

***Conference Report on Rescuing Awash National Park held in Adama Ras Hotel,  
Adama/Nazreth from 24-25 August 2011***

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*Opening Speech by  
H.E. Ato Dawood,  
Sate Minister, MoCT*

*Key note by Dr. Kifle Argaw  
Director General, EWCA*

*Key note by Ambassador Xavier Ato Mesele,  
European Delegation to Ethiopia  
Tedecho & Wendwosen  
Heads of Weredas & the Park*

**Summary** – The natural resources of Awash National Park, which have local, national and global value, have declined drastically over the last four decades to the point of species extinction and habitat degradation. In order to develop a lasting solution to the problems of Awash, a National Conference was held in Adama/Nazreth from 24-25 August 2011. The conference, organized by a Working Group that was initiated as a forum to discuss and resolve the Awash situation, involved 87 stakeholders and distinguished guests including government officials from Federal and Oromia and Afar Regional States, Wereda and Kebele representatives, ambassadors, diplomats, heads of NGOs and related conservation groups, researchers and prominent individuals.

The five presented papers and subsequent discussions clearly showed that Awash NP is deteriorating due to: a lack of integration and development cooperation between the Park and the surrounding local administration, the minimal managerial and institutional capacity of the Park, minimal alternative

livelihoods for the surrounding communities, inadequate commitment among all officials in taking the Park as an issue of development agenda, absence of legal procedures and understandings on expansion of large scale farms, unplanned and non-integrated land use systems, and a lack of appropriate outreach programs needed to change the attitudes of the surrounding communities.

Following a consensus amongst the key stakeholders that collaborative park management was needed to rescue Awash, an agreement was made to form National and Wereda level committees in the near future. ***The National Level Committee***, which is to be responsible for guiding and advisory roles, will consist of MoCT (chair of the committee), EWCA (secretary), and other members are from Federal Police, Ministry of Federal Affairs, members from Oromia and Afar Regional States administrations and security, heads of Bureaus of Culture and Tourism, Land Use Administration and Environmental Protection, Forestry and Wildlife Agency and Livestock and Pastoralist. ***The Wereda Level Committee*** will comprise of Awash NP (Secretary), representatives from each wereda offices of Administration and Security, Culture and Tourism, Land Administration and Environmental Protection, Police, Justice and Pasture, which all are members will be responsible for actual implementations in a very collaborative way. The Working Group will assist the two committees through mediation, project development/fund raising, advocacy and coordination.

The Conference positively concluded with the MoCT, H.E. Dawood, promising to support and closely follow this initiative, and by the principal stakeholders, namely the Head/representatives of the Awash and the Awash-Fentale Weredas and the warden of Awash NP signing a written commitment to accept this initiative to bring real change for this Park.

### ***Introduction***

In 1969 Awash National Park (Awash NP), with an area of 756 km<sup>2</sup>, became the first protected area to be gazetted in Ethiopia. The wildlife resources of Awash NP have both national and global significance. In order to ensure the long-term preservation of Awash, any utilization of its resources must be sustainable. However, over the previous four decades the wildlife have declined drastically, resulting in species extinction (more than four large animals), and the habitat heavily degraded. At present, more than two thirds of the Park is either permanently or temporarily used for non-conservation related activities ranging from permanent settlement to extensive grazing. The park's resources are severely threatened due to poor relations between park management and the neighboring communities and to the latter having minimal understanding about the economic values of the wildlife resource. Poor management capacities of the

park, inadequate enforcement of legislation, and minimal collaboration among stakeholders have further hindered the sector from achieving its mandate to conserve. The competition between livestock and Awash NP's grazers and browsers has led to range and food loss. Tourists visiting the Park have also become persistently disappointed by the absence of large animals and the multitudes of livestock that they see.

### ***Justification for a National Conference***

In response to the conflicting situation and problems of declining natural resources in Awash NP and adjacent areas, various integrated management plans were formulated in the past but were not all successful and have not even been able to be implemented due to various reasons.

Given recent improvements to the Federal government's environmental policy and its strengthening of institutional arrangements, it has been argued that it is now possible to find lasting solutions through integrated conservation and development programs, especially by motivating and mobilizing key stakeholders and partners. This reflects a paradigm shift in emphasis for the long-term sustainability of the Park, particularly in regards the full participation of the surrounding communities and other stakeholders. In view of this new perspective, a Working Group composed of 11 institutions (government and non-government) was initiated as a forum in October 2010 to discuss and develop lasting solutions for Awash NP. Among the various recommendations suggested was facilitating a National Conference so as to come up with long-lasting solutions once and for all, taking into account the existing environmental, political and economic circumstances. A further aim of a conference was to develop trust among key stakeholders through the active participation of local communities.

### ***The motive of preserving Awash National Park is to:***

- Preserve the viable populations of several rare and endangered mammals, in particular the Beisa oryx, for their local, national and international significance,
- Safeguard Awash NP's unique habitats that are the home of several species of endemic, range-restricted, threatened and migratory birds,
- Conserve Awash NP's lowland ecosystem diversity and its unique physical, geological and other scenic features,

- Recognise the historical and contemporary role of pastoralist communities in the functioning of the Awash ecosystem and the importance of the ecosystem to community livelihoods, and
- Promote Awash NP's scientific and medical research (e.g., Hamadryas-Anubis baboon hybridization) and educational values.

### ***The Park's outstanding resource values***

These are particular resources and values for which Awash NP was originally established, and that need to be protected and preserved in order to accomplish its purpose. Awash NP's exceptional resource values consist of habitats, fauna, flora, scenic landscape and tourism and culture of the Kereyu, Itu and Afar communities. It supports/serves:

- Ethiopia's largest protected Beisa oryx population - Among the 85 mammals identified so far, eight probably no longer occur in the park. Mammals that contribute to the Park's uniqueness include: Beisa oryx (*Oryx beisa*), Defassa waterbuck (*Kobus ellipsyprimnus defassa*), Salt's dikdik (*Madoqua saltiana*), Hamadryas baboon (*Papio hamadryas*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Ardwolf (*Proteles cristata*) and Bat-eared fox (*Otocyon megalotis*).
- The second most important Critical Bird Area in Ethiopia - Awash NP is the richest conservation area in its bird diversity, with more than 450 species. The birds recorded in Awash NP, which are listed on the IUCN's Red List and/or endemic to Ethiopia include: Vulnerable species: Lappet-faced vulture (*Torgos tracheliotus*), Imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca*), Lesser kestrel (*Falco naumanni*), Basra reed warbler (*Acrocephalus griseldis*), Yellow-throated seedeater (*Serinus flavigula*), near-threatened species: Lesser flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*), Pallid harrier (*Circus macrourus*), Sombre rock chat (*Cercomela dubia*), endemic species: Wattled ibis (*Bostrychia hagedash*), Abyssinian woodpecker (*Dendropicos abyssinicus*), Banded barbet (*Lybius undatus*), White-winged cliff-chat (*Myrmecocichla semifufa*) and Thick-billed raven (*Corvus crassirostris*).
- The Awash ecosystem's diverse habitats and the various services provided,
- The endangered African lion,
- Unique landscape scenery, including Fentale Crater, Ilala Sala plains, Hot spring area, Awash Falls and the gorge,

- Hamadryas and Anubis baboons and the hybridization between the two populations,
- Endangered, endemic and migratory bird species,
- Unique botanical features, including Doum palm and riverine forests,
- Ilala Sala grasslands,
- Unique geological features, including Filwuha hot springs,
- The Doum palms represent an important income and food source for local communities,
- The Filwuha hot springs are important for curing illnesses such as malaria,
- As a buffer area between different ethnic groups,
- As the nearest national park to the capital city,
- The oldest educational museum and the lodges inside,
- Diverse and unique ethnic/cultural features, including the Seats for Gada system and the Belaadas in Afar,
- An ideal place of a training site for ornithologists, primatologists, and archaeologists, and
- Vital watering points for livestock, including Hakaki and the hot springs.

### ***Recently Initiated Interventions***

A Working Group, of which EWCA, ESTA and WSD were key actors as Leading Agency, Sponsor and Secretary and Facilitator, respectively, was initiated in October 2010. The Working Group acts as a forum to discuss and develop lasting solutions for Awash NP by examining the underlying and root causes of the problems and to map out and recommend improved and comprehensive management solutions for the Park through a participatory and integrated development approach.

The Working Group held a preliminary consultative meeting in Awash NP at Awash Falls Lodge premises between December 28 and 29, 2010 to devise lasting and effective management strategies for the Park. The meeting was aimed at piloting collaborative approaches involving the local communities, federal and local governments, NGOs, investors and potential donors. It was at this meeting that the suggestion of facilitating a National Conference to address the issues of Awash NP was proposed.

Of the 11 members of the Working Group, EWCA, ESTA, EWHNS, PHE-Ethiopia Consortium,

SDPASE, Dr. Almaz Tadesse and WSD were responsible in facilitating/preparing this National Conference.

*Institutions of the Working Group for Rescuing Awash National Park.*

<i>No.</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Representing person</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Contact address</i>
1	<i>Awash Fentale Wereda Culture &amp; Tourism Office</i>	<i>Mohammed Adaba</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>0913206818</i>
2	<i>Awash National Park (ANP)</i>	<i>Wendwosen Sisay</i>	<i>Warden</i>	<i>0911029569</i>
3	<i>Awash National Park Baboon Project</i>	<i>Dr. Mat Pines</i>	<i>Researcher</i>	<i>091006188</i>
4	<i>Population, Health and Environment-Ethiopia Consortium</i>	<i>Negash Teklu</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>0911201968</i>
5	<i>East Shewa Zone Culture &amp; Tourism Department</i>	<i>Mohammed</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>0911932527</i>
6	<i>Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Alliance (ESTA)</i>	<i>Bedilu Shegen</i>	<i>Chief of Party</i>	<i>0912795397</i>
7	<i>Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA) - Chair</i>	<i>Kahsay G/Tensae</i>	<i>Directorate Director</i>	<i>0911742003</i>
8	<i>Ethiopian Wildlife &amp; Natural History Society (EWNHS)</i>	<i>Mengistu Wondafrash</i>	<i>Executive Director</i>	<i>0911242369</i>
9	<i>Sustainable Development of the Protected Areas System of Ethiopia (SDPASE)</i>	<i>Lakew Berhanu</i>	<i>National Coordinator</i>	<i>0911644889</i>
10	<i>Wildlife Conservation &amp; Environmental Development Association (WildCODE)</i>	<i>Dr. Almaz Tadesse</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>0911697157</i>
11.	<i>Wildlife for Sustainable Development (WSD) - Secretary</i>	<i>Dr. Yirmed Demeke</i>	<i>Executive Director</i>	<i>0911643388</i>

***The National Conference***

The National Conference was held in Adama Ras Hotel, Adama/Nazreth from 24-25 August 2011. Conference participants (87 persons) derived from:

*Federal Government Institutions:* Heads of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Federal Affairs, Federal Police, Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority, Institute of Biodiversity Conservation, Environmental Protection Authority



*Photos of Conference participants from different point of view.*

*Embassies:* Heads of EU delegation, and U.S.A. Embassy, Environment Unit

*Oromia Regional State:* Heads of Administration and Security, Forestry and Wildlife Agency, Bureau of Culture and Tourism, East Shoa Zone Administration, Departments of Culture and Tourism and Land Administration and Environmental Protection, Fentale Wereda Administration, Offices of Culture and Tourism and Land Administration and Environmental Protection, Police and six Kebele chairpersons

*Afar Regional State:* Heads of Zone 3 Administration, and Security, Fentale Wereda Administration, Offices of Culture and Tourism and Pastoralist and three kebele chairpersons

*Awash National Park:* Park Warden, heads of Tourism Unit and Wildlife Scouts

*NGOs/Conservation groups/Associations which have direct link with wildlife/environment issues:* Heads of Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Alliance, Ethiopian Tour Operators and Hotels Associations, Horn of Africa Regional Environment Center, Sustainable Development of the Protected Areas System of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Wildlife and Natural History Society, Population, Health and Environment-Ethiopia Consortium and the Wildlife for Sustainable Development and researchers.

The Conference started with program overview including some remarkable achievements since its inception in October 2010 by Dr. Yirmed Demeke, Executive Director of WSD and Secretary of the

Working Group followed by a key note address by Dr. Kifle Argaw, Director General of EWCA. Then the Conference was officially opened by H.E. Ato Dawood Mohammed, State Minister, Ministry of Culture and Tourism. A remarkable key note speech was also delivered by His Honorable Ambassador Xavier Marchal, Delegate of the European Union to Ethiopia.

Five very informative papers were presented, the topic on the causes of resource conflicts was specifically an original research made by the Working Group. Papers presented on the Conference were:

- Conservation and management issues of Awash NP – by Kahsay G/Tensae followed by movie clips,
- The values of Awash NP from climate change adaptation perspective and vegetation – by Kumara Waqjira,
- Resource use conflicts vs community views/ perspectives around Awash NP – by Fedlu Abdela
- Collaborative wildlife management: Lessons learned from Simien Mts NP – by Zeleke Tigabe
- Paradigm shift interventions towards Awash NP conservation – Negash Teklu



*Ato Kahsay G/Tensay, Director of Directorate at EWCA delivering his speech, and two of the moderators,*

*Dr. Assefa Mebrate and Ato Bedilu Shegen*

Dr. Assefa Mebrate and Ato Bedilu Shegen chaired the presentation and discussion sessions. Following the presentations, group discussions were made. More thoughts were sought from wereda and kebele chairpersons. The participants raised various issues and questions for clarity on the presented papers, which was followed by in-depth discussions on existing situations and constraints that face the Awash NP. Furthermore, both chairpersons showed their concern about the Park and its appalling situation and

pledged to collaborate with any efforts required to improve the image of the Awash NP. Finally, based on the presented papers and discussions conducted, participants became fully aware that the Park is deteriorating due to various factors, such as lack of the following:

- Integration and development cooperation between the Park and the surrounding local administration;
- Management and institutional capacity of the National Park;
- Alternative livelihoods of the surrounding communities;
- Commitment and awareness of the local officials in taking the Park as an issue of development agenda;
- Legal procedures and understandings on expansion of large scale farms and rapid spread of alien species in the Park;
- Planned and integrated land use systems (holistic approaches during designing and development of projects); and
- Outreach programs to changing the attitudes of surrounding communities.

To advance the various ideas, H.E. Ato Dawood took the chair and provided direction on how to come up with feasible and workable solutions to save Awash NP. Many stakeholders expressed regret over the state of the park and described how the gaps and related negligence happened on such a local, national and global asset over the previous years. Dr. Kifle Argaw and H.E. Dr. Girma Amente took the opportunity of entertaining better solutions for sustainably utilizing Awash NP. Representatives from the Ministry of Federal Affairs (Ato Gidey Zerihun), the People of House of Representatives of the Culture and Tourism (Excellencies Rabia Issa) and Natural Resource Standing Committee (Dr. Gameda Binegide) made invaluable suggestions and further directions.

Consensus was reached with reflections of full acknowledgment that the suggested short-and long-term actions recommended as tasks and outputs to be accomplished by the Collaborative Park management, consisting of Awash NP Management, and the two Weredas, Fentale and Awash Fentale Administrations, would be the principal remedy for rescuing the park. Of note, the task of developing alternative community livelihoods was given the highest priority. It was also seriously highlighted that the existing opportunities from the government towards improved conservation is very high.

It was agreed that a committee has to be established soon at two levels, namely at National and Wereda levels and this has to report to the MoCT Office. The National Level Committee, with the purpose of guiding and advisory roles, consists of MoCT (chair of the committee), EWCA (secretary), and other members are from the Federal Police, Ministry of Federal Affairs, members from Oromia and Afar Regional States administrations and security, heads of Bureaus of Culture and Tourism, Land Use Administration and Environmental Protection, Forestry and Wildlife Agency and Livestock and Pastoralist. Committees at each Wereda Level, with the purpose of actual implementations in a very collaborative way, comprised of Awash NP (Secretary), representatives from each wereda offices of Administration and Security, Culture and Tourism, Land Administration and Environmental Protection, Police, Justice and Pasture. It was decided that all committees should be established and start functioning soon.

The Conference was concluded positively with the Head/representative of the two Weredas (Ato Tedecho Guto from Fentale and Ato Melese Yilma from Awash Fentale) and Ato Wondwesen Sisay from Awash NP signing a written commitment guaranteeing their acceptance of this thriving initiative to bring real change for this Park. Each signatory approved his commitment with short promise speech. The ceremony was admired by all participants.

The Conference participants extended their appreciation about the roles of the Working Group and the coordination it delivered. In the verge of this initiative, it was agreed to continue the good role of the Working Group and help in mediation, project development/fund raising, advocacy and coordination.



*Promises by each signatory being Dr. Kifle a facilitator. Closing remark by H.E. Ato Dawood Mahammed.*

Finally, the Conference was officially closed by H.E. Dawood, who firmly stated that his Ministry will closely follow up the progresses and the positive changes to make Awash NP as a well-managed conservation area in Ethiopia. He sincerely thanked the audience for attending this very demanding Conference enthusiastically and the Organizers with the utmost regards.

***N.B. Proceedings are under preparation and these will be made available to all participants and other relevant stakeholders by end of September 2011.***