



Response to the Welcome to Australia

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Your Excellency the Honorable Shane Stone and Mrs Stone, and to this incredibly distinguished gathering: my profound thanks to you all for this remarkable welcome at this equally remarkable dinner at the venerable Australian Club. It is a distinct honour and privilege to be with you tonight, and I cannot help but think how touched my Grandfather, His late Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie, would have been that we are here, recalling the ties he built between Australia and Ethiopia.

Before I continue, let me thank my old and dear friend, Shane Stone, for helping to make this visit a reality. We have discussed it for some time, and he was aware how much such a visit would mean to me, and to many Ethiopians who want the shared memories of Australia and Ethiopia to come to life again. Thank you, Shane and Josephine, for helping to awaken us from the slumber which had overtaken the relations of our two great countries. And thank you for your great friendship and dedication. It is not as though you are not massively over-committed with important projects in Australia and around the world.

Few people in either of our countries have given great thought in recent years to this bilateral relationship. Our countries are very different from the ones which began to become conscious of each other less than 150 years ago. Australians first began to comprehend the Red Sea region closely, only when the Suez Canal was completed in 1869, and Australian trade with Europe began its passage through the northern Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. And when Australian troops then left for the Sudan in 1885, to avenge the death of General Charles “Chinese” Gordon, at the hands of the Mahdi’s forces.

I am here tonight with you because my Grandfather, His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile Selassie I, also felt a great kinship with Australia, which is why he arranged with the Prime Minister of Australia at the time, Sir Robert Menzies, for the State Visit to Australia in 1968, a half-century ago next year.

My beloved Grandfather, who raised me in the Palace after the passing of my Father, saw in Australia a special friend. Australians and Ethiopians fought together, of course, in the Korean War, and saw in each other similar values. Emperor Menelik may have begun the relationship when he brought eucalyptus trees from Australia to regrow the forests around Addis Ababa. But Emperor Haile Selassie also grew to love the horses which the Australians brought to the Middle East in World War I: the hardy Waler horses which the Australian Light Horsemen had to leave there when they went on to fight in Gallipoli in 1915. These horses and their heirs became the mounts for the Imperial Guard Regiment.

But there were many points of contact between Australia and Ethiopia. And Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies sent a famous Australian cricketer, Bert Oldfield, to Ethiopia in 1965, with a team of Australian schoolboy cricketers, to play the students from the Wingate School in Addis. The Prime Minister sent a cricket bat to the Emperor as a gift, and this began the process by which the Emperor started thinking of his State Visit to Australia, which was to take place in 1968.

What is wonderful today is that the cricketing legend, Bert Oldfield, had a nephew, Dr Paul Scully-Power, AM, who was Australia's first astronaut. And Dr Scully-Power is today one of the Crown Council's advisors on science and technology. He is one of the Australians who is returning the affection which the Emperor showed Australia. I am so happy to see you and Frannie here tonight, Paul.

The Crown Council's strategic advisor, Gregory Copley, is also an Australian, and he works with us —like Dr Scully-Power and many others — out of love for Ethiopia and its history. Both of these Australians work at the highest levels of government around the world, and yet donate their time to Ethiopia.

Look, too, at enormous charitable contributions of Australia to Ethiopia, exemplified by the commitment of obstetrician and gynaecologist Dr Elinor Catherine Hamlin and her New Zealander husband, Dr Reginald Hamlin, who co-founded the Addis Ababa Fistula Hospital.

What has been wonderful, as well, is that companies have donated services — airline travel and accommodation — to make this Commemorative Trip possible, which means that the Crown is not diverting funds away from charitable work to be with you. Virgin Australia — a wonderful and very Australian airline — kindly donated my travel to and from Australia. Globe-trotter Travel and their partner company, Penny Inc., found and donated accommodation for us around Australia, and have indicated a desire to work to create opportunities in Ethiopia.

A number of other Australians and Americans have contributed to making this visit possible, and yet have asked to receive no acknowledgment. But we are profoundly grateful.

I don't want to take away from the beautiful hospitality of tonight's gathering to belabor you with many serious thoughts. But let me just say that one of the reasons why Ethiopia, and the three-thousand years of its Solomonic line, is important to Australia is that this Solomonic line represents the unbroken spinal chord — the bloodline — of Judeo-Christian civilization. There is no other unbroken link which we have linking us today back through to the earliest biblical times.

The Crown has been in an interregnum now for 43 years. It is not the first time that we have seen such setbacks in the three-thousand years of our Solomonic line. But the Ethiopian People are rallying again around their historical identity, exemplified by their great saga, the *Kebre Negast*, the Glory of Kings. Today, the Ethiopian People are a global people, and the Ethiopian Crown is no longer just the Crown of the geographic territory of the country. It is the Crown of all Ethiopians, and it is also the guardian of that unbroken historical line of Western culture and civilization.

We have been working, for some years, on developing charitable endeavours for Ethiopia and Africa, like our Water Initiative for Africa, which has created unique water purification technologies, which are sustainable in remote areas without access to normal power, or spare parts. But now we

are working urgently to help save the identity of Ethiopians. We plan now to create The Haile Selassie I Library and Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, and we have been given reason to believe that the Government will return some of our land to make that happen.

This will begin the immense task of rebuilding Ethiopian identity security, and with it the strategic importance of Ethiopia as a guardian of the Red Sea trade routes, among other things.

I am happy to talk more about that with you, and we have some literature which you may find interesting about Ethiopian culture and symbols and why these resonate as “world symbols” today.

But let me get onto something which gives me enormous pleasure.

I would like now to announce the creation of our wonderful friend and supporter, Josephine Stone, AM, as Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the Star of Honour of Ethiopia. She, and Shane, have put an immense amount of themselves — their time, their thoughts, their influence, and much more — into helping the Crown get back to this point in our history.

Josephine, I now present you with the miniature of your Grand Cross, and hope as soon as it is convenient for you that we can formally invest you with the full ceremony and regalia of the Order, perhaps in Washington, DC.

Thank you so much for all you have done, not only for the Crown and Ethiopia, but for Australia and the international community. The rank of the Order carries with it the honorific of “Your Excellency”.

If I may turn to Shane, now, given that we can rarely catch you off-guard:

Shane, you have been wonderful in your help to us for so long, and I know that you have also been regarded as an inspiration to other communities. I know this from my contacts with the Greek Orthodox community, with whom we share so much faith. You are already known to the Ethiopian Crown as “Your Excellency”, being the holder of the Knight Grand Cordon of the Ethiopian Lion. And you, with your naval background, have been made an honorary member of the Officers Mess of the Imperial Guard Regiment.

But tonight I would like to announce that the Crown Council has agreed to recognise you with one of the ancient and most venerable Ethiopian orders. We wish you to be created Knight Grand Cross of the Imperial Order of the Holy Trinity, a rare honour. Again, we hope that you can join us for a formal investiture service in Washington, DC, sometime in the near future.

I know that you will all share in congratulating Josephine and Shane on what we believe are fitting recognition for their great services to humanity.

Thank you all so much for welcoming me to your beautiful country. My Grandfather fell in love with Australia, even after he became enamored of its People. It is my happy fate to share that same sentiment.

Shane, Josephine, ladies and gentlemen: could I ask you to join me in a toast to Her Majesty the Queen of Australia and to a resurgence of Ethiopian and Australian bonds at a time when we all need to confirm the security of the Indian Ocean which binds our two nations together.

Can I give you, then: the Queen, Australia, and Ethiopia. May our bonds endure.