Ethiopian Millennium celebration kicks off with Information Technology symposium
September 7, 2007

Information Technology Symposium at World Bank Headquarters in Washington D.C.

By Gabe Hamda, ICAT Consulting, Inc.

The much-awaited Ethiopian Millennium Celebration in Washington DC kicked off in earnest with the start of the information technology symposium. On Friday September 7, 2007, the who-is-who of the information technology within the Ethiopian community in US cities flocked into the World Bank Headquarters in Washington DC. Those about 50 professionals attending the Washington, D.C. symposium were joined by 30 other professionals via video simulcast from the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa.

The purpose of the information technology symposium was to assess the current state of technology transfer in Ethiopia and to explore how to expedite the transfer of technology as a means of reducing poverty and increasing prosperity for Ethiopians in the next millennium. The symposium was also organized to connect Ethiopian information technologists within the United States as well as in Ethiopia.

Comments from attendees were favorable and constructive. Fikrete of Alexandria, VA felt that the symposium was an excellent venue for connecting with fellow information technology professionals. Her only misgiving about the symposium was the speaker-centric feature of the symposium. Fikrete would have appreciated more dialogue between the presenters and the attendees. Alem of London, England was inspired to see highly talented Ethiopian technology professionals inside and outside Ethiopia. One of the remarks that resonated with Alem was the realization that advances in information technology are more than building the physical infrastructure of technology in Ethiopia. Alem expressed that the Ethiopian Government’s restrictions on Ethiopian web sites is one of the barriers of advances in information technology in Ethiopia.
The half day symposium featured topics such as the role of technology in advancing the quality of life of Ethiopians, outsourcing, project management discipline, information security and the role of the Diaspora in the advancement of technology in Ethiopia. One of the keynote speakers at the symposium was Noah Samara, Chairman and CEO of Worldspace and a pioneer of digital satellite radio. Worldspace provides digital satellite audio, data and multimedia services primarily to the emerging markets of Africa and Asia.

The symposium is an excellent start in connecting Ethiopian technology professionals. The presenters and the attendees expressed lots of optimism in words in body language about the future of information technology and its role in improving the lives of Ethiopians. The symposium can truly be considered a success if this forum serves as an inspiration to create a vibrant Ethiopian information technology professional group, which is currently non-existent. An outcome short of creating an ongoing knowledge exchange at an Ethiopian Information Technology Group would only be a rehearsal for another symposium to be held at the turn of the next millennium.

**September 8 & 9th 2007**

**Ethiopian Millennium Served Up Knowledge Buffet**

*Gabe Hamda, ICAT Consulting, Inc.*

They came from Frankfurt. They came from Seattle. They came from Vancouver, Canada. They came from Baltimore. They came from Atlanta. They came from San Francisco. Ethiopians came from all corners of the world to be served up knowledge buffet ushered in by some of the best and the brightest Ethiopian scholars and practitioners.

While the Howard University medical students were busy learning and treating their patients; about 500 Ethiopians packed into the western wing of the Howard University Medical School Auditoriums to hear scholarly presentations addressing issues facing current Ethiopians and actions needed in the next millennium.

The symposium, held on September 8-9, 2007, was a dream come true for Neamin Zeleke, Chair of the Symposium Committee of the Washington DC Millennium Celebration Organizing Council. Neamin, who tends to smile first and then speaks, led a team that worked tirelessly to assemble presenters from diverse disciplines. The night before the symposium kick-off, Neamin was burning the mid-night oil making final stops at the Kinko’s, the Office Depots and the Staples around the metro DC area printing symposium packages. Neamin appears to be an excellent judge of talents. He meticulously hand picked talented and dedicated presenters at the symposium line up.
How did Neamin manage to receive a commitment for complimentary presentations from high paid speakers? Neamin’s secrets to obtaining commitments from potential speakers include: (1) expressed sincere appreciation for scholarly work (2) flexibility to accommodate unique requests from each speaker (3) expressed gratitude for the offer (4) demonstrated personal interest in the well-being of each volunteer speaker (5) ability to articulate the importance of each topic to the greater purpose of strengthening the intellectual capital of Ethiopia. The real secret to Neamin’s success as a coordinator of the symposium was by generously expressing the value of each contributor.

The symposium covered the A to Z of issues of interest to building a democratic Ethiopia. Topics included: building democratic institution, ethno politics, human rights, foreign affairs, history, language, civic society, youth development, women’s issues, conflict resolutions, literature, economic development, finance, mass media, sustainable development, global warming, community development, congressional advocacy, good governance, health, education, business, and decertification. The presenters included: university professors, authors, researchers, government officials, business owners, media personalities, social service providers, congressional staffers, scientists, engineers, health professionals, human rights advocates, lawyers and educators.

Among the featured presenters included: Professor Al Mariam, California State University, Dr. Brook Lakew, NASA, Selam Mulugetta, Special Assistant to U.S. Congressman Mike Honda, Ambassador Ayalew Mandefro, Former Ambassador and Minister of Defense, Dr. Negede Gobeze, Author & Political Activist, Belgium, Nebiat Solomon, Director of African Affairs of the Mayor of Washington, D.C., Ephraim Madebo, System Engineer, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Fikre Tolossa, Writer, Poet & Author, California. Dr. Aberra Molla, Ethiopian Computer & Software, Inc. Colorado.

Symposium attendees have expressed the following impressions:
“It is delightful to see individuals from various political views on the same platform”
Bezu, Vancouver Canada
_The presenters have articulated the issues that encounter Ethiopia. I would have liked to hear more about the solutions to these problems._
Yohannes, Tacoma Park, Maryland
“My friends and I came all the way from Missouri to learn the solutions related to human rights violations in Ethiopia.”
Aster, Missouri
_The issues and problems that appear to be obvious. I would have liked to hear more alternative solutions_”
Former Ambassador Ayalew Mesfin, Washington, D.C.

One of the “out of the box” presentations at the symposium featured Dr. Brook Lakew of NASA on global warming. In addressing global warming concerns, the NASA scientist, Dr. Lakew, recommends that Ethiopia needs to shift from producing agricultural products to importing agricultural products to avoid the depletion of soil. Other related eye opener green recommendations that Dr. Lakew presented include:

- Convert the country into a giant network of small and large parks with heavy involvement of the private sector
- Make hospitality industry a major component of the economy
- Meet energy demands via ever more abundant solar energy
- Strategically convert farmers and unskilled youngsters into gardeners, park rangers and tourist guides, and hospitality industry leaders

Evidence of the attendees’ overwhelming desire to learn more about the issues and solutions for their homeland was the fact that the number of attendees got bigger and bigger in sessions that went way beyond the finishing time. For example, the closing session ended four hours after the scheduled end time. Hundreds of attendees packed into the Howard University Hospital Auditorium to participate in a panel discussion that featured the Ethiopian unity. Such energy by the scholars and the overflow of desire by the attendees points to an obvious demand for ongoing dialogue among Ethiopians to further explore the issues and alternative solutions. The need for organized and recurring knowledge sharing opportunities is a no brainer. However, the fatigued millennium council members are not thinking beyond completing the festivities at hand and going back to their daily routines. The greater community that enjoys the fruits of such efforts needs to step up in support of these organizers by providing real volunteer hours and other resources.

**September 8 2007**
Ethiopian Millennium Concert goers learn Work Ethic

Gabe Hamda, ICAT Consulting, Inc.

What do “concert” and “work” have in common? A lot. The legendary Ethiopian musician Mohammoud Ahmed put on a demonstration of an exemplary work ethic at the Sept 8th Millennium Celebration concert that was held at the DC Armory near the Redskins Stadium. Talking of the Redskins, if their quarterbacks can put in the kind of work ethic that Mohammoud displayed, the skins would have been back to back superbowl champs. The non-stop performance by Mohammoud picked our curiosity and we started asking around concert goers for their estimate of how long Mohammoud was on the stage. Most answered 2 hours. Some gave a 3 hour estimate and others gave a 4 hour estimate. Mohammoud served up plenty of songs that span generations of Ethiopians that induced nostalgia among the nearly 5,000 attendees that packed the arena.

Also on display was the rising star Abebe Belew, an eskista artist turned a radio journalist. Abebe showcased an eye popping eskista, an Ethiopian highland dance routine, along with his former peers and did a duty as a stage facilitator and as a comedian. Actually, his jokes were pretty funny. It is beyond the talents of this writer to effectively repeat any of Abebe’s comedy routines. Undoubtedly, there are more talents at which Abebe will excel in his life time. Who knows perhaps, golf? political leadership? University professor? inventor? The sky is the limit for the talented Abebe.

In this Saturday night concert that started at 9PM and ended Sunday morning around 4AM, the crowd was cheerful doing eskista routines wherever they happen to hangout. The millennium organizers did a superb job of effectively feeding every human sensory organ throughout the event. There was literally no idle moment. When live performances were not staged, there were some crowd pleasing recorded music while the video commercials were scrolling on large flat screens. This should keep the event sponsors pretty happy. The crowd seemed to have used every excuse to be entertained and remain festive. We asked John, a CSC Security Associate, what he thought of the crowd. He did not quite catch the intent of our question first. We clarified our question by asking “compared to other concert attendees of similar events, how does the Ethiopian crowd fare in terms of discipline.” John gave us two answers: The crowd is pretty disciplined and the women are pretty. We were more interested in the first response and John was more interested in his second unsolicited response.

The entertainment extravaganza also featured Ethiopian cultural music, which included performances depicting various Ethiopian cultural groups. Couple of surprises that kept the crowd guessing included the Neway Debebe no-show and the surprise appearance by
Ethiopia’s favorite Alemayehu Esthete. Indicative of the type of music that the next generation will consume, the versatile Tebebu Workiye performed an eclectic combo of hip hop, reggae, Ethiopian Bati, rap, with Amharic lyrics. The pace of Tebebu’s music was traveling way beyond the speed limit of the contemporary Ethiopian music. For the ipod generation, the pace should be within the range of normal.

Ethiopians who want to eat out traditional meals go to Ethiopian restaurants. Ethiopians who need medical care go to see their doctor. Ethiopians who need to get a loan go to financial institutions. Ethiopians who want live Ethiopian entertainment go to see Ethiopian musicians. Seeking specialized service to meet specialized needs is not unique to Ethiopians. However, we would like to offer one exception in the upcoming millennium. We think Ethiopians and Ethiopian establishments who seek to acquire individual and organizational excellence ought to consult to Ethiopian musicians who are thankless demonstrators of excellence and work ethic. Look no further than Mohamoud Ahmed, Abebe Belew and Tebebu Workiye.

**September 10 2007**

*Artistic Expressions on Display at the Ethiopian Millennium Celebration*

*Gabe Hamda, ICAT Consulting, Inc.*

The Howard University Blackburn Art Gallery was a perfect venue for artistic expressions at the Ethiopian Millennium Celebration in Washington, DC. While mother nature was pouring down some much needed rain, millennium celebrants were rubbing shoulders with Ethiopian artists in the metro DC area were fighting through the Monday night rush hour to get to the Art Exhibit that started at 6pm on Monday, Sept 10th. The Ethiopians, who camped out from out-of-state, had something else to worry about: “Where is Howard University?” “Where is Blackburn Art Gallery” “Where do I park?” “I love visiting DC but no way I want to live in this town where parking is more expensive than Berbere in Addis”. Once these revelers were in the exhibition room, no one can tell who is from where.

The 300 or so attendees were ushered to about 50 eclectic wall displays of artwork ranging from photography to oil on canvas to digital art on paper to mixed media on canvas. There was something for people with various tastes. Talents on display included live singers and dancers representing traditional Ethiopian as well as African-American cultures. A moving
remark by Professor Atcha Debela of Durham, North Carolina challenged Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans to learn more and pay attention to the work of art that Ethiopian artists produce.

The evening that was dedicated to a collection of artistic work was not only about works of art. The setting was also perfect for mixing and mingling. Friends and acquaintances that lost touch had a chance to reconnect. Networking of all kinds was made possible at the gallery. Generally, Ethiopians tend to stay close to people they know and tend to be reluctant to strike a conversation with a complete stranger. However, this venue and the art work that was on display facilitated conversations with artists to learn more about what inspired them to create their work.

While the artists were proudly showcasing fruits of their labor and the guests were marveling at what they were watching, the Millennium Organizing Council was huddling to put finishing touches on the March for Democracy to be held in couple of days. The organizers were discussing in hushed tone to ensure they were not interfering with the exhibit in session. One voice among the organizing group that stood very tall is that of Zecharias Getachew of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Zecharias is one of the core organizers of the Millennium Celebration in Washington, DC. The mild mannered Zecharias does not quite stand out as an imposing person. He is a man of very few chosen words and a person of very tall actions. His actions endear Zecharias among his fellow Millennium event organizers. In a brief huddle such as the one that took place at the gallery or in a formal meeting or in routine conference calls, Zecharias, is the one who listens the most for action items. One of many duties assigned to Zecharias is to ensure the Millennium web site is up and running and updated to reflect current events. Zecharias is one of the principals of a family owned Mortgage Company in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

In this economic climate where the mortgage industry is on the verge of its death bed, Zecharias is holding the faith and he does not show the stress and he is not complaining. For Zecharias, who is focused and a dedicated community leader, his priority for now is the successful celebration of the Ethiopian Millennium and a bright future for all Ethiopians. One of the anchoring personalities behind a successful event such as this is Zecharias Getachew.

The art exhibit showed that art is something very special. It also showed that art can be part of our daily life. What is even clearer is that, in the millennium we are ushering in, Ethiopian art will be immortalized through its young and talented cadre of artists.

September 12, 2007
Democracy in Action at the Ethiopian Millennium Celebration Is the official beginning of the Ethiopian Millennium a new beginning or business as usual?

Gabe Hamda, ICAT Consulting, Inc.

September 12, 2007 in Washington, DC was a special day. It was a beautiful day. Sunny with no rain in sight! Breezy! Blue sky! Elected leaders of Ethiopia are in town. At the capital city of the free world, there is no fear of being arrested for the events ahead. Such an event is unthinkable in Addis Ababa today. What more can a freedom loving Ethiopian ask?

The west lawn of the US Capitol was the staging ground for March for Democracy. Capitol police officers were on hand to enforce the code of use of the premises as well as to protect the public. As march participants trickled in around noon, the millennium coordinating committee was pretty busy setting up all the gadgets needed for the march. While the estimated 1000 marchers were pretty excited to be at the capitol to express their dreams for democracy for their homeland, Teddy Kass’s mind was on much finer details of the event. Teddy is the architect of the march for democracy on behalf of the Washington DC Millennium Coordinating Council. Teddy put his entire energy and all his waking hours of the last several months to see to it that this march is executed flawlessly. The high charging but always smiling Teddy commands respect from his peers because he is a hands-on leader. It is hard to stand and watch a leader who works first and asks for help. Teddy and his team cued up the march ready to go for a 2PM kick-off.

The freedom loving marchers were in really good mood. They were chanting pro-democracy slogans. The marchers were warmly cheering the march speakers. Even the young Ethiopian boys and girls, who may have little idea as to what the march is all about, were joining in to create a true family outing atmosphere. The crowd was not quite tame when the Kinjit delegation arrived to participate in the march. There was a sudden eruption of joy, screaming and chanting to welcome the truly elected leaders of Ethiopia, who were in jail for 21 months in Ethiopia on trumped up charges. The crowd rushed to the elected leaders to show them love and adulation. One marcher fell on the feet of the delegates to express the ultimate form of respect and love for the beloved leaders. US Representative Mike Honda, Chair of the Ethiopian Caucus in the US Congress greeted the crowd in Amharic and wished them a happy new year and a happy millennium. Congressman Honda expressed his unwavering commitment for the passage of the Ethiopia Human Rights and Democracy bill dubbed HR 2003, which is under consideration in Congress. The sub-title of the Congressman’s remarks was dedicated to the need for tolerance among Ethiopians of all political views.

Professor Al Mariam, the darling of the Ethiopian democracy movement was among one of the speakers. The professor, who is gifted with the substance and style of presentation made a case for supporting HR 2003. He challenged the marchers to reach out to their US
Congressional Representatives to support the passage of the bill. Al Mariam’s body language clearly demonstrates that he is a winner and he is not going settle for anything less than a win for the Ethiopian people.

The two Kinjit delegates who were in attendance of the march were Dr. Hailu Araya and Ato Gizachew Shiferaw. These cherished leaders thanked the Ethiopian Diaspora for their relentless support during their imprisonment, and expressed their dedication to democratic institution-building in Ethiopia. These gallant leaders communicated with the crowd not only with their words but also with their body language. They showed sincerity, determination, dedication and love for all Ethiopians. They generously made themselves available to meet and greet their admirers. They even took time out to visit with the youngest of the marchers, American style.

After the democracy march, attendees were encouraged to join the celebration finale at the Washington Monument. The event organizers urged the crowd to call and text message their friends to join in the evening celebration, which featured a free concert of traditional Ethiopian music, contemporary Ethiopia music, African American music as well as reggae.

By 9PM the monument park was packed with more than 10,000 Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia to enjoy the free concert. The crowd was truly into all kinds of music. Gone are the days when Ethiopians only listened to and enjoyed only Ethiopian music. They sang along and danced to African American as well as to reggae. The evening was capped with performances of Ethiopian cultural music and dance. The entire park turned into an instant eskista dance floor. A few brave souls, mostly young boys and girls, joined the performers on the stage to showcase their talents.

As the celebration approached a culmination point, members of the DC Millennium Coordinating Council appeared a whole lot like a super bawl team that is leading its opponent by 54 to 3 with 2 minutes before game time. The council members were high fiving one another. The leaders of the Council, who were the MVPs of the event were Alem Tsehay Wodajo, Neamin Zelleke, Zecharias Getachew, and Teddy Kassa. Alem Tsehay Wodajo, who is a performing artist by background and a real estate agent by profession, presided over the Millennium Council. She put in countless hours to lead a team of volunteers to put on this historic event. Alem put to use all her talents and some to pull off this extremely successful event. She used diplomacy, lots of smiles, flexibility, gratitude, speaking her mind, tears, sincerity and effective listening skills to lead a male dominated volunteers. Alem can probably write a best seller book entitled “How I pulled off an event that can only be repeated in a thousand years”.

Dear Millennium organizers. Now the event is in the history books. What is next? Let me offer an organizational consultant advise in the order shown here: (1) First take a break and take care of your self (2) Attend to your family members, who were neglected while you were busy organizing the Millennium mega event. (3) Regroup with the most productive members of the volunteer group – you know who they are by now. Cut out the deadwood. (4) Transform the current organization into the Ethiopian Millennium Action
Group (EMAG), which is a non-partisan group, dedicated to raising awareness and educating Ethiopians to build a democratic nation through activities you have already successfully implemented such as: (a) Building Technology Infrastructure – hint: technology symposium (b) Creating a think tank of best practices and research – Hint: general symposium (c) Excellence for artistic expressions – hint: art exhibit and the two concerts (d) Building Democratic Culture – hint: March of Democracy. Remember, it is always easy the second time around. You have already done 80% of the work by successfully hosting the millennium for the first time.