

# **In the Name of Allah the Merciful the Compassionate**

Network of Ethiopian Muslims in Europe

Annual Conference

02-04 April 2010

## **Public Statement**



The Network of Ethiopian Muslims in Europe (NEME) has successfully conducted its second Annual Conference from April 2 – 4, 2010 in Brussels, Belgium. The second annual conference, organized under a leading slogan “with challenges come opportunities”, deliberated on the internal and external challenges of the organization and the Umma at large. Muslim community organizations used the forum to introduce their communities to the bigger audience and exchange experience.

One of the unique remarkable features of the conference was the special plenary session that deliberated on the Negashi Model of Interfaith Understanding. Dr. Idris Mohammed of Addis Ababa University gave an elaborated presentation on “The Story of a Muslim Prophet and a Christian King: A Promising Model for Inter-Faith Relationship and Cultural Understanding”. The plenary session has been one of such event that created interaction beyond Ethiopians and Muslims themselves. Panelists Prof. Sami Zamni of Ghent University (Belgium) and Prof. Ahmed Moen of Howard University (USA) each emphasized on the value of having such a model at a time and in a world where misunderstanding and suspicion command actions. Representatives from the Sudan and Somalian Communities in Belgium acknowledged the value the cordial relationship that existed between the Prophet of Islam (saw) and the Negashi (ra) have in promoting peace, understanding and cooperation in the horn of Africa and far beyond.

In a speech made at the end of the session, the Ambassador of Ethiopia to Belgium and the EU, Ato Berihane Gebre-Christos, appreciated the overall objectives of the conference, acknowledged our distorted history and called upon the Muslim community to engage in action to further address the Muslim's issues in a secular system. A representative of the Ethiopian Community in Belgium made an encouraging remark and told the participants that the Hijra to Ethiopia is a history that all Ethiopians – Muslims, Christians and others – should be proud of and thus be promoted by each both in their own way as well as in a joint action.

The exhibition that portrayed the **“forgotten legacies of Ethiopia”** gave color and test to the conference. The various posters and pictures depicted the reach and magnificent historical, cultural and religious assets of Ethiopian Muslims.

The Network's leadership and representatives of the different communities conducted a round-table discussion with Ambassador Berhane. During this open and very cordial discussion, issues as the plight of Axum Muslims, the case of Muslim students', the Muslim institute, the Majlis, and the role of the Diaspora Muslim organizations were emphasized.

It has been the aspiration of NEME to serve the Muslim communities in various European countries as an umbrella organization and as their bridge for communication and cooperation. An intensive action that lasted for several months enabled the Network to enlist Muslim Communities in five European countries as its members. Despite the process was sealed when member organizations worked through the Network's constitution and adopted it as their binding guide, the second Annual Conference served as a forum to directly implement its articles. Member organizations assumed ownership of the organization. After listening to the reporting of the leadership and the auditing board, members decided to inject stimulus to the organization by replenishing the leadership with new members of their own choice. Accordingly the seven member leadership of the network shall consist of one member from each of the five member countries and two members from the outgoing Executive Committee. Brother Abiye Yassin Ibrahim from Belgium (President), Sister Asma Kedir from Norway (Secretary), Br. Salahudin Ali from Sweden (Treasurer), Br. Seid Mohammed from Holland and Br. Mohammed Ali

from Switzerland (members) were brought in to serve in the Executive Committee. Brother Mohammed Hassen and Br. Seifulislam Mohammed were retained from the outgoing Executive Committee to serve as members of the new leadership. The new leadership is mandated to serve for one year during which time a new election shall be conducted.

The participants benefited immensely from the wisdom and in-depth knowledge of Ustaz Hayder Ali, Dr. Idris Mohammed and Ustaz Nebiyu Ayalew. Ustaz Nebiyu reminded participants of the Muslim personality – the relationship of one with his Lord, with himself, with his family, his neighbors and the bigger community including plants and animals around him. His lecture subdued the minds and hearts of the audience and forced them to examine their inner feelings and thoughts and their day to day actions.

The second annual conference has been one such event that revealed the weakness of the Diaspora Muslim communities. Leading personalities invited for the event were unable to join the conference. They were either refused travel visa or could not get it on time. The new leadership has picked up this issue and promised to take action that would fill the gap.

The conference has been an important lesson for future conferences. There was a serious gap between the network and the host community and the responsibility each of them are accountable for was not clear. Some logistical problems and problems related to keeping up with the announced program and in strictly enforcing the time allocated for each activity were noted. There was difficulty in controlling anonymous participants and a failing was observed in registration and in securing participation fees. All these and others were lessons learnt and upon which the new leadership and the next host need to work on.

The other issue of prime attention for the coming year will be making the network a functioning institute where smooth communication with member communities and effectuality and efficiency will be central themes. Strengthening member communities and bringing those which are not yet members under its fold will be another area of its engagement.

The conference echoed further on the need for strengthening unity and cooperation among Muslims themselves and understanding with the non-

Muslims. In this respect the network will work by its own and in joint action with other sisterly Muslim organizations in creating a forum for our learned Ulema's, the pillars of our unity. The Network calls up on Muslim organizations and individuals to join hands and work together for the good of ourselves and the Umma at large.

Luqman Ethiopian-Belgian Muslims Association hosted the second annual conference. The Network of Ethiopian Muslims in Europe is grateful for the Association's and its member's unique hospitality and devotion to make the event colorful and of great success. We also extend our thanks and appreciation for all the participants who travelled for several hours with their family including little children.

Insha Allah the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference will be hosted by Swedin's Ethiopian Muslims (Sveriges Etiopiska Muslimer, SEM), Stockholm, Sweden. We pray for Allah's blessing so that we meet again in Stockholm next year, Insha Allah.

Network of Ethiopian Muslims in Europe

April 04, 2010

Brussels – Belgium