

Issue No. 17

May 2007

An email newsletter

to facilitate networking and information exchange among CSOs and researchers

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Spotlight



FSS Bulletin

Vol. 5, No. 1 (March 2007)

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FSS Hosts 4th Congress of the Association of African Historians

The Forum for Social Studies, in partnership with Addis Ababa University and the African Union Commission, successfully hosted the 4th Congress of the Association of African Historians on 22-24th May 2007. The three-day Congress was held at the Conference Hall of the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa.

The Congress, which was held under the theme of "Society, State and Identity in African History", was attended by nearly 150 participants consisting of FDRE government officials, AU commissioners, members of the diplomatic corps, representatives of international and regional organizations, FSS donors, CSOs, researchers from within and outside Ethiopia, and other participants.

Prof. Bahru Zewde, Executive Director of FSS, made a welcome speech in which



he highlighted the relevance of the theme to the current context of Africa and the great interest it was able to arouse among historians as attested to by the 170 abstracts that were initially received from across Africa and abroad. He noted the financial challenges encountered in organizing the Congress and expressed his gratitude to the African Union Commission, and especially its Chairman Prof.

Alpha Oumar Konaré, whose enthusiastic and indispensable support eventually made it possible for the Congress to be held in Addis Ababa. He also thanked all the other organizations and individuals who had made various contributions to the success of the Congress.

In his statement, the President of the Association of African Historians, Prof. Doulaye Konate, joined Prof Bahru in welcoming the participants. He pointed



out the significance of the Congress theme by referring to the prevailing image of Africa as a continent of conflict, some degenerating into genocide, which was committed in the name of identity. He said that judging by the titles of the Congress papers and the expertise brought together by the Congress, a comparative approach with a scientific perspective would throw light on the complex issue of identity, whose conception has changed over the ages.

Prof. Konate also paid tribute to some of the great scholars of Africa who recently passed away, such as Prof. Joseph Ki-Zerbo from Burkina Faso, Abu Boahen from Ghana, Dr Fred Anozie from Nigeria, Prof. Archie Mafeje from South Africa, Téréba Togola from Mali, MBaye Gueye and Brahim Diop from Senegal. A minute's silence was held in their memory.

Addressing the Congress in his turn, Prof. Andreas Eshete, President of Addis Ababa University, pointed out that the

status of African history as an academic discipline as well as Africa's status in humanity's reflection on its own past is a matter of concern not just for historians but also for African citizens and communities in and out of the continent. He noted the various shifts and influences in the methodology deployed by historians and expressed his hope that the deliberations at the Congress would help to "sort out the good and ill influences" of the powerful ideas from the West on Africa's historical self-image, a process which he said is necessary "to chart a clear, commanding vision of Africa's future".



In his statement representing the African Union Commission, Prof. Alpha Konaré retraced the itinerary of the AAH from its founding in Dakar in 1972, to the congresses held in Yaounde, then in Bamako and now to its 4th Congress in the historic city of Addis Ababa, on the eve of the "celebration of the new Millennium in this great nation". He welcomed delegates to Addis Ababa, which he assured them was their city, too.

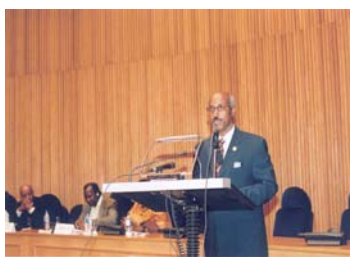
Prof. Konaré recalled the great difference between the OAU and AU, wherein the former was primarily preoccupied with strengthening cooperation and solidarity among the African nations for the liberation of the African continent from colonial subjugation. The African Union, on the other hand, is tasked with enabling the continent to address multiple economic and good governance challenges and creating a new Africa of regional and continental integration.



He underscored the importance of identity in the ongoing debate over the creation of a continental government, the strategy for continental integration. He posed the challenge to historians to reflect on this issue and contribute to the debate at the Summit of the AU next July. He queried what the response of African historians should be to issues of language, multiple identity and cultural unity of Africa. He pointed out the need to redefine our concepts and methodology in the process of the reconstruction of the pan-African conscience.

Prof. Konaré declared that there is no pan-Africanism without a pan-African conscience, without reappropriating our sovereignty; there no is birth of the "the United States of Africa" without a vision of the pan-African nation.

The 4th Congress of was opened by H.E. Ato Seyoum Mesfin, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. In his address, Ato Seyoum declared that the theme "Society, State and



Identity in African History" neatly encapsulates the major issues that Africa is at present grappling with at the highest level of leadership. Referring to the appropriateness of the selection of Ethiopia as the venue for a Congress of historians deliberating on the theme of identity, he said that the country has taken "a bold and innovative approach to deal with the challenges of identity in its various manifestations". He added, "The course of action we took to address the challenge of identity head on was made imperative because the interminable crisis eating away at the foundation of our statehood was rooted in demands and grievances related to identity."

Considering it in light of the Grand Debate on the issue of the Union Government at the AU Summit at the beginning of next July in Accra, Ghana, Ato Seyoum said that the theme of the Congress was not only the most appropriate but also the most timely because "at the most fundamental level, the debate under way within Africa on the viability, and timeliness of the Union Government and related issues involves also a debate on issues in connection with identity, including multiple identities and how it is handled as well as on the nature and functions of African states and societies." The Foreign Minister concluded his address by expressing his hope that the deliberations of the Congress would contribute towards greater clarity on these issues to ensure the success of the project of the African Union.

Later in the day, a documentary film featuring Prof. Joseph Ki-Zerbo and titled «Identities and identity for Africa », produced by the Burkanabe film-maker Dany Kouyaté, was shown to the participants of the Congress. Introducing the film, Prof. Doulaye Konate noted that the year 2006 was marked by a significant event that saddened African historians, namely, the passing away of Prof. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, co-founder and President of the Association from 1975—2001, on 4th November 2006. In the name of Prof Ki-Zerbo's widow and family, Prof. Konate thanked all those who had expressed their solidarity, testimony and condolence on the occasion. In his tribute to the great pan-Africanist historian, Prof. Konate said that Prof. Ki-Zerbo, together with Cheik Anta Diop of Senegal, constituted the two most emblematic figures in the struggle for the decolonisation of African history in the 1950s. He also noted that Prof. Ki-Zerbo had blazed the trail for African historians and other Africanists in the use of oral traditions for the reconstruction of African history.

The 4th Congress saw the largest number of presentation of papers within a space of three days. Altogether 67 papers by young and established scholars drawn from 22 African countries and others from Belgium, France, Italy, Sweden, Turkey, Malaysia and USA were presented at the Congress. The presentations were organised around the following ten sub-themes:

- Heritage and identity
- Colonialism and identity
- The challenge of creating a pan-African identity
- Conceptions of the nation-state and identity
- Identity-based conflicts
- Federalism and devolution

- Migration and acculturation
- Evolving identities
- Lessons of regional integration
- Identity and historiography.

The three sub-themes with the largest number of papers were “Conceptions of the nation-state and identity” (16 papers), “Identity-based conflicts” (12 papers) and “Colonialism and identity” (11 papers), which reflects the level of attention given by the scholars to exploration of issues of identity linking the colonial past, statehood and current conflicts.

Five of the papers dealt with Ethiopia while one dealt with Eritrea.

During the business session, the members of AAH discussed and approved the Executive Committee’s activity report and the newly revised constitution of AAH. Members also held an election in which those members of the Executive Committee who had only served for one term were re-elected. Among these were the President of AAH, Prof. Konate, and the Vice President, Prof. Bahru. Among the new members who joined the Executive Committee were Dr Lily Mafela from Botswana, Dr Jamaâ Baida from Morocco, and Prof. Pontian G. Okoth from Kenya.

The business session was concluded with a Recommendation urging African heads of State to provide support to AAH in the interest of preserving the memory of African history; calling on African historians to get better organised under the umbrella of AAH; thanking CODESRIA for its support to AAH through publication of its journal *Africa Zamani* and calling on the Council to continue with this support.

At the end of the Congress, participants of the Congress were treated to a selective staging of *Taitu*, a historical play by Getnet Enyew, at the Addis Ababa City Hall Theatre.

Scenes from the 4th AAH Congress





Congress participants & invited guests



Members of the newly elected Executive Committee of AAH



Members of the National Organizing Committee of the 4th Congress of AAH

IGTK Public Discussion on Banking in Ethiopia

The Forum for Social Studies organized a public discussion on the development of the banking sector in Ethiopia. The discussion, which was launched under FSS' **Inter-generational Transfer of Knowledge (IGTK)** series, featured a public lecture (in absentia) by the prominent Ethiopian banker, Ato Teferra Degife. It was held at the Hilton Hotel on 18th May 2007.



Ato Teferra's presentation, which dwelt on the contributions of the banking sector to the country's development, was read out as he was receiving medical treatment abroad. In his presentation, Ato Teferra described in detail the evolution of the banking sector in Ethiopia, from the days before the Italian occupation up to the eruption of the February Revolution of 1974. He delineated how the government engineered the growth of a professional class of Ethiopian bankers by sending its promising young staff, including the author himself, for training abroad, and how the Ethiopianization of the Ethiopian banking sector was effected through replacement of the foreign bankers by these Ethiopians and the printing of the Ethiopian currency, which replaced the Italian Lire and the East African Shilling.

In a short period of time, the Bank of Ethiopia was able to stand on its own feet and successfully compete with foreign banks not only in the country but also abroad, through its foreign branches in Sudan and Djibouti. In Ethiopia, the Bank not only conducted commercial banking services, but



also undertook various operations for the Ministry of Finance, such as transit services from Addis Ababa to Djibouti, administration of the customs warehouse at the La Gare, and distribution of cigarettes on behalf of the Tobacco Monopoly.

The Banker pointed out that during his days, the banks made decisions independently and that the National Bank carried out its controlling functions through consultations with the banks. Ato Teferra, a veteran who had served the banking sector for some 34 years in various capacities, including as the first General Manager of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia and as Governor of the National Bank of Ethiopia, pointed out that the main difference between the commercial bank at his time and the current one is one of market.



During the discussions, members of the audience raised various questions regarding the slow pace of modernization of the banking sector, especially in the adoption of technology and improving customer services. Former colleagues of Ato Teferra and current management officers of the Commercial Bank responded to some of the questions. A documentary film showing the growth of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia was screened prior to the discussions.

Correction

In the last Special Issue (April 2007) of the *FSS Update* on the National Conference on Academic Freedom, we briefly reported the closing address that H.E. Dr Adhana Haile delivered to the participants. In that report, Dr Adhana's portfolio was wrongly stated as "Vice Minister of Education". The correct portfolio of Dr Adhana is "State Minister for Higher Education".

We sincerely apologize to Dr Adhana and our readers for the mistake.

Off the Press

Decentralization in Ethiopia.

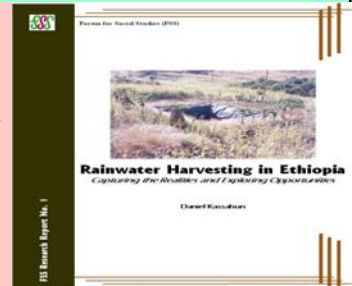
Edited by Taye Assefa and Tegegne Gebre-Egziabher. (FSS, Addis Ababa, 2007).

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New FSS Publications

Daniel Kassahun. *Rainwater harvesting in Ethiopia: Capturing the realities and exploring opportunities.* FSS Research Report No. 1. (Addis Ababa, 2007).



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Bahru Zewde and Siegfried Pausewang, eds. *Ethiopia: the Challenge of Democracy from Below.* Nordiska Afrikainstitutet (Uppsala) and Forum for Social Studies (Addis Ababa). Reprinted in 2007.

