

Commemorate and Remembering Yekatit 12, 1929 G.C. (Ye-Sematet day) in New York City on March 1, 2014

By: Berhane Tadese

Ethiopians residing in the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut held a town hall meeting on March 1, 2014 in New York City as Remembrance Day for Yekatit 12, 1929 G.C. Fascist General Graziani's massacre act. This observance event was organized by a committee composed of Ad hoc committee for Global Alliance for Justice and the Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance Association of NY, NJ and CT.

Commemorative ceremony started with a minute of silence for those who died in Yekatit 12 as well as for those who died during the Italian invasion between 1935 and 1941. That was followed with inspiring panel discussion spearheaded by the well-respected guest speakers, Dr. Girma Abebe, Dr. Syoum Gebre Egziaber and Mr. Nicola DeMarco. A special film entitled "Fascist Invasion and Resistance" film was shown. Following the film A poem entitled Hager Malet Yene Lij "ሀገር ማለት የኔ ልጅ" "by- Asrat Abraham, and a testimonial letter written by former Ethiopian Ambassador Ato Getachew Zeleke was read. In addition the Awen film Director and producers Mr. Valerio Ciriaci & Isaak Liptzin made a brief presentation of the documentary film they are working on. The film is entitled "If only I were that Warrior." It is a documentary about the Italian occupation of Ethiopia in 1935. Following the protests against a recently constructed monument to fascist General R. Graziani, the film brings to light the war crimes he committed in Ethiopia and their legacy today.



The two Ethiopian guest speakers shared their eye witness experience about the unforgettable massacre conducted by the Graziani when the fascist army went on a rampage of murder and arson through Addis Ababa, slaughtering thousands of innocent people in February 19 1937 (Yekatit 12, 1929GC). As a kids growing in war time, they had also heard from an eye witness accounts how the Italian war machine rolled into the Ethiopian hills and used mustard gas on our patriots and civilians. The short film that was presented after their speech showed how the effect of the powdered chemicals blinded, choked and caused skin burns on the patriots and non-combatant Ethiopians civilians. It is evident in the film that the Ethiopian had no defense against these air attacks or a means to treat the victims. Even the Swedish Red Cross facilities were not spared during the indiscriminate bombardment.

Mr. DeMarco who is an Attorney by profession and human rights activities told the audience that his grandfather was among the new settlers brought to Ethiopia by the fascist regime during the Italian occupation. During his presentation he said the story he heard about Italian war in Ethiopia from his grandparents created an interest on him to learn more about the war. He then travelled to Ethiopia and met well known historians and people who were eye witness of the war. Since then he also actively worked with other Ethiopian citizen who were campaigning to return the Axum Obelisk back to Ethiopia. Currently he is an active participant in the campaign to demolish the Graziani monuments built at Affile south of Rome.

The Speakers stressed that Ethiopian communities in diaspora must make every effort to get involved in organizing this type of annual public events and pass this important history to the next young

generation of Ethiopians. These forums keep the dialogue within the communities to ensure that similar war crimes never happen again. During the discussion it was noted that on Yekatit of 1929 G.C. within only in three-day the Fascist army massacred 30,000 Ethiopians in Addis Ababa. During the five year Italian occupation over one millions Ethiopians were killed, 2000 churches and 525,000 homes were destroyed.

At the end of the presentation the forum's participants asked questions and shared many ideas with the speakers. All of us should assume the responsibility to spread awareness, promote a culture of peace, and advance democratic rules so that the sacrifice made by our forefathers would not have been in vain.