

## A moment of Silence for a Solemn Sacrifice



The anticipation was palpable. The audience, in character, had high expectations. If you were in attendance this past Sunday June 7, 2009, at the public meeting hosted by Andinet-Atlanta, you would undoubtedly agree that the guests did not disappoint. The guests, of course, were none other than the current chair of Andinet-North America Association of Support Organizations, Ato Aklog Limeneh, and the well-known Professor from California, Prof. Alemayehu Gebremariam. The occasion, the four year anniversary of the bloody crackdown following the 2005 elections, demanded no less distinguished guests.

The moderator, Ato Getachew Legesse, kicked off the event by welcoming the attendees and introducing Ato Aklog and Prof. Alemayehu. Following the introductions, Ato Dawit Kebede lead everyone in a moment of silence by reading a poem that honored Ethiopians killed in the aftermath of the 2005 elections and those that even now continue to endure torture and other abuses in the hands of the Ethiopian government. The poem recounted the solemn sacrifices paid by leaders and activists alike and the continuing struggle to keep the light of liberty lit in all corners of Ethiopia.



**Ato Getachew Legesse**



**Ato Dawit Kebede**

Ato Girmaye Gizaw, chair of Andinet-Atlanta Support Group, started the day's discussion by reminding everyone that June 7 will always be remembered as the day Ethiopians with one voice chose Democracy over dictatorship and the rule of law over tyranny. It was on this day in 2005, the current regime in Ethiopia stole the elections, murdered innocent civilians on the streets of Addis, and embarked on the path of open extrajudicial killings and sweeping arrests. Ato Girmaye concluded his remarks by pleading with everyone to actively engage themselves for the good of the people of Ethiopia.



**Ato Girmaye Gizaw**



**Ato Aklog Limeneh**

Ato Aklog Limeneh, the young and dynamic leader of Andinet North America Association of Support Organizations, chose to focus his remarks on three important themes: crystallizing Andinet's goals and their measurements, identifying priorities and focus areas, and finally, underscoring the importance of moral and effective leadership to achieving these goals. Ato Aklog repeatedly stressed the value of assessing Andinet's organizational weaknesses and correcting them.

In addition, Ato Aklog spoke at length about the plight of Birtukan Mideksa. He detailed her illegal imprisonment, the deplorable conditions of her incarceration, her solitary confinement and isolation, as well as the refusal by the government to respect her rights of visitation by family and friends. According to Ato Aklog, Birtukan symbolizes and broadly represents the diverse people of Ethiopia and the intolerable conditions in which they endure. As a young single mother and a leader of an all-inclusive political party, Birtukan has electrified the public for unparalleled political change. Ato Aklog concluded by highlighting the importance of Birtukan Mideksa for the continuing struggle for freedom and democracy in Ethiopia.



Picking up where Ato Aklog left off, the keynote speaker, Prof. Alemayehu Gebremariam, spoke on the current situation in Ethiopia and the responsibility each Ethiopian has to his country and fellow brothers and sisters. Using his own personal experience as a guide, Professor Alemayehu Gebremariam reflected on how the 2005 elections completely transformed him from an interested observer in to a fierce and vocal defender of democracy in Ethiopia. He noted that each and every one of us need to go through a personal transformation, much like the one he had underwent, in order to make real change in the Ethiopian political landscape. He stressed the importance of having fierce and uncompromising conviction in one's vision and purpose. He brought the audience members to their feet with applause when he expressed his own complete faith and belief that Ethiopia's best days are yet to come.

In the one-hour long and sometimes contentious question and answer session that followed, the audience quizzed the speakers on various issues including the activities of the current Andinet leadership, sought more information on securing Birtukan Mideksa's release, and raised concerns surrounding the formation of Medrek with other opposition parties and former EPRDF officials.

Finally, Ato Girmaye Gizaw, on behalf of Andinet-Atlanta and in appreciation of their extraordinary work, gave an award for distinguished public service and leadership to both Ato Aklog Limeneh and Prof. Alemayehu Gebremariam.



**Prof. Alemayehu Gebremariam**

