Dedication and Inauguration of the Segenat Children and Youth Library a Success

Over 400 men, women, and children attended the inauguration and dedication of the Segenat Children and Youth Library. Among the noted dignitaries were Rwandan Ambassador to Ethiopia, Professor Joseph Nsengimana; Ato Abraha Kiros, Special Education Advisor to the President of the Regional Government of Tigray; Dr. Solomon Inqui, retired statesman and author; and Ato Teklawoyni from the office of the City of Mekelle Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis, Founder and Executive Director of Ethiopia Reads/ Ethiopian Books for Children and Educational Foundation, welcomed each of the distinguished guests who in turn had an opportunity to congratulate Ato Yohannes on the magnificence of the Segenat Library and its importance to the future of the children of Ethiopia. In welcoming Ambassador Nsengimana, Ato Yohannes stated, “Your presence with us is a testament to the friendship of the peoples of Rwanda and Ethiopia.”

Ato Yohannes also announced that Dr. Solomon Inqui has been named the patron of the Segenat library for all of his past work in government and education. He will be an outstanding role model for all of the children who utilize the library. He has been a frequent visitor of the library for the past few weeks, donating books in Tigrigna and also introducing distinguished visitors to the library.

Two young girls and frequent library visitors, Lula Gebreselassie and Regat Yohannes, took turns reading Ato Yohannes’ latest children’s book, “Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda: An Ethiopian Girl’s Festival” aloud to a welcoming audience. The book was distributed free to audience members during the celebration.

Ato Yohannes concluded by stating, “Please send your children here. Tell friends and family about the wonders of this library. Become worthy ambassadors for the Segenat Children and Youth Library. The future of our children is at stake. As our children succeed, so succeed Tigray and all of Ethiopia.”

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Many activities occurred during the First Children’s Book Week held in Tigray during the week of August 22 through August 28. Hundreds of colorful posters were proudly displayed in local businesses throughout the city of Mekelle and beyond announcing the weeklong celebration.

A panel discussion, “Tigray Reads! Tigray Blooms! Creating a Culture of Reading in Tigray” was held prior to the book week. Several thousand copies of “Tirhas Celebrates Ashenda: An Ethiopian Girl’s Holiday,” written by Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis, Founder of the Tigray Library and Literacy Development Project, were distributed free to the Ashenda Girls groups that celebrated the Ashenda Festival.

The highlight of the week was the dedication of the Segenat Children and Youth Library, a free-standing children’s library for the children and youth of the City of Mekelle.

Panel Discussion on Publishing and Literacy Kicks off Children’s Book Week.

A lineup of librarians and educators came together on Friday, August 20th to discuss children’s literature in Tigray. The panel organized by Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis, Founder of the Tigray Library and Literacy Development Project, and moderated by Goitom Tegegn was held as part of the Tigray Libraries and Literacy Development Project and was held prior to the opening of the Tigray Children’s Book Week.

The panel presentation served as an opportunity for members of the community to be heard as well as to receive information. A common theme among the presenters and the audience, over 100 in attendance, was the importance of literature and reading materials in the mother tongue. Presenters and audience members alike shared personal stories of reading experiences that they had in childhood providing anecdotal evidence to prescribed theories. Panelists included: Erin Meyer, University of Denver; Tesfay Mesele, Mekelle University; Maria Briones, Sharjah Higher College of Technology, Dubai, UAE; Berhane Achem, Mekelle University; and Daniel Teklu, Mekelle University.

Ato Yohannes received an outpouring of support for the Segenat Children and Youth Library and for his publishing efforts. It was noted that there are few children’s books in the local languages and few age appropriate books for children to learn the basic concepts of reading.

There were many noted authors in the audience as well as students from Mekelle University. Although the Segenat Children and Youth Library will be focused on the needs of children and youth, it was suggested that writers among the group might be able to avail themselves of the multitude of resources available at the library.

The panel discussion was a great kick off to Tigray Children’s Book Week and panelists and audience members anticipate more follow up discussions in the future.

See photo on pg. 3.
Three days of intensive library training were offered to library assistants at the Segenat Children and Youth Library and to library assistants at Myliham, Debri, and Fre Se-wat elementary schools. The training was provided by volunteers recruited by Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis, Founder and Executive Director of Ethiopia Reads/Ethiopian Books for Children and Educational Foundation.

The trainers included: Ato Tewolde Tesfay, of Mekelle University; Athena Michael, John Wiley & Sons, Publisher; Erin Meyer, University of Denver; Dr. Maria Briones, Sharjah Higher College of Technology, Dubai, UAE; and Janet Lee, Regis University in Denver.

The seventeen library trainees studied the basics of cataloging and classifying books, story telling, puppetry, general library management and providing reader’s services to students. The training experience enhanced the skills that they have obtained from their ongoing work experience. All agreed that the training was beneficial and that they would like additional training in the future.

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Library hours:
Monday through Saturday:
8 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.  
2:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.
The Segenat Children and Youth Library is a modern, full-service library serving the information needs of the children and youth in Mekelle, Tigray Region, Ethiopia and its environs. The 20,000 volume library has a networked computer lab with limited internet access, an online catalog, reference services, and a variety of clubs and other programming. It is open 48 hours per week, Monday through Saturday.


The Dr. Thomas Hooyman Youth Reading Center

Among the more significant features of the Segenat Children and Youth Library is the Dr. Thomas Hooyman Youth Reading Center. Dr. Hooyman, a professor of medical ethics at Regis University in Denver, Colorado challenged his students to think beyond the obvious and to look at issues from differing points of view. It is therefore fitting, that Ato Yohannes Gebregeorgis chose a quote from St. Thomas Aquinas, “Beware the person of just one book,” to characterize Dr. Hooyman’s life.

Ato Yohannes and Dr. Hooyman met nearly two years ago when Dr. Hooyman conducted a radio interview with Ato Yohannes on the Regis University radio station. The two men became fast friends and made plans to build a literacy radio station together in Ethiopia. Tragically, Dr. Hooyman suffered fatal injuries in a motor vehicle accident a little over a week later. Ato Yohannes committed to setting up a library in his memory. Funding was raised and a site was chosen that was befitting of the life that Dr. Hooyman led. This site, the first school library established in Mekelle, Tigray Region, was at Fre Siwot, the Fruit of the Martyrs.

At the time of the dedication of the Dr. Thomas Hooyman Memorial Library and Media Center at Fre Siwot, officials of the City of Mekelle approached Ato Yohannes with the generous offer of a building for a future children and youth library. Ms. Barbara Hooyman Baker, sister of Dr. Hooyman, was in attendance and committed to assist in funding the new library after the outpouring of love and gratitude that everyone received from the community.