

Eritrea's capital listing as a World Heritage Site celebrated in Vienna, Austria

Peter Haider
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Vienna, Austria -- The listing of Eritrea's capital as a World Heritage Site was celebrated at a special event titled "Asmara -- City of Dreams."

The event was organized by UPF-Austria together with the Permanent Mission of Eritrea at the United Nations in Vienna; the United Nations Correspondents Association Vienna (UNCAV); and the Horn of Africa Peace Initiative.

Approximately 150 guests attended the event, held on July 15, 2017, at the UPF Peace Embassy in Vienna.

The listing ended a long-running quest by Eritrean authorities to have their capital's unique architecture recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

This architecture includes an art-deco bowling alley with colored glass windows and a petrol station built to resemble a soaring airplane.

Opening the event, Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, welcomed the guests and spoke about the importance of Asmara's inclusion in the World Heritage List. He congratulated the Eritrean delegation for this achievement, which represented a victory for Italy as well as Eritrea.

Professor Habteab Tsege, a member of the Steering Committee and head of the Mining Engineering Department at Mai Nefhi College in Eritrea, stated that the inscription of Asmara onto the UNESCO World Heritage List is a symbol of pride and achievement for the Eritrean people, who shoulder the responsibility to maintain its status.



Asmara, the first World Heritage Site to be recognized in Eritrea, is unique in having modernist architectural design in an African highland setting, Professor Tsege said. The buildings that make up the World Heritage Site were built between the late 19th century and the middle of the 20th century. Professor Tsege called on participants to work to preserve the strong values of the people and government of Eritrea. He said he looks forward to working together with all the representatives and heads of organizations.

Engineer Medhanie Teklemariam, an architect and city planner who is responsible for Asmara's World Heritage nomination project, explained why the city deserved to be included in the World Heritage List. He was accompanied and supported by Asmara's director for city planning, engineer Tesfalem Woldemichael.

The historical, functional and architectural integrity of Asmara has been well preserved despite the decades of war and upheaval experienced by Eritrea to gain its independence, Mr. Teklemariam said. The UNESCO listing will encourage and increase current Eritrean efforts to restore and maintain these buildings, as well as bring to the world awareness of this African modernist treasure, he said.

Salwa Dallalah, the director of conference and document services at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), gave a speech in solidarity with the people of Eritrea. Dr. Gerhard Kiennast, the president of Environmental Concepts Exchange Association (ECEXA), spoke about his recent trip to Eritrea and gave insights about social and economic developments in the country.

In his closing remarks Dr. Peter Haider of UPF stressed the importance of the forum in bringing together people from all fields to address and celebrate Asmara as a new World Heritage Site, while exploring different opportunities of working together toward sustainable development in Eritrea and Africa together with Europe.

Other unforgettable aspects of the event were the Eritrean buffet, which was organized by the Permanent Mission of Eritrea at the United Nations in Vienna in cooperation with the association of Eritreans living in Austria, and the musical performance by a Sudanese cultural group, who inspired a high level of excitement in the audience.