

## Mengesha Awarded Prestigious Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education

### Director-General of ENP to be Recognized at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

#### Jerusalem- June 2010

Dr. Nigist Mengesha, Director-General of the Ethiopian National Project, has been selected to receive the 2010 Samuel Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education in recognition of her outstanding contributions in the field of education in Israel. The Rothberg Prize will be presented to Dr. Mengesha at the 73rd Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on June 6, 2010.



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem's President, Professor Menahem Ben-Sasson, notes that the Rothberg Prize has been awarded to Mengesha in recognition of her broad educational activities with the Ethiopian-Israeli community and her success in combining her work in education with efforts in the public sector and municipalities. "You have been and are a leader and initiator in the realm of education of the **Ethiopian community in Israel. Your educational work with immigrant communities has been sensitive to the special needs required to advance and fulfill the untapped potential of every Ethiopian-Israeli boy and girl,**" describes Ben-Sasson.

Mengesha explains her untiring efforts: "The fulfillment of the potential of Ethiopian-Israeli youngsters is beneficial to all," explains Mengesha. "Education will break the cycle of poverty."

"It is fulfilling to see that within just five years the Ethiopian National Project is making tremendous headway in catapulting the performance of Ethiopian-Israeli youngsters," explains Mengesha. "ENP's programs are reversing so many of the negative trends that we have witnessed among Ethiopian-Israeli youth," Mengesha adds.

Dr. Nigist Mengesha immigrated to Israel in 1984. In Ethiopia, Dr. Mengesha served as a social worker for the Ethiopian Prisons Authority. After making aliyah, she received a BA in Social Work from Bar-Ilan University, an MSW from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and graduated from the fellowship program of the Mandel School for Educational Leadership in Jerusalem.

**Mengesha views this award as coming full circle in her personal story: "What few know is that after a few unsuccessful attempts to make aliyah as a teenager, well before Operation Moses, I later was assisted in my efforts to leave Ethiopia through the provision of scholarship documents from Israel among them, from the Hebrew University. At a time when members of my family and community endured the treacherous journey through Ethiopia to Sudan, my arrival was eased through such efforts."**

Mengesha received her degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Sussex in July 2007 for her thesis "Socio-Educational Mediation among Ethiopian Immigrant Jews in the Israeli School System."

Dr. Mengesha has been a community activist and advocate of Ethiopian Jewry since her arrival in Israel. Her activities included working for the Israeli Social Welfare Department, serving as the SHATIL (a New Israel Fund project) project coordinator for Ethiopian organizations, founding and directing Fidel, the Association for Education and Social Integration of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, representing Israel at the Durban United Nations Conference Against Racism, and sitting on the **boards of many international and national voluntary organizations. Dr. Mengesha has served as the Director-General of the Ethiopian National Project since June 2003.**

The annual Samuel Rothberg Prize for Jewish Education was established by the Hebrew University in 1975 in honor of the 65th birthday of Samuel Rothberg in deep appreciation of his dynamic leadership and dedicated service to the University, the State of Israel and the Jewish people. Samuel Rothberg was the National Chairman of Israel Bonds and the International Chair of the Board of Governors of the Hebrew University.

"I am honored to receive the Rothberg Prize," says Mengesha with pride. "Education is the key to success. But our work is far from over."

#### About the Ethiopian National Project

A unique partnership between the Jewish Federations of North America, the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish Community Organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel (JDC-Israel) and Keren Hayesod-UIA, ENP unites those dedicated to advancing the Ethiopian-Israeli community, adopting the following strategies:

- Empowerment: A grassroots effort on a national scale, ENP involves the Ethiopian-Israeli community at every stage of the creation, implementation and evaluation of ENP's programs.
- A holistic approach: ENP programs take a "bigger picture" of the cultural, social and emotional challenges faced by Ethiopian-Israeli teenagers that hinder their academic success.
- Meeting unmet needs: ENP carries out an extensive mapping of existing programs and

services to ensure that ENP programs are filling an unmet, critical need.

**Ethiopian National Project**

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