

# "Images of Hope and Promise" art exhibition

by Melese Telahoun

An art exhibition entitled "Images of Hope and Promise" that portrayed over 100 paintings and photographs by the people of Gambella was opened at Hilton Addis Ababa on the evening of 2 February, 2006. The exhibition was organized by Pact Ethiopia. The paintings and photographs were created at a workshop under the direction of Ethiopian artists Michael Tsegaye and Zerihun Seyoum as a part of Pact's conflict management and community stability programme.

The exhibition included photography by New York City photographer, Susan Liebold depicting Pact's activities in education, reproductive health and women's empowerment. The exhibition was organized to celebrate Pact's recent work in Ethiopia.

Pact is a networked global organization that strengthens the capacity of local leaders, organizations and institutions to direct their own development to meet pressing social needs in dozens of countries around the world. Pact's work is, reportedly firmly rooted in the belief that local communities must be the driving force in ending

poverty and injustice. Pact has been in Ethiopia since 1976.

In an opening remark, Pact's Country Representative in Ethiopia Miss Leslie Mitchell said, "Tonight's art and photo exhibition, which we have entitled 'Images of Hope and Promise' is significant as we try to move toward a different perspective and understanding of Ethiopia." She said the images portrayed at the exhibition capture the diverse people of Ethiopia and their move away from poverty and despair. Miss Mitchell went on to say that by honouring Ethiopia's diversity, we are honouring

the deepest source of Ethiopia's national strength. "That strength takes many forms and the most obvious are not always the most significant." She told the invited guests that these images represent the spirit that informs and reminds us of Ethiopia's strength.

The country representative pointed out that a nation reveals itself not only in the persons it produces but also by the persons it honours. "And to-night we honour the people of Ethiopia, whose hope shines through in the photographs. We are

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deeply appreciative for the contributions - they inspire us, deepen our insight, and contribute to our spiritual strength and self-comprehension."

According to Miss Mitchell, the paintings were developed by the peoples of Gambella, as an activity under Pact's

peace building programme supported by USAID to bring together all ethnic groups from the state to promote their own expressions of peace and hope. The photographs with white background were taken - not by professional photographers - but by everyday people of Gambella, who share a common desire that resides within all our hearts for peaceful, productive and fulfilled lives. Miss Mitchell expressed the belief that a place that disdains art, invites the fate of having nothing to look backward to with pride, and nothing forward to with hope. Some of the remarkable arts who created these images paintings at the exhibition were present on the occasion.

Pact President and CEO Sara Newhall who was present on the occasion expressed her delight to be "standing here with you tonight. She said she and her other colleagues were in Addis that week to physically demonstrate their solidarity in the ongoing partnership with Pact Ethiopia.

Sarah Newhall told the guests that Pact, which has been in Ethiopia since 1995, is dedicated to building organizational capacity at the



"When there is peace guests come to eat in our homes. Our art is to welcome them, to show them our love"

grassroots level, strengthening civil society as a sector, and creating innovative development approaches that could lead to long term institutional sustainability.

She recalled that earlier in the week, she was taken to view three of Pact's partner organizations and their community-based activities Newhall said, in each case, the centres were flooded with people receiving training and support from peer education,

health workers and community facilitators. "In conversing with participants and leaders in these prospects, I was impressed at the clarity of the peoples dreams for the future," she added.

Invited guests that were present at the opening of the exhibition included government officials, Pact country directors in different African countries and executive directors of a number of local NGOs.

