



ETA, Ethiopian Teachers' Association, P.O.Box 1639, Addis Ababa.

21 JUNE 08 EVENT: CELEBRATION FOR STEVE SINNOTT, NUT GENERAL SECRETARY

Invited guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

National Union of Teachers and Ethiopian Teachers' Association have been friends for the last 59 years. Mr Steve Sinnott, however, developed more friendly and meaningful inter-connected working environment between the two sister organizations. He used to do it ever since he had been elected as the Deputy General Secretary of his union, NUT.

He used to pay further attention to Ethiopia especially when the Ethiopian Government launched various forms of attacks against the leadership and prominent activist of the ETA. With a view to know more about our real circumstance, Steve invited me to UK in may 1997 when my first entry to UK took place. I met this great man on the 2nd of May that year, at his office of the NUT headquarters of Hamilton House. His reception was special. Owing to his hospitality and compassionate modesty, I felt at home during my stay with him.

During my stay in UK and after my return to Ethiopia, Steve Sinnot had always been by my side as an absolutely special friend, personal adviser and protector. He was also constantly by the ETA side as most committed and dearest colleague. He had been a solid foundation and dependable source of inspiration particularly for the persecuted teachers across the globe, more specifically for Ethiopian teachers and for myself personally. I had never had a friend better than Steve Sinnott.

Dear fiends, let me witness one of the unforgettable experiences I had with Steve. As many of colleagues at Hamilton House, and concerned Ethiopians residing in London are fully aware, whenever there was a new development with ETA that needed Steve's attention or when I faced a problem that I could not solve on my own, I usually ran to Steve, or gave him calls or wrote him letters. The problem with me during such swift communication was that I repeatedly made mistakes that caused confusion and sometimes disruption to Steve and a great embarrassment to myself. These silly mistakes were committed while I was telling time or dates.

When Steve or one of his assistant secretaries arranged me an appointment to meet him at 4:30 or 5:00 P.M, for instance, I would make available myself at 10:00 or 11:00am in the morning, about 5 hours before the actual time I was supposed to meet Steve. When I also wrote him a letter, sometimes, there could be seven or eight days or even years difference from the dates of events I intended to write. The important thing was that, despite my own such embarrassing mistakes committed repeatedly, I had no a single day to mention when Steve was annoyed by that. He had never complained it at all. Instead, he politely used to advise me to take it easy and more importantly, he applied his fantastic knowledge of teaching methodology and decent sense of humors that encouraged me to stick to important disciplines for which I always remember Steve Sinnott. He said "Gemoraw, let us sign an agreement with three provisions: No. 1. We should think in a language we speak or write. No. 2. We should

consider that every language is self-sufficient only in its own culture and No. 3. we better use AM and PM being followed by time qualifiers in the morning, in the after noon and in the evening as appropriate.” He named this agreement as **“Treaty of Calendar”**.

As revealed in these phrases, please note that Steve was very cautious not to hurt my feelings by putting the blame on me but he rather intended to share it himself. At the same time he politely wanted me to get rid of my weaknesses. He had got a hobby of supporting the needy. He was also boldly committed to upholding truth. Steve Sinnott had been a man of integrity with optimistic quality to show true love, consistency of determination, and more importantly he had been an icon of internationalism and a bright hope for all his colleagues. This was the real Steve Sinnott I had been a friend for the last 12 years and missed him since 5 April 2008.

Dear friends,

Within the periods of 1999 - 2008, Steve paid a total of 5 visits to Ethiopia, that is, 3 times as an EI delegation and twice representing his union, NUT. Steve's last visit to Ethiopia took place 4-6 February this year accompanied by Teachers TV journalists. His missions focused on lobbying all concerned particularly Ethiopian government authorities including PM Meles Zenawi to be willing to cooperate in alleviating the plights of Ethiopian teachers, and simultaneously he used to assist us to develop leadership quality, build up the organizational capacity of ETA and encourage Ethiopian teachers to keep their unity to defend their rights and advance their interests, and contribute their shares to the promotion of quality public education in Ethiopia.

Even though he was unable, due to his early sudden death, to witness the complete fulfillment of the great aspiration he had for Ethiopian teachers and their union, Steve had succeeded in some significant areas of his work in Ethiopia:

1. He successfully made the international community be aware of the real nature of the problems of the ETA as well as its sole method of resolving the problem, and at the same time successfully won the concerned international community to stand by the side of Ethiopian teachers in the ETA.
2. He had played a remarkable role in showing the world that the killing of the late Assefa Maru, the Deputy General Secretary of the Association, was of a political motive, rather than committed against criminal offender or not that which occurred due to an ordinary conflict. His advocacy together with the influence of the international community forced Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to at least verbally pledge a promise to bring the case of the murder before the court of Law.
3. We believe that the contributions of Steve for the pooling up of the world-wide pressure had materialized the release of the former president of the Association, Dr. Taye. As a delegation of EI, Steve managed to visit Taye in prison in 2000 and 2002 and brought to light his difficult condition and inhuman treatment he was receiving in prison. It is to be recalled that Taye had been previously sentenced to 15 years to serve in prison but released after being imprisoned for 6 years. We attribute this achievement, the early release of Dr Taye, to Steve’s remarkable advocacy.
4. In December 2007, the Federal High Court had granted some prisoners to be released on bail that amounted Birr 5000 (about £300) per person. Those who could afford were leased but those who could not were left behind the bars. When Steve heard of the members of the ETA, namely Berhanu Abadebissa, Wolde Danna and his wife Wubit Legamo stayed under custody more than a month for not able to deposit the said amount, he convinced his Association (NUT) to pay the bails and enabled the helpless detainees to go out of jail. Thanks to him, those colleagues are able to join their families, see natural light and breathe fresh air since then.

5. The solidarity support organized by Steve for ETA has enabled us to overcome the Ethiopian Government cadres' plot of dismantling the Association by freezing its bank assets and forcefully channeling membership contributions to surrogate ETA. This significant international solidarity of Steve deserves a lasting memory.
6. Whenever Ethiopian community in London organized public meetings, demonstrations, vigils and hunger strikes, to protest against gross violations of human and trade union rights in Ethiopia, Steve Sinnott would be amongst them. Had it not been for constant support of Steve, the efforts of the ETA Support Group in UK being exerted to support the struggle for the respect of human and trade union rights activities at homeland would not have been so easy to meet the purpose.
7. During my stay in exile, Steve played a significant role in making possible the fast reunification and good settlement of my family. I attribute the academic achievements of my children to Steve's invaluable advice and encouragement. He also managed to lobby with the relevant diplomatic community to pay a due attention to the situation of colleagues in the ETA and myself while as the same time boosted the spirit of the teachers in the struggle for the respect of their rights, when he together with Mr Andire Dumont of the AOb (Dutch teachers' union) went to Ethiopia in accompanying me upon my return to my homeland in December 2004. By doing so, Steve enabled me to keep my promise and uphold my integrity.

This unique trade unionist, Steve Sinnott, is remembered by Ethiopian teachers throughout the country and by all concerned Ethiopians within and abroad for all these commitments and particularly for his humanitarian spirit manifested in his prompt responses to the needy persecuted teachers and as well in being a judicious person who was courageously fighting against injustice anytime at any circumstance that could even put his safety at risk. What he did for us in Awasa in February 2002 to make possible our General Assembly is a good point in case. I feel humble proud of informing you that that General Assembly of ETA attended by 600 regional representatives of teachers unequivocally decided that Steve Sinnott should be an honorable member of ETA which he accepted it with great pleasure.

Unfortunately, Steve Sinnott, General Secretary of NUT, has completed his race in his 56 by which the National Union of Teachers has lost its charismatic and inspiring leader. By which the Ethiopian Teachers' Association has lost its dearest friend. The EI, global federation of teachers, and peace loving international community have missed a renowned and practically attested trade unionist.

Hereafter, we are going to Steve and not he to us. Thus, on behalf of colleagues in the ETA, Ethiopian community in London and myself, I wish Steve's family (his beloved wife Mary Sinnott, his daughter Kate Laventure, his son Stephen Sinnott, his parents and his grand- children), his friends, the whole staff at Hamilton House and the members of the NUT at large and his mates across the globe, I wish you all a lasting condolence, strong courage and good future. At the same time, I would like to politely request this gathering to vow to courageously carry on the noble cause to which Steve Sinnott committed himself until the last minute of his last breath.

I thank you for listening.

Gemoraw Kassa
General Secretary, ETA
21 June 2008, London, UK

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Storey's Gate, Westminster, London SW1