

## **Commemorating Yekatit 12: Remembrance of the Second Italo- Ethiopian War in 1935**

**By: Berhane Tadese**

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Ethiopians use the month of February to commemorate the victims of 19 February 1937 or Yekatit 12 in Ethiopian Calendar and to honor the heroes who fought for Ethiopia's sovereignty in the five-year (1935-1941) Italian occupation. Since 2014, the Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance Association in NY (ECMAA) and Global Alliance for Justice have worked together to host panel discussions, poetry readings, and video screenings to remember the victims of this tragic day.

This year on February 16, 2020 , the two organizations hosted a special short play of "Petros in that Hour" followed by comedy performance. The play was performed by Tayitu Cultural and Educational Center at The National Black Theatre in New York City. The play, created by Ethiopian poet-Laurate Tsegaye Gabre-Medhin, tells the story of "last days of Abune Petros", a well-known Ethiopian Orthodox bishop who assisted the Ethiopian troops in their struggle to resist the Italian fascist occupation and repeatedly publicly denounced the violence and terror committed by the Italian army. Abuna Petros, the martyr, rejected all Italian persuasion to accept Italian leader Benito Mussolini as the ruler of Ethiopia. He strongly denounced the invasion and encouraged the citizens to protect Ethiopian sovereignty. The fascist Italy executed him by an Italian firing squad on July 29, 1936. It is interesting to know that prior to the trial the Italian authorities gave him a final offer to save his dear life. Abuna Petros refused the offer. In line with this story, Wikipedia states what Abuna Petros said...

*"The tears of my countrymen caused by your gas and your machines will never allow my conscience to accept your ultimatum. How could I stand before God if I do not condemn a crime of such magnitude?"*

Prior to his executions at public square where large crowd gathered, he gave his last speech:

*"My countrymen, do not believe the fascists telling you that the Patriots are bandits, the Patriots are fighting to free us from the terror of fascism. Bandits are the soldiers who are in front of me and you, who have come from far, terrorize and violently occupy a weak and peaceful country: our Ethiopia. God gives to the people of Ethiopia the strength to resist and never bow to the Fascist army and its violence. An Ethiopian land can never accept the orders of the invading army. Land of Ethiopia; I condemn you if you accept such an invasion."*

In addition to Abuna Petros, Ethiopians commemorate many other heroes who sacrificed their lives to end the five-year Italian occupation. Professor Mesfin Woldemariam beautifully summarized with this phrase to give tributes "...So many unsung and forgotten heroes unknown to Ethiopians and known only to God..." To name a few, the heroes include Shewareged Gedle, Ras Abebe Aregayi, Lt. General Jagama Kelo, Dejazmatch Geresu Duki, Dr.

Melaku Beyan, Lij Haile Mariam Mamo, and Dejazmatch Kebede Bizunesh. The war has demonstrated indispensable unity of Ethiopians across ethnic lines. As you read further into Ethiopian history, the unity of the country had also been demonstrated in March 1896, when Emperor Menelik II stood up by galvanizing armies from different ethnic groups against invading Italian army; in spite of the fact Ethiopia's armed forces and civilians were equipped with antiquated weapons. To the astonishment of the world, the well-equipped and armed invading Italian army was resoundingly crushed. This victory took place, during the first Italo-Ethiopian War, in the year 1896 at the Battle of Adwa. The victory demonstrated that Ethiopians unite and put aside their ethnic and political differences at crucial time for the sake of protecting the sovereignty of their country. The famously known the Battle of Adwa became a source of pride for Ethiopians and other African people under colonial rule in Africa, the Caribbean, and North and South America.

Ethiopia has maintained its independence for over 3000 years and beyond. Unfortunately, currently, the unity of Ethiopians endangered by diehard ethnic politicians polarized political agenda. The country is challenged with growing ethnic tensions and conflicts across the country. One can only hope the young generation should study and learn Ethiopia's historical events such as Yekatit 12. The history of martyrs and patriots, like Abuna Petros, should inspire young generation to bring all inclusive ideas to make Ethiopia safe and livable by all humankind. It's important to remember the freedom and independence Ethiopia experiences now rooted from the unifying spirit of Ethiopians to resist foreign powers.

Thanks is extended to the sponsors and to W/O Alemstaye Wodajo, Founder and Managing Director –Tayitu Cultural and Educational center and the talented actors Ato Tesfaye Sima and Ato Abebayehu Tadesse for their cooperation to bring Petros in that Hour play to New York.

Long live Ethiopia!!!