

# Minutes from March 18, 2018 Diaspora Conference Call

The chairman of the Diaspora-branch committee opened the meeting @11:30AM Eastern Time. He welcomed the participants and thanked them for their commitment to help IDA, bet it financially and or morally. Over 40 participants attended the call from four continents, but majority were from North America. The call lasted about four and half hours and great ideas and suggestions were exchanged.

The Chairman immediately dove into introducing the new committee members that has been at work since July 2017. Individual committee member names accompanied with specific responsibilities and tasks were readout. In addition to doing committee related business as usual, the introduction made it clear that each member had multiple duties that she/he leads in collaboration with other committee members, with IDA members, and Irob community at large. The chairman stated that the meeting had three focus areas; to assess the activities since July 2017, planned initiatives for 2018, and progress update by the board members from Ethiopia. And finally, there was a Q&A session. Here are the details:

## **Introduction: - Committee Activities**

- A lot of activities have been accomplished since the election of the new committee on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 and a lot more to go. The committee met regularly, (on a weekly basis for months at times) to discuss how we can mobilize Diaspora Irobs and serve as catalysts to help strengthen IDA. Our focus has been collecting membership fees, collecting pledges, adding new members, assigning roles and responsibilities of the committee members, designing the framework/roadmap for 2018 initiatives, and sharing ideas on the roles Diaspora committee can play to motivate Irobs back home and around the world, under one umbrella of Irob Development Association (IDA).
- **Committees' roles and responsibilities** – We work collaboratively as a team, but each committee member has roles and responsibilities that she/he coordinates.
  - ❖ Haile Berhe is our public relations officer and helps with Fund-raising efforts
  - ❖ Feseha Kahssay is our treasurer
  - ❖ Abraha Sebhat coordinates the fund-raising initiatives
  - ❖ Tesfay Desta, Alema Giday, Fisuh Hagos and Gaim Medhin have taken the initiative to assure IDA obtains legal NGO status in UK and organize Irobs under IDA across Europe
  - ❖ Girmay Tesfay leads IDA initiatives in Canada
  - ❖ Abeba Fesuh partners with and helps the treasure and fund-raising efforts
  - ❖ Hagos W/Giorgis – is the chairman and leads the effort to mobilize our 2nd generation young Irobs
  - ❖ Alema G has an additional responsibility of vice-chairmanship
  - ❖ Hagos Gebrai serves as secretary and coordinates with mobilization efforts of the diaspora-born Irob young adults.
  - ❖ Tesfay, Abraha, and Hagos G partner and serve as communication channel/liaison between Diaspora committee and IDA board back home

And again, teamwork was stressed as many of the committee members' activities do overlap. The task division ensures that each of us is accountable for all the IDA's initiatives and goals. We work together as hand and glove, and we succeed together. We also realize our greatest assets are our members and intend to inquire continues help from our members. It is action that counts, and one step forward is a success accomplished.

## Finances - Inception to date (ITD) Financial Activity Report

- A summary of the financial report was next on the agenda. The audience was informed that the Internal Audit work was in progress to review financial management and the overall governance process of the Diaspora branch. This audit should be completed within the next few months and covers the last four years' activities. Internal audit will be performed annually on go forward basis. Diaspora branch's auditor is Tesfay W Kumenit, who has been an active IDA member since its inception in 2014.
  - **Financial detail:** Since our last assembly call on May 7, 2017, decent size of funds was transferred to the IDA's main account in Adigrat, Ethiopia.
    - \$30,000 (USD) from USA
    - \$15,000 (CAD) from Canada
    - £1,900 (British-Pound) from UK

That is equivalent to one million and 54 thousand (1,054K) Ethiopian-Birr. As reported previously, the diaspora branch had also transferred 290k Birr i.e. (\$7,520 from USA, \$2,100 from EU, and \$1,500 from UK). That brings the ITD funds transferred to IDA bank in Adigrat to **1,344K Ethiopian Birr**, which approximates to \$55,518 in US Dollars.

- **Expenses – ITD expenses since 2014**
  - \$1,257.50 = ID website
  - \$1,279.36 = Receipt books, fliers/business cards
  - \$400.00 = IRS, Tax exempt application
  - \$390.00 = Bank fees**Total \$2,949.66**
- **Cash on hand:**
  - USA = \$23,664.40
  - CA = \$1,545.63
  - UK = \$1,394.30
  - EU = \$3,230.00**Total: \$29,834.33**

When accounted for monies transferred to Ethiopia, expenses paid, and cash on hand; IDA diaspora branch has collected equivalent to **\$88k** in US Dollars during the last four years. Considering its small number of active members, this is significant accomplishment, but there are plenty of opportunities to take the fund-raising effort to the next level.

**Membership:** We continue to strive to retain active members and add new ones. There are some challenges to overcome, some economical and some that could be related to lack of clear understanding of IDA's objectives. Nonetheless, our membership stays steady hovering to upper 60s and lower 70s year over year. For year ending 2017, our members stood at seventy-one; vast majority of these are recurring members. Only paying members for a fiscal year are considered active.

- ❖ Europe = 8
  - ❖ Canada = 9
  - ❖ USA = 54
- Total = 71**

The membership goal for 2018 is aggressive and budgeted to reach a 100-membership mark. We are counting on each of the current members to renew their membership and the initiatives taking place in Europe. We have

already identified new members that will help us top 60 counts in USA and reach mid-teens in Canada. That is promising! The chairman also put forward a direct challenge to all non-member attendees to become a member, and current members not only to renew our membership but also strive to bring at least one new member or a donor. A “We can do” attitude was at play.

- ❖ **Pledge status** – As many of us know, IDA’s current priority goal is to ensure the successful completion of the STVET-APICC project under-construction in KalaAsa, Irob district. To help make this project and other IDA objectives a reality, 81 of Diaspora Irobs had pledged \$36k during the month of January 2017. We are happy to report 89% or \$32k of that total has been collected. We are following with the few individuals with outstanding balance. Here is a summary that tracks the pledge collection status.

	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	
Country	Pledges Still Pending	Pledges Collected	Total	Collection Rate
Belgium	\$100	\$100	\$200	50%
Canada	\$500	\$2,040	\$2,540	80%
Denmark		\$2,100	\$2,100	100%
Sweden	\$1,550		\$1,550	0%
UK		\$500	\$500	100%
USA	\$1,600	\$27,200	\$28,800	94%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,750</b>	<b>\$31,840</b>	<b>\$35,590</b>	<b>89%</b>

- ✚ It was noted on the call a benefactor from the USA has recently donated **\$10,000**, i.e. equivalent to 300,000 Birr, for the STVET project. This money is already wired and deposited into the IDA main account in Adigrat. This contribution is not part of the financial report detailed above. The name/s of the donor will be announced soon with their permission.

**A message with progress update from IDA back home:**

It was then time to open the stage for the IDA’s chairperson from back-home in Ethiopia. Ato Hawku Reda, the current chairman of ID’s executive body had updated the attendees with the up-to-date STVET-APICC project status as well as the newly added Limestone/Gemstone mining factory. He stated that the project has multiple phases. As reported by Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation (EBC) recently the whole project composed of the three phases will cost about 500M Ethiopian Birr.

STVET is part of Phase I and it is expected to be completed this year and to become fully operational by upcoming Ethiopian school year and the rest will follow suite. As each of the Phase completes, a formal communication with financial report will be shared with public. And as stated, Phase I has 36 class-rooms that are about ready to be completed. The construction of cafeteria and dormitory rooms are underway as well. Phase I building will have G+1 and G+2. Side-walks and borehole drill work are underway, and it is expected that the roofing to be installed soon. METEC is to install the necessary machineries to ensure STVET is fully operational at completion. If the plans go accordingly, STVET is expected to enroll over 150 trainees during the 2011 Ethiopian-school year. Eventually, it is expected to train and graduate up to 300 skilled workers on annual basis.

He also touched on other activities and upcoming projects, such as a plan to build a public Hall in Adigrat and initial discussions taking place to open “Sume-Park” in Irob. The anticipated Hall in Adigrat would have the

potential to generate income, intended to be self-sufficient, and will serve as a community center. Sume Park will be a great way to reverse the deforestation and could be an opportunity to generate income from visitors. Ato Hawku also briefed the attendees on the initiatives taking place to organize Irobs under IDA's umbrella in Irob district as well as other cities of the country. He stated that it was due to such initiatives that "Bahli-Irob, and Student Associations" were made to be organized under the umbrella of IDA.

To encourage education, IDA continues to provide monetary award to 60 students (grade 5-12) and top 10 best teachers. There are a lot of work to be done in education sector as the dropout in Irob are one of the highest, if not the highest, in the country. Reading materials, reference books, and other sporting activities that could attract our young to education are non-existent at schools in Irob. All high schools lack the basics such as science laboratory or reading rooms, for example.

The STVET project is intended to help the dropouts, the farmers, and others to gain needed vocational/technical skills necessary for success. It will also contribute in hindering youth exodus. He has answered and explained in detail several questions/concerns from the audience about IDA's priorities. Inquiries included but not limited to IDA's roles in areas such as: the attempts being made to motivate Irob young to stay in school, to raise awareness and curb illegal immigration and a mindset of self-help, board's role to in drafting new projects mobilize Irobs across Ethiopian cities, and its collaboration with the district administration so that Irob people's needs are given the necessary attention and are addressed. His responses were detailed and the audience seemed to be satisfied. "Let us coordinate our efforts and focus on issues that serve and contribute to our peoples' betterment", was his main message. IDA is not perfect and that is not its intention. We have challenges and will continue to do so. We will learn and amend any mistakes as IDA continues to progress and incorporate feedbacks from its members and others. IDA's current priorities and approach may not make everyone happy but that is the nature of any organization. At the end of the day, IDA's objectives can and will unite all Irobs across the globe.

Ato Hawku also mentioned that local authorities had performed a "surprise audit" by making unannounced visit to IDA's main office recently. The examiners were pleased when they reviewed IDA's documentation and interviewed several stakeholders including some committee members and Irob district administrators. This should give us an assurance that IDA has clean and transparent framework, free of corruption, ensures that it follows local laws and requirements, and its objectives are meaningful and contemporary.

Ato Hawku stated that the board is getting ready for the upcoming 5<sup>th</sup> assembly which will take place in Adigrat. External audit work is in progress and should be completed soon. New board members are expected to be elected at the 5<sup>th</sup> assembly.

After about 2 hours stay on the call, it was time for him to leave and the attendees extended their appreciation of Ato Hawku's and other board members' hard work. When Irobs work together, bigger things are accomplished and IDA's objectives will be fulfilled; let us work on strengthening IDA both at home and abroad. These were the mottos of the participants.

### **2018 Initiatives:**

The chairman took over the podium after our farewells to Ato Hawku and walked the participants through the upcoming initiatives of the Diaspora branch. We believe unwavering commitment of all Irobs and especially that of its members' is key to successfully accomplish IDA's objectives. Irobs, young and adult, with diverse professional and technical expertise should contribute on wellbeing of our people. Giving back to the ones own community is the most rewarding gift we should all strive for. The main roles of committee members are to collaborate, coordinate, partner, serve as a catalyst, advocate on behalf of our people, inform the public about the dire issues our people are facing, design plans, and to lead; but success of IDA's objectives, like any organization, is dependent on its members.

That in mind, we have decided to focus on the following initiatives for 2018; and as you know some or all of these initiatives are continuation from previous years, so you might have heard them before. We believe these are the core values that strengthen IDA, they can be expanded and or modified but will continue to be part of our annual goals. As always, we count on our IDA members to take our development association to the next level; to ensure IDA's objectives are accomplished, that it continues to be transparent and be servant of our people, sharing ideas, forwarding constructive criticism, and being part of solution are the key.

**Membership drive** - we understand this is voluntary service. As stated, our intention is to ensure we retain the existing members by providing transparency, timely status report, and ensuring their money is spent as intended. We will continue to inform and educate non-members about IDA's objectives, incorporate their concerns and suggestions when appropriate, and in mean time encourage them to become contributing IDA members and join the train. Becoming IDA member is of course on volunteer basis and it is open for all Irobs and friends regardless of political views or religious affiliation. IDA is an NGO and it does not entertain politics.

**Fundraising activities** – Current priority project is the vocational training center and agro-processing project under construction. The project was recently expanded to include limestone/gemstone mining factory. IDA shares the cost with the other stakeholders. There are also other areas that require our attention and must be addressed, hence, the need to raise funds is imperative. Our schools and clinics lack the necessary supplies and the roads are so bad the death tolls from preventable car accidents continue to rise for example. The exodus of youth migration is another area that requires urgent focus. Knowledge sharing so that our young are informed and make conscious life decisions; and ensuring our heritages such as our culture and language are preserved are few to mention. To address these and many other issues is why raising funds is imperative.

- ✚ Armed with purpose, courage, can-do attitude, coupled with encouraging progresses of IDA's activities, DC metropolitan residents in the USA have volunteered to take a shot on potential 2018 fund-raising event. The team from DC is to work with "fund-raising" committee members and assess the potentials on how to make the fund-raising gala a reality. Timing, cost, potential revenue, and man-power will be part of the considerations in decision making. There was diversity of opinions as to the main purpose of the get-together. Some stated that the event should generate substantial income while others believed that yes net revenue should be one of the goals but also other considerations such as getting to know each other and the potential that this could bring the community together, should also be considered as part of the benefits. This kind of public events also will serve as an experience and will put us on the map, therefore, generating income, though important, but should not deter us from putting together a fund-raising event, they would say. Either way, we will know more details on this matter by May 2018.

There were also other potential techniques and mechanisms discussed that we can deploy to raise funds. All of them require active participation and dedication from our members. Irobs with technical expertise and background with NGO fund-raising mechanisms by way of submitting project proposals are expected to play a leading role. Here are some of the methodologies mentioned to help raise funds that would benefit our people.

- ❖ **Membership fees** – attracting and increasing the number of dedicated members helps the organization with recurring revenue. Looking for flexibility to adjust membership fees for students and unemployed so that they become contributing members was also entertained.
- ❖ **Annual get-together (detailed above)**- With your help and suggestions, we can decide a place and the timing for Diaspora Irobs to get-together and have fund-raising gala. This is similar to what other development/alumni associations from our region do on an annual basis. In addition to raising funds, it also helps us to meet and to get to know each other.

- ❖ **Teleconference** - this is similar methodology that we had used at the beginning of 2017. It is low cost and effective but limits majority of our efforts to current members.
- ❖ **Submitting projects** and applying for funds from other humanitarian foundations or corporations. We know this requires some expertise and we ask these of you with experience and background to help us.
- ❖ **Sharing IDA's objectives** with our friends, our employers, business owners, etc and ask them to donate

**Legalize and Establish Non-Profit status of IDA branch in UK.** UK team has made great progress to assure this is accomplished in 2018 but still in its initial stage.

- ❖ **Organizing Irobs in Europe-** The focus is mainly Germany, Sweden, Belgium and UK as majority of Irobs tend to reside in these countries. The European team of our committee (Alema, Tesfay, Fisuh, and Gaim) are working hard to mobilize Irobs in these countries by sharing IDA's objectives and the overall benefits of getting organized as a community. Gaining active members in Europe, though encouraging, but has been a challenge so far.

**Mobilizing Diaspora young Irobs** - We believe our young will be the key for IDA's success. They will be its future leaders and contributors at large. We, therefore, intend to start educating our young about IDA's objectives, encourage them to organize themselves, and come up with their own ideas on how to help our people back home. Parents will of course play a vital role to ensure success. There are about 40 second-generation Diaspora young-adult Irobs who are over 18 years old, and many with advanced degrees under their belt. We believe these young adults are invaluable asset to IDA. We are at the initial stage, but the work has begun. It was encouraging to see them exited and their willingness to learn about their heritage and readiness to help. With their infinite creativity, we will never know what these brilliant souls can accomplish until we put them into test. We intend to find ways to unleash their full potential.

**Creating sub-local committee** – at a country level in Europe (UK, German, Sweden for example), and in the cities with larger population in the States, it is in our plans to have local chapter committee members. This approach helps to effectively organize Irobs and friends and encourages members to own some responsibilities and coordinate local fund-raising efforts. We currently have similar set-up in Canada.

**Canada Team:** Hats off to team Canada! Although few in numbers, IDA members in Alberta, Canada had organized a public fund-raising gala on August 5, 2017. The event grossed \$13k CAD. These brave brothers and sisters became exemplary for the rest of us, Diaspora Irobs. The event also live-streamed on FB. They have proven that with courage, determination, will power, and armed with purpose, we can push ourselves out of the comfort-zone and can accomplish big things. As Girmay, IDA's Canada representative put it, the main lesson from that event was that when there is courage, dedication, and pride, to stand for a good cause of Irob people, we will have the support of our brothers and sisters both from Ethiopian and Eritrean communities. That was what the Canada team witnessed during the event. Although it took a lot of hard work, the event was a success relative to the initial expectations. The guests at the events were diverse and seeing our Tigraean brothers and sisters and neighboring Eritreans at the event was encouraging and uplifting.

The conference call on 3/18/2018, last five (5) hours and was very productive. It was evident that Irobs came prepared to share constructive ideas, excitements, and personal feelings. There were suggestions that such meetings should take place every six months. If possible, separate conference calls for North America and Europe should take place every quarter in addition to the semi-annual call that includes all Diaspora Irobs. Committee is to discuss the technicality and see if this is in fact doable.

The chairman delivered closing remarks, reiterating the responsibility of everyone, not just IDA members, to make IDA's objectives a reality; reaffirming the suggestions and feedback from participants, reassuring that IDA is open for anyone interested, and that the upcoming year looks promising. He thanked the attendees for their dedication, patience, and continuous help.

**The conference call was started and concluded with prayers by the clergies who had participated the meeting.**

-End-

IDA-Diaspora Committee