

Wrap-up Press Release – Returnees from Saudi Arabia-

Taking stock one year after the exodus, **Date:** Thursday 11th December 2014, Venue: CCRDA – HQ, AA

Migration will not stop- but it can be properly managed.

Returnees talk for themselves

The conference: *Returnees from Saudi Arabia- Taking stock one year after the exodus*, which started with a get-together reception at the Beergarden Inn on the 10th of Dec. and concluded after an intensive daylong session on the 11th of Dec. was attended by more than 50 invited participants and several media outlets. At the cocktail the European Union (EU) Ambassador Her Excellency Chantal Hebberecht was introduced by Birgitte Hagelund/Sen. Staff of the delegation, while The Ambassador said a word of welcome and thanked the organizers for bringing together the conference participants and members of various EU delegations from Africa, who were in Addis attending a training on **Migration**.

Various international media were present such as the Voice of America and from the national media-- Sheger Radio and Ethiopian News Agency were in attendance. All these media outlets and the others present during the conference reported on the same day and the days to follow.

The participants stretched from government institutions such as the State Minister Solomon Tesfaye, State Minister of Administration, Justice Policy Planning & Implementation, Prime Minister's Office, representatives of foreign embassies (France), senior staff from the EU-delegation, scholars and researchers from universities, civil society organizations, the UN family e.g. ILO, IOM and above all returnees themselves. Representatives from regional Bureaus for Labor and Social Affairs (BoLSA) were participants and presenters and also a Sen. Police officer from the anti-trafficking unit.

The conference brought these different stakeholders to deliberate on the support and interaction completed by each actor to alleviate the plight of the expelled returnees.

In his remarks to the 50 plus delegates, His Excellency Solomon Tesfaye outlined that a new law on migration is under final preparation and will soon come into effect. He encouraged the NGO sector to get involved in converting the attitude of would-be returnees—who often see migration as the only-way to develop themselves—to seek opportunities in Ethiopia. Speakers from NGOs highlighted that the sector is already involved through training, skills development among others and the vast work being done by the sector has been in **prevention**, through enabling Ethiopians' to earn a living here at home.

Aida Awel from ILO who at the same time represented the ILO office for Ethiopia and Somalia pointed out that a large nationwide needs assessment survey has been conducted on returnees and shows the direction which the returnees want to pursue. Financial support and consistent coaching are measures required by the returnees as the survey conducted by ILO shows. The needs assessment survey has also shown that "...not less than 50% plan to re-migrate again despite their past experience" as the lead consultant for the assessment Ato Sileshi Temesgen pointed out. The ILO has plans to launch a large program funded by the European Union to rehabilitate and reintegrate returnees.

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Source: IOM

In his remarks as the main organizer and host of the conference Kiflemariam Gebrewold/CCRDA said that the core idea of the conference was to highlight the achievements made by humanitarian and development organizations ever since the returnees

were expelled from Saudi Arabia, forge reliable networking for the future and let the returnees speak for themselves. The BoLSA representative from *Amhara Region* explained that almost 65000 of the returnees were from region 3 and that a major training program is underway to absorb and enable the returnees a new life.

Tamrat Abraham from IOM gave an overview of the immediate response spearheaded by his office, which was carried out with various actors and included among others provision of shelter and means of transportation.

A returnee Mulu Temesgen said to the participants that there needs to be viable support for returnees from government and NGOs alike, in order to assist them in reintegrating in society and work and that this may take time. The horror they have gone through is unimaginable.

Tsigie Haile from Organization for Women in Self Employment which has almost two decades of experience in enabling women to be self-reliant, made the point "...that returnees and other groups, are ultimately themselves responsible for reorganizing their lives..." This means that the humanitarian sector can only be a support framework in enabling marginalized groups to come out from poverty or in this case to reintegrate back in Ethiopia after the exodus from Saudi Arabia. Ato Abera from the NGO AGAR, shed light on the sick and traumatized returnees who need a special support package.

Yoshua Friedmann from Danish Refugee Council DRC expressed the wish of his organization to work with all stakeholders in a cooperative way in order to support the returnees and this can only be achieved if working conditions for humanitarian organizations are improved in terms of working rules and procedures amongst other things. Ultimately, he said...*we are here to help, if and when needed...*"

Ayalnech Tegen a returnee who had spent some three years in Saudi Arabia and moved back to Ethiopia some years back in a regular manner, stated unequivocally that living and earning in Ethiopia is not only possible but doable. Her own case demonstrates how she started in the Lafto sub-city area a small road-side kitchen to supply meals for construction workers. Today she owns two restaurants and can support herself and a dozen of employees.

Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Associations (CCRDA) —

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The conference concluded with a *Statement of Intent* which commits the participants to work closely together and highlights key areas of analysis, action and aspired achievements for the near future.

The conference proceedings will be distributed in January 2015 after Ethiopian Christmas.

N.B. Media outlets, not present at the conference have reported about the conference.

This is to remind the general public and the participants of the conference, that only authorized press releases and/or media organizations who were present at the conference have legitimacy to report about the event. All other media reports quoting conference speakers, participants are unauthorized.

Fact Sheet:

- **invited** 61, attended 53 plus
- **Composition** of attendees - United Nations, bilateral donors, CSOs, press, several returnees, FDRE & BoLSA, academics
- **Range** of presentations:
 - a. research findings from major ILO returnees needs assessment survey,
 - b. living witnesses speech/statements of returnees,
 - c. BoLSAs on the ground situation reports from different regions,
 - d. Launch of new rehabilitation and reintegration program by ILO,
 - e. key IOM interventions as immediate and mid-term response for the returnees,
- **Output:** *Statement of Intent* with 11 key points for adherence while working with returnees
- **Partnership/support:** *Civil Society Support Program, UN-International Labor Organization, UN-International Migration Office, Danish Refugee Council, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung & CCRDA*

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