

STATEMENT FOR MEDIA

General Information

**RAS TAFARI: The Majesty & The Movement Exhibit
Press Conference, Held at Radisson Blu Hotel, Addis Ababa on April 30, 2014**

Dates of Exhibit: May 25th to June, 25th, 2014

Venue of Exhibit: National Museum of Ethiopia

Panelists:

1. His Excellency Albert Yankey, Ghana Ambassador to Ethiopia and the African Union;
2. Professor Constaninos, Esteemed Ethiopian Academician and Internationally Renowned Advisor;
3. Ato Bereket Zewde, Museum Expert, Authority of Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), National Museum of Ethiopia;
4. Sister Wolette Mahdin, Rastafari Elder and activist, RTMM Sashamane Rastafari Community liaison;
5. Ato Merid Tafesse, D.Y.M.D.C. Art Director, Ethiopian Contemporary Fine Artist;
6. Dr. Desta Meghoo, D.Y.M.D.C., RTMM coordinator and curator;
7. Leroy Davis, Bright Future School Student and Youth Representative.

History: In 2002 Dr. Desta Meghoo was appointed international advisor to the Smithsonian Institute by the Rastafari Ancient Council of Elders of the Nyahbinghi Order to assist in the development of the Smithsonian's exhibit entitled DISCOVERING RASTAFARI! The exhibit opened November 2007 and ran through 2011 at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History in Washington DC attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors. The opening was unprecedented with hundreds in attendance including representatives from various international Rastafari mansions/organizations, special invited guests and the Diplomatic core in DC including Jamaican ministers and former Ethiopian Ambassador to the USA, H.E. Berhane Gebrekristos.

In 2010 Nana Rita Marley and Dr. Desta Meghoo visited the Smithsonian and discussed the possibility of bringing the exhibit to the Bob Marley Museum in Jamaica in 2014 then to the National Museum of Ethiopia in 2015, where they felt it would be well received. However, due to various reasons including the limited size and scope of the DISCOVERING RASTAFARI exhibit; Dr. Desta Meghoo, thought it best to create an exhibit with a narrative by Rastafari people for Ethiopians and all Africans which included the arduous and parallel journey of Qadamawi Haile Selassie and the Black liberation Movement known by his pre-coronation name, Ras Tafari. This journey included the trials and triumphs from slavery and colonialism to racial and economic injustice - social and cultural development to independence and repatriation. Finally, after consultation with various advisors priority was placed on raising the Pan African consciousness of African youth in particular while dispelling disparaging stereotypes and myths about Rastas and their philosophy as we helped to memorialize the works of Ababa Jonhoi.

The National Museum was booked in 2011 to host the RTMM exhibit May 25th (in commemoration of African Liberation Day) scheduled to close on June 25, 2014. An international advisory board of Pan Africans headed by senior Rastafari artists,

academicians and activists was formed including grandson of Qadamawi Haile Selassie, Crown Prince Zere Yacob Asfa Wossen and his wife Wz/ro Avril Powell, Nana Rita Marley, Artist Ras Danijah Tafari, Nyahbinghi Master drummer Ras Ibo Ashanti, Artist Merid Tafesse and Ras Abye Tillahun amongst others who would contribute to the project voluntarily in the areas of history, research, translations, content acquisition, community outreach, tour facilitation and art design amongst other areas. International working committees were formally established in the UK and Mexico while individuals began contributing content from Ghana, Kenya, the USA, and of course Jamaica. The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism was consulted and immediately an expert from the Ministry was assigned to assist in any way possible including ensuring a landmark exhibit. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ethiopian Embassies worldwide have also been cooperative in facilitating visas and other related support.

Rationale: This landmark exhibit aspires to contextualize and interpret the contributions of Qadamawi Haile Selassie towards Pan Africanism and African liberation at home and abroad, while simultaneously documenting the journey and impact of enslaved African descendants and their struggle to return to their homeland, exemplified by the RasTafari Movement. In 1974, exactly 40 years ago, the Derg, overthrew the government of Ethiopia established millennia ago from the line of Great King David through King Solomon and Queen Saba and their seed Menelik I. This gaping 4 decade vacuum in the history of Ethiopia, denied an entire generation of their predecessors struggles and successes. While false narrative of 'blacks born to be slaves' and dubious discoveries of indigenous peoples remained unacceptable versions of reality to those seeking social and spiritual liberation and hence the Rastafari Movement was seeded in resistance to human injustice. Guided by a profound spiritual compass and genetic memory connecting Africans children long carried away, Rastas would rise up to be the manifestation of morality in the 20th century guided by the teachings and works of Qadamawi Haile Selassie and Back to Africa Prophet Marcus Mosiah Garvey.

Goal: One major goal of the exhibit is to enhance the understanding and relevance of the popular Ras Tafari Movement, with particular focus on African youth, in order to help dispel myths and misunderstandings while increasing constructive dialogue and critical thinking and reflection amongst the media, students and scholars alike. Finally the RasTafari Movement has a great social, cultural and spiritual depth and integrity, yet to be fully explored. RTMM is also a platform to increase culture and tourism and a sense of pride and dignity in an amazing country with a distinct history of working with the African Diaspora from the time of Emperor Menelik II. The RTMM exhibit, therefore is anticipated to attract many visitors both local and international, to view the rare photographs, archived documents, cultural artifacts, apparel and armaments. Various books, documentaries and rare documents will also be available for additional information and research. Panel discussions films, tours and such events will also add value and experiences to RTMM. The exhibit is scheduled to tour Africa from 2015 to 2019 beginning with Ghana. The Embassy of Ghana has been assisting us for the past two years. Upon return to Ethiopia, all content will form the basis of a research center focused on Pan African history, culture and the arts to be located in Addis Ababa, Diplomatic capital of Africa.

Exhibit Team:

Consultant and Coordinator, Dr. Desta Meghoo, is the curator also responsible for

promoting and staging the exhibit. She is best known for organizing Africa Unite, Bob Marley's 60th Birthday as former Managing Director of the Bob Marley Foundation. In March 2013 she was co-curator of Embassy of Portugal's multi-million dollar collection including rare paintings, prints and other valuable art works from the 15th century to contemporary fine Ethiopian art. She recently curated renowned Ethiopian fine artist Desta Hagos' 50th exhibition at the National Museum. Ras Danijah Tafari was previously RTMM Chief Curator from 2011 to March 2014. He is a well established Jamaican born artist and educator who spent most of his adult years in the UK participating in and documenting Rastafari and other Pan African Movements in the UK. Merid Tafesse is Art Director and has created new works for the exhibit as well as making sure the artistic integrity of the exhibit is maintained. A popular fine artist, Merid has traveled to various cities for exhibition and residencies and his art is in various collections of prominent individuals and institutions. Ato Negusi, a senior lecturer at Alle Felege Selam School of Art has helped in developing themes and translation and introducing important people who have amazing stories to share of Qadamawi Haile Selassie. Ras Abye Tillahun, Ethiopian tour consultant, fluent in several languages, has provided advice on important and historic places for visitors and is making arrangements for delegates, helping to ensure the best of Ethiopia is presented in a professional manner to all guests and incoming media. Sister Wolete Mahdin is a well known and respected Rastafari Elder who has been instrumental in many projects in the UK and Ethiopia. She has been active in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Rastafari Movement since the 70's the landmark Centenary celebration of The Majesty's 100th Birthday in 1992 and is now the main liaison and coordinator of the Shashamane Experience, an extremely important component of the RTMM exhibit. Ras Mweya is an artist, traditional historian and has researched and prepared the exhibit for the Shashamane Experience. His research has revealed photos and information which is not widely known about the landgrant will be presented in the Shashamane component of the exhibit. New to the team is D.Y.M.D.C. Intern Zebib Tadiwos who is enjoying learning about the varying aspects of the art industry and though she holds two Masters degrees, she plans to use this experience to help further her studies and work in the area of culture and linguistics in particular. We plan to have Zebib travel to Ghana for the exhibit next year to provide Amharic lessons, an important element of the exhibit, as display panels will be printed in Amharic and English. The RTMM UK Committee has also done an exceptional job in creating the narrative that connects Ethiopia, England and Jamaica. Their component of the exhibition will enrich the dialogue on international relations and the growth and development of the Rastafari Movement. Finally, regrettably the RTMM Mexico Committee could not get support to physically participate but they have sent their panels of information which will show the long and respected relationship between Ethiopia and Mexico from the League of Nations to the historic 1954 visit of Jonhoi to Mexico City.

Content:

The exhibit is divided in 12 distinct categories that address the history, development, impact and influence of The Majesty and the Movement. Various Ethiopian and International advisors and committees from Ethiopia, the UK, Mexico, Jamaica and the USA have been working for over three years to present this dynamic unique exhibit. Moving moments from the re-creation of the slave ship experience to Marcus Garvey's Black Starliner, the euphoria of the Black world at the victory of Adwa and Majesties' coronation will be presented in multi media platforms including photographs, rare paintings, furniture, film and more. Responses of solidarity during the Italian occupation are also included as well as the hardships faced by early Rastas in the mid 20th century

because they claimed Ethiopia as their identity. Contemporary content includes the impact of reggae music through the works of Count Ossie, Bob Marley, Peter Tosh etc. along with fine art and installations portraying original Jamaican Rasta culture compounds called "yards". The impact of Qadamawi Haile Selassie on the development of the OAU and His relationship with African luminaries from Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah to Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta and the helping hand given to South Africa's Nelson Mandela will also be represented. While state visits to Jamaica and African Diaspora communities will also be chronicled; all an important part of the narrative on the development and impact of Qadamawi Haile Selassie and Ethiopia on Pan African discourse and formation of the Ras Tafari Movement.

Related Events: (Please see attached itinerary)

The prestigious University of the West Indies, Faculty of Humanities - Rastafari Studies Unit will facilitate a symposium at the National Museum Auditorium. International films by and about Rastafarians will be screened while simultaneous satellite exhibitions will be hosted in Shashamane and Harar/Ejersa Goro encouraging cultural tourism. A special Nyahbinghi spiritual ceremony will be held at Ababa's Villa in Entoto. The venue is very special in that Qadamawi Haile Selassie would visit his friend and family in this home. www.ababasvilla.com

Opportunities:

The New York Time recently named **RAS TAFARI: The Majesty & The Movement** (RTMM) "...the blockbuster exhibit of 2014." This is just another opportunity to develop and create platforms for the arts that will attract many more youth and local and international tourists.

Sponsors: The Embassy of Ghana through the guidance of HE Albert Yankey, has helped generously by providing historical information and monetary support for printing of promotional materials. The Embassy of Jamaica through Ambassador Norma Taylor-Roberts, also serving as High `commissioner in South Africa, has helped launch the media campaign in Jamaica bringing awareness to millions on the island in the Diaspora. The ARCCCH /National Museum has generously provided access to their never before publicly seen collection of the Emperor's belongings brought to the Museum by the Derg shortly after the coup. The Rita Marley Foundation has provided photos and other materials for the exhibition and will assist in the Ghana leg as the Foundation's headquarters are located in Ghana. Radisson Blu Hotel has generously provided the Press Conference facilities and gratis rooms for the media and special delegates. St. Georges' and Circle of Life Hawassa has provided monetary support to help facilitate the printing of panels, billboards and the exhibit catalogue. While Bright Future Academy is providing students and alum to assist in the grand opening day and with printing and logistics for the Shashamane experience. DYMDC is the main supporter of the Ethiopian exhibition and though this is a non profit effort, they are encouraged by the important duty of preserving, protecting and promoting history to be told by us and for us hence their motto, "*developing Africa through the arts...*" .

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