

Acceptance Statement for the Outstanding African Leadership Award

I would like to thank the American Academy of Achievement and the Global Hope Coalition for extending a hand of friendship to the African continent and for **recognizing Ethiopia's Green Legacy initiative as an African success story.**

Indeed, our continent is filled with many success stories - past, present and future. The perspective that African countries are net producers of problems that always require external assistance is an outdated one. Therefore, great appreciation to the organizers for lighting a torch on the continent's net production of solutions.

As the global community continues to be confronted with the adverse effects of climate change, in Ethiopia we chose to undertake bold and practical solutions to address the issue. When in 2019 we launched the Green Legacy initiative as a proudly African nation and as a government navigating turbulent times, Ethiopians from corner to corner rose up armed with seedlings to cover the nation green.

The act of planting a tree is an act of faith by a young and hopeful nation. In most of Ethiopia, June to August is the rainy season, where the air cools, the dust settles, the rain quenches the thirst of the land after 9 months of heat, and the soil softens, making it hospitable for young fragile seedlings to establish roots.

In the course of these 3 months, the Green Legacy initiative invites our people to come out of their homes and places of work, walk out in unison to a field with a seedling in hand, dig a little hole in the ground and place the seedling.

Four years into the implementation of the Green Legacy Initiative, we have mobilized 25million Ethiopians across the nation to plant 25 billion seedlings, equivalent to 250 seedlings per Ethiopian. The impact could be equated to removing 64 million gasoline-powered cars from the roads for a whole year.

Today, Ethiopia’s Green Legacy Initiative is the most extensive afforestation and reforestation program next to the Amazon. Besides the tree planting afforestation and reforestation efforts, Ethiopia has also put over 700,000 hectares of existing biodiversity and carbon-rich natural forests under a sustainable participatory forest management scheme.

By 2022, our Green Legacy initiative has fostered a flourishing national green culture, tripling the number of seedling nurseries to more than 121,000; creating more than 750,000 jobs mostly for women and youth; and generating 1.3 billion Ethiopian Birr in income.

Seedlings have also been shared with neighboring countries to bolster regional cooperation for transboundary ecosystem management.

Our Green Legacy Initiative will certainly contribute towards removing the equivalent of hundreds of millions of tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and reduce deforestation. This implies Ethiopia’s significant contribution to the global climate change mitigation efforts.

Ethiopia’s tangible contribution to the overall global afforestation and reforestation pledge is impressive by any standard, but even more so when it has been financed primarily by domestic resources and efforts. Building on this success, Ethiopia plans to restore an additional 22 million hectares of degraded land by 2030. We are also developing a green fund and will pursue carbon trading schemes to help raise additional financing.

As a nation, we may and we do have differences in the way we interpret the past and the way we envision the future – but we are united in the hope we have for our children and our planet.

We aspire to reverse deforestation and build a green society in Ethiopia and Africa. We have no doubt that our Green Legacy story will motivate a global mobilization toward reconciling our modern civilization with our planet and ecosystems.

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