

Swiss-Eritrea Association in Geneva Holds 2nd Congress; Pledges to Expand Support for New Eritrean Refugees

(By ASEPE Supporter)

An Eritrean-Swiss association (ASEPE) formed in Geneva two years ago held its second congress Saturday, 19 November, and renewed its resolve to actively support newly arriving young Eritreans who are in dire need of all-round assistance for starting new life in exile. Most heartening to congress participants was to see young and mostly second generation Eritreans and their Swiss friends in the frontline of all activities of this model voluntary solidarity association.



Committee chairman Tedros Eyasu and his team who included Sophia Ammar, Awet Aregay and Tedros Teklemariam, one by one presented wide-ranging reports of activities and problems encountered in the past two years, while Olivia Heller presented future activities of ASEPE (Association Suisse-Erythréenne pour l'Entraide) in a congress conducted both in French and Tigrinya.



(Some of the ASEPE activists/leaders, from left to right: Awet, Tedros T/Mariam, Sophia, Hannah Ammar, Senhit Shiberim, Arabic-French-Tigrinya speaker and ASEPE chair Tedros and Olivia Heller, new committee member)

It was reported that the association was most successful in its educational and information programme which taught French language to new arrivals and assisted them to acquire basic information on Swiss culture, customs, laws and how the newcomers can overcome problems related to problems like housing, insurance and job opportunities. In this educational task, 12 young volunteers consisting of Eritreans born or raised in Switzerland and their Swiss friends (schoolmates and work colleagues) assisted the new refugees to learn French language in weekly sessions. Between September and December 2015 alone, ASEPE volunteers organized 11 courses for a total of 381 attendants. The course continued throughout 2016 in weekly language courses for up to 40 young refugees organized small learning/discussion groups.

The Geneva (cantonal) department for social cohesion and integration it now committing itself to provide basic funding and related support to help promote the programmes of the association which include creating working relationship with other communities and civil society organs. The committee also extended appreciation to the ICV (International Communication Volunteers) for their close cooperation to help the ASEPE stand on its own feet.

However, financial contribution from the Eritrean community was far short from earlier expectation. Only 500 Swiss francs were contributed by community members while the volunteer teachers and ASEPE committee themselves had to spend lots of money from their pockets.

The congress participants warmly saluted the achievements of the young volunteers and the ASEPE committee and elected/re-elected Tedros Eyasu, Sophia Ammar, Olivia Heller, Awet Aregay and Tedros Teklemariam to kindly continue the good work for the coming 12 months.

Ahmed Surur and Abdalla Mohammed Ali were expected (in absentia) to accept their re-election as auditors, and Merachew Berhe and Tseggai Tesfaldet agreed to congress recommendation to continue their highly appreciated advisory support to the young ASEPE committee members.

It was learned that future plans include initiating cultural and folkloric activities and finding a center where Eritreans and friends could meet.