

**Remarks on the Ethiopian Diaspora engagement
policy by:**

**H.E. Teshome Toga, Ambassador of the Federal
Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the Benelux,
Baltic Countries and Head of Mission to the
European Union.**

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Excellencies

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and gentlemen

Allow me, at the outset, to extend my appreciation to the organizers of the Global Diaspora Week 2016 which is platform to engaging the diaspora on their role and contribution to the development and transformation of their country of origin. Let me extend apologies my minister for foreign affairs who was keen to join you but could not make it. He sent his best wishes to the success of the event. We are glad to share our brief experience in integrating our Diaspora in the overall development of our country.

As the saying goes back home, “it is hardly impossible not to find Ethiopians in any part of the world”. Today, it is estimated that at least 2 million persons of Ethiopian origin are in North America, Europe, the Middle East, Australia and Africa. For many years their importance and contribution to the development efforts was not given the highest recognition it deserved. This, in turn limited their multifaceted engagement to merely sending remittances.

Having recognized the immense untapped potentials of the Diaspora, the government has taken initiatives and introduced Diaspora participation policy and strategy by benchmarking best experiences of other countries. Recognizing the contribution of Diaspora in economic, social and human resource development, the policy enlarged their participation to include investment, trade and tourism, knowledge and technology transfer, foreign currency inflows, promoting the culture and building the image of their country of

origin. In other words, they serve as the constituency of Ethiopia wherever they reside.

You would agree with me that institutional arrangements and legal framework are vital in enabling and ensuring effective participation of diaspora. Therefore, institutions were established both at the federal, and regional levels. The ministry of foreign Affairs was given the responsibility to effectively and efficiently mobilize and facilitate their productive engagement in the transformation of the country. The proclamation for foreign nationals of Ethiopian origin was another measure that entitled them to various rights and privileges by lifting legal restrictions imposed on them when they lost their Ethiopian nationality.

Thanks to the policy and legal measures taken by the government, they are entitled to enter the country without visa, have residence permit to live in Ethiopia, be employed without a work permit and enjoy pension scheme. When it comes to private investment, all incentives enjoyed by domestic investors are equally enjoyed by the diaspora. Similarly, operation of foreign currency account for non-resident Ethiopians and persons of Ethiopian origin enabled them to the use of foreign currency accounts.

The deposit account can also serve as collateral to get credit in local currency from domestic banks. For instance, the Development Bank of Ethiopia provides medium and long term loans for diaspora engaged in commercial agriculture, agro processing, manufacturing and industries investment projects. The directives to construct residential houses in eight regional states and two city administrations also entitle Diaspora members to

access land for the construction of residential houses aiming at bolstering the diaspora emotional ties and connection with their country of origin.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Diaspora activity is an integral part of the work of Ethiopian Embassies and diplomatic missions where we have concentration of Ethiopians and persons of Ethiopian origin.

Members of the diaspora are also encouraged to invest in reserved industrial zones and participate directly on industries individually or in forging joint investment projects. Diaspora members are encouraged to benefit themselves and their country by facilitating and promoting suitable market for major export commodities and by way of participating in local, regional and international trade and tourist exhibitions.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and gentleman

Ethiopia is a country affected by brain drain and in order to avert this situation the Diaspora policy have deliberated to brain gain by enhancing knowledge and technology transfer. In this regard, we have employed a mechanism to mobilize and register professionals to fill the gap of our institutions especially in health and education. The other most important part of our Diaspora policy pillar focuses on facilitating flow of remittances through legal channels. This year, we have managed to earn 4 billion USD from remittances and this is more than our export trade earnings for same period.

However, compared to the significant number of Diaspora living outside, we believe the amount of the remittance has the potential to increase substantially. Therefore, the government is in consultation with several money transfer companies to secure attractive service fee for the Diaspora members to send their remittances back home.

Beyond the remittances, 21000 Members the diaspora opened foreign currency account, The diaspora actively and patriotically participate in several important flagship development projects like the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dame (GERD).

Finally, allow me to share with you our experience in organizing and celebrating a Diaspora day annually. The aim of the event is mobilization and strengthening the bond of link with their mother land. This is absolutely important as it serves as forum for dialogue with policy makers and also create to visit development projects in the country which in turn motivate and inspire them to make more participation and contribution. It also has a very positive contribution to our tourism sector where many of them tour the country.

In the process of engaging the diaspora, it is very vital for countries to integrate the interests of the diaspora. We are highly convinced that there should be a two way communication and working very closely with diaspora associations in the country and outside the country is very important. This has enabled us to seriously take their feedbacks and grievances and deal with them to lift up their ever growing participation.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and gentleman,

What we have managed to achieve so far was not without a challenge. As the diaspora has diverse opinions, there are minority group who work tirelessly to hinder the active participation and contribution of the majority. Some extremist elements also abuse social media to create havoc in their country of origin while enjoying the kind hospitality of their hosts. The way forward, in our view is to continue working with moderate groups and engage regularly with those who even unnecessarily politicize the diaspora program. That is the experience I wanted to share with you all.

I thank you.