

Press Release on the Golden Jubilee of the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 26 August 2017 - A Quest for Cooperation in the Conservation of Nature

On 21 June 1966, a group of keen environmentalists and advocates of sustainable use of natural resources, most of which were expatriates, formed the nucleus for what is to be the first indigenous environmental NGO in Ethiopia - the "Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS)." What started as a social club in 1966 was transformed into a formal Conservation Institution in September 1993.

Back in the early sixties, the environment was in a much better shape. With human and livestock population much less compared to what we have today, competition for resources was not significant. But the Society's founding members were far-sighted even in those days, and came up with the noble idea of nature conservation, to which they should be given due credit. Against all the odds, the Society has been building its capacity so that the dreams of the founding members can be realized. Over the years, commendable achievements have been recorded through the implementation of clearly defined programme areas, namely: Environmental Education, Awareness Raising and Community Outreach, Biodiversity Conservation and Monitoring and Research.

EWNHS is proud to have pioneered a number of activities pertaining to conservation of nature in Ethiopia, such as awareness enhancing of the general public on the need to protect nature, establishing of school nature clubs, publishing of assorted promotional publications, celebration of World Environment Day (WED), conservation of the country's avifauna with special focus on threatened & endemic species, monitoring of aquatic ecosystems, rehabilitation of degraded lands, improvement of livelihoods, to mention just a few.

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Despite efforts over the past five decades, however, wildlife, aquatic resources and quality of ecosystem services have been declining at an alarming rate. Climate change is also taking its toll. Humans are becoming more aggressive as they take more and more land for farming and other uses, thus leaving very little space for other species. The trend is so frightening. We are on a collision course with nature and committing what can be called a collective suicide.

“Environmental conservation is not solely the responsibility of any particular entity”, says Mengistu Wondafrash, the Executive Director of EWNHS. “It is a collective responsibility of Government bodies, conservation non-benefits, development collaborators, the private sector and communities, working hand in hand to harmonize development activities with conservation”. The Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society is thankful of the support it has been given in the past, and would at the same time renew its commitment to conservation, and looks forward to working with all concerned entities.

At this point in time of celebrating the 50th year anniversary of the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS), it would be proper to recognize the contributions of various individuals and institutions. At the outset, we would like to extend our utmost appreciation and sincere thanks to the founding members who have been instrumental for the very survival of the Society. Moreover, we cannot express enough thanks to Mr. Alen E. King who has inspired the idea of establishing a non-state conservation institution in Ethiopia, the current EWNHS. He has also been the chairperson of the Board of Management for many years.

We are hugely grateful and indebted to the past and active Board of Management Members of the Society for investing their own financial resources and sacrificing their precious time on voluntary basis. Underpinned by members, like-minded partners, dedicated employees -

And volunteers, Board Members built the profile of the Society and guided it to the stage where it is now. Nobody has been more important to EWNHS in the pursuit of its objectives and activities than the Board Members, without whose genuine guidance the Society would have not been what it is now.

Protection of environment, conservation of biodiversity and ensuring of improved livelihoods of communities is absolutely the mandate of Government. Civil society organizations are there to assist government and fill gaps. For any civil society organizations, like EWNHS, to be successful on the ground and discharge its responsibility, therefore, the good will of Government and acceptance by communities/beneficiaries is extremely crucial. EWNHS is deeply indebted to the Government in general and the line ministries in particular for their good will, provision of working environment and support. Our deep appreciation goes out also to the local communities/beneficiaries for consenting to our objectives and partnering with us in the field.

We would like to express our deep and sincere gratitude to development partners, without whose financial support and technical backstopping, the existence of the Society for 50 years would not have been realized. They are too many to enumerate here from individuals to trusts & foundations, Embassies to Governments and from International NGOs to International Development Agencies. We gratefully acknowledge the funding kindly granted to us thus far and look forward for future collaborative partnerships.

Finally, yet importantly, we owe a huge debt of appreciation to BirdLife International Secretariat (and its partners) for the support they provide to the Society in terms of fundraising, image building and all-round technical capacity building. A special and profound gratitude goes to NABU, the BirdLife Partner in Germany, for extending institutional

support to EWNHS as non-restricted funds for meeting core activities of the Society. This is an example of north-south collaboration between BirdLife partners.

On the occasion of its Golden Jubilee, the Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society (EWNHS) earnestly requests all its members and partners to join the celebrations. The Anniversary is being celebrated at a time of unprecedented environmental challenges, both nationally and globally and hence there is a high need to work closely together than ever before to maximize our achievements. Let us strengthen our cooperation in conservation of nature, mitigation of climate change and safeguarding of our mother earth.

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