourism night. I can assure you that you will enjoy the cultural music, cuisine and the coffee ceremony that are typical to Ethiopia.

Visit Ethiopia, a place where it all began!!

I thank you.