

# **Academia, Business, Government: A Partnership to Promote Development**

Keynote address by  
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RELATIONS IN  
ETHIOPIA**

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His Excellency, President Girma Wolde Giorgis,

Ministers,

Guests,

Academics,

Businessmen:

It is an honour for me to be asked to say a few words at the opening of this Conference.

This country has produced some of the most amazing historical and religious places. It has also produced some of the most amazing athletes.

A few years ago there was a poster all over Addis Ababa, with a picture of Haile Gebre Selassie, one of the greatest individuals and athletes of our time. On the poster it said, “Yishalal”. It is possible.

The Great Ethiopian Run, with 25000 participants, shows that it can be done. Yishalal. If you run, or take a walk around Meskel Square early in the morning, you see hundreds of young people, and some middle aged as well, showing the same thing. When they run at full speed up the hill passing ECA and Hilton and the Foreign Ministry, they show that it is possible – Yishalal.

But the message from Haile Gebre Selassie is not confined to sports only. It says that it can be done also in other sectors. Ethiopia Yishalal!

The incredible thing with long distance running, which is a highly individualistic effort, is that it also requires cooperation. Different efforts must pull in the same direction. Team work is necessary. Haile and Kenenisa together winning Olympic Games is a fantastic illustration of this.

And this is true also in politics and economics. It is true if one wants to achieve growth and development. Different actors need to work together, to pull in the same direction, to make the individual efforts possible. To enable the best to win.

Perhaps that is the key message from this Conference. Government, the private sector, academia must work together, in a partnership.

Each one in the team has a crucial role. That is true for sports, and it is true in the area of development.

Government does not create growth. Businesses do. The aims of this Conference - to achieve improved economic and social development – will not be achieved by people like me. Development and growth will only be possible if businesses can grow and prosper. If individuals and investors, workers and business women and men, farmers and entrepreneurs, feel that investing their efforts, time and money is useful and profitable. If so they may produce, sell, buy, trade.

The private sector is the key.

But it is not enough. From where do businesses get their ideas? Their research and development? Their trained people?

Some of this will come out of the family, the village, the businesses. But as businesses grow, prosper and develop, as they interact and compete with other businesses, as they move beyond the local and national market, then the challenges grow, the need for information increases. They need new ideas, they need specialists, researchers.

In Ethiopia, the manufacturing sector is characterized by low productivity and weak competitiveness due to low skills, shortage of capital and lack of modern technology. Yet this sector could be a major source of export led growth if these constraints are removed. To realize this potential, the GOE needs to create an enabling environment for more investment in manufacturing, both foreign and local and improve the skills base for higher labour productivity.

Universities are a breeding ground for ideas, free thinking, development. Some of it may succeed. Some may not. Out of hundreds of ideas and thoughts and theories and studies, only a few will prove to be crucial and useful for further development. But all will contribute to the creation of a vibrant intellectual climate that is so necessary for ideas to flourish.

Universities are not the only institutions that contribute to such an intellectual climate. Also think tanks, independent organizations, the free press, people participating in debates – they all play an important role in creating a climate that breeds innovations and a spirit that it is possible - Yishalal.

The free flow of ideas and information is a key to economic and social development and to democracy.

The task of government is to create the general framework for such a climate. A spirit of openness, respect for freedom of thought and expression, the means through which information can flow, internally but also externally creating a flow of information and ideas between the national and the global market. In today's world the global market creates enormous

opportunities. To take advantage of those opportunities, the connection to them, the awareness of them and the accessibility to them must be in place.

Perhaps the most important task of government is to remove obstacles to business growth. To know what those obstacles are, the business community as well as research institutions and others must be encouraged to participate and voice their demands and criticism. Government must listen. It must encourage dialogue.

Networks among different actors are key to the success of such a dialogue. One aspect of this is the networking between government, businesses and universities. A big and important step in the right direction can be taken through this conference.