

DC Community Pays Tribute to Birtukan Mideksa

Andenet DC Metro Press Release

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A capacity crowd at Washington DC Marriott Hotel paid special tribute to Birtukan Mideksa, leader of UDJ and by far the most popular opposition party in Ethiopia. Birtukan was thrown into prison a year ago this Thursday by the government of Ethiopia on bogus charges and ahead of the May 2010 election

Birtukan, a renowned lawyer and judge, is one of the most vibrant voices in Ethiopian politics. She champions political lines that are in tune with the wishes and aspirations of the rather youthful Ethiopian population, 69% of which is under 30. The party she heads pursues a political platform that challenges, among other things, the widely detested ethnic policies of the regime. Popular support for her party was underscored in the 2005 election when Kinijit, the precursor of UDJ won under the watchful eyes of international observers. The election was usurped by the regime despite national and international protests.

Amnesty International, an array of governments and institutions had declared Bertukan Mideksa “Prisoner of Conscience” and are conducting concerted campaign to secure her release. By imprisoning Bertukan, the government made her the symbol of Ethiopia’s struggle against tyranny rather than quelling the struggle.

The Sunday program also featured two guests that reflected on the economic and political environment in Ethiopia. Dr. Gezahegn Bekele made a cursory review of the Ethiopian economy and pointed out that empirical data for the last 17 years does not point to meaningful advancement in the living standard of the average Ethiopian as measured by internationally acceptable parameters. He singled out the government’s policy on land as a major hindrance to progress and expressed concern on the growing foreign debt to gross national product ratio.

Ato Sileshi Tena, former UDJ official and colleague of Bertukan Mideksa reminisced on the kind of leader Bertukan is, her total commitment for the cause of human right, democracy and Ethiopian unity and her unflinching determination even in the face of eminent danger. Ato Sileshi, who is currently pursuing a program at Harvard’s Kennedy School for Public Administration, presented a candid assessment of the political climate in Ethiopia and urged participants to heighten their support so the struggle at home attains its intended goal. “Squabbles”, he added, “are unavoidable hiccups in the lives of organizations and should never be causes for lasting frustration and withdrawal from a noble cause that one is committed to”.

A generous portion of the program was allotted to question and answer session during which participants renewed their commitment to intensify participation in the “Free Birtukan Mideksa!” campaign. An overwhelming call was made upon Andinet to resolve internal differences in a responsible manner so the entire energy of the organization is committed to the major task ahead.

On the occasion, the DC Metro community presented a plaque to Ato Alemayehu Abebe, Andinet DC Metro Support Chapter Chairman, in recognition of his sustained contribution. Ato Yilma Adamu and Ato Lemma Ataklti presided over the presentation. The meeting was chaired by Ato Bekele Wolde, Andnet DC Metro Support Chapter board member.

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