

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Conference participants,

ENKUAN DEHNA METACHEHU! Welcome to the ANSA-Africa Stakeholders Conference. And welcome to Ethiopia.

I am glad and honored to welcome you all to what should be a stimulating and informative conference, which will be dealing with a very important and timely issue – Social Accountability.

Let me thank first of all the ANSA for choosing Ethiopia and organizing this interesting conference and our host, the GTZ-PBS social accountability team for the warmth of their welcome to Addis Ababa - the Africans city.

We, Ethiopians are also honored to host this conference - to host you, the 130 delegates that represent more than 30 African countries, as well as other partnering countries.

I assure you that you have come to a special place – Ethiopia, a place that is celebrating the year of the millennium.

Ethiopia is an important nation in Africa, with a long, rich and respected history and culture. Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia is where the headquarters of the African Union is located, and also the African base of the UN's Economic Commission is based in Africa. As such, all the nations of Africa have Embassies and staff based in Addis. Streets in Addis are also named after 54 African Nations that make up the African Union.

Ethiopia also has a significant religious heritage that includes many Ethiopian Jews, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and Islam. It is clear that Ethiopia is a country of many nationalities that have different backgrounds, language and culture.

As every country on our world may have a peculiar value of its own that makes it different from others, Ethiopia, so also has something that makes it peculiar to other states. That peculiar thing is a unique calendar, which is known as a "Julian." Ethiopia uses a solar calendar, which divides the year into 12 months of 30 days each, the remaining five days (six in a leap year) constituting a short thirteenth month. The Ethiopian New Year commences on September 11 in the Gregorian calendar and ends on the following September 10.

On that basis Ethiopia has been celebrating its third Millennium starting the 11th of September 2007 for one year. So, again you are lucky in coming to Ethiopia during this Ethiopian and African millennium and I welcome you all to enjoy your stay during this wonderful season.

You have also chosen a place where social accountability is on the move. In this regard, I am especially proud about the changing roles that the civil society organizations are playing in Ethiopia today. They have started moving from service delivery to involving in dialogue with government, donors and citizens about service provision and policy issues. They have started dealing with rights issues, good governance and democracy, which are very important roles in enhancing social accountability.

The CSOs role have become very instrumental in scaling up the government's development programs in infrastructure and human resources development, food security, rural-urban economic growth, capacity building, basic service delivery and advocacy. Social accountability tools, such as the Citizens Report Card and participatory budgeting have also started getting roots in Ethiopia.

Social accountability provides greater oversight of public resource management to discourage corruption and clientelism; and accountability is about transforming passive voices to active ones through empowering citizens. Social accountability is also useful in Influencing international and development agenda of notions such as MDGs, UN reforms, Trade Policies that affect Africa. Social accountability again enhances Partnerships for effective resource sharing and advocacy. In that regard, social accountability encourages working together to fight the poverty, disease, ignorance and lack of life-sustaining services which afflict the lives of millions every day.

The Civil society has stepped forward as never before in involving through social accountability, holding governments to account and injecting new dynamism into African societies. This new spirit of empowerment and changing roles of civil society in Africa must find a home in every African country. For that to happen, we need to strengthen the capability of CSOs and community groups by building their capacity, by strengthening such pan-African conferences and partnership, and institutional linkages as well as networking - including creation of regular dialogue and information

exchange forums that would enable us to create a vibrant civil society in Africa.

I am sure that you will find this conference stimulating and instructive as well as a basis for discussing such issues to push social accountability forward in Africa through the active participation of the civil society.

Wishing you a successful conference and fruitful stay in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, once again I welcome you to Ethiopia, Welcome to the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability-Africa Annual Stakeholders Conference.

Thank you very much for your attention!

Eshetu Bekele

Executive Director,

Poverty Action Network of Civil Society Organizations in Ethiopia [PANE]

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