



MEDIA RELEASE

From:

WORKING WITH
VICTORIA'S AFRICAN COMMUNITY

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African Think Tank Inc.

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AFRICAN AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES THRILLED AT CHOICE OF VICTORIA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2009

Excitement continues to reverberate through Victoria's African communities following the announcement that former refugee and Chairperson of the African Think Tank (ATT), Dr Berhan Ahmed, will be Victoria's representative for the 2009 Australian of the Year.

Dr Ahmed learned of his award, presented by Governor de Kretser on Tuesday night, while overseas.

When contacted, Dr Ahmed expressed his absolute delight, immense gratitude and profound sense of humility at the honour.

"I'm genuinely stunned," Dr Ahmed said. "As someone who has been fortunate enough to be given a second chance at life in this country, words cannot express the pride I feel on so many levels for so many people."

"I am especially heartened by the broader message this award sends out to all – and *about* all – refugees, former refugees and humanitarian entrants," Dr Ahmed said, "and those of African background in particular."

"Too often refugees are perceived as being helpless and unable or unwilling to contribute to their new home when many have much to offer," Dr Ahmed said.

Accepting the award on Dr Ahmed's behalf, his long-time colleague and ATT co-founder Mr Hailuel Gebre-selassie was quick to link the Victorian award with the recent election of African American Barack Obama to the US Presidency. "A few weeks ago we talked excitedly about the 'audacity of hope,'" Mr Gebre-selassie said. "To many Dr Ahmed's award here in Victoria represents the "validity of dreams."

The sentiments were shared by others in Victoria's African communities.

"I believe Dr Ahmed is a very worthy recipient," said Mr Clyde Salumu from the Congolese community. "As a former tram conductor and current academic from the University of Melbourne, his choice for this prestigious award sends a powerful message of hope to those in difficult circumstances who dream of achieving their best in Australia."

"Everyone I've spoken to in the African communities is still on a high from the news," said Dr Hussein Haraco from Victoria's Somali community. "Almost overnight it is like there is new empowering image attached to the label of refugee. One that focuses on what they can do rather than what they cannot."

Mr Samuel Kout, Chairperson of the Sudanese Community Association in Australia, said, "it was not a surprise to me hear that Berhan had received this excellent award. Most of us in our African communities in Victoria, as well as from the wider Victorian community, are well aware of his outstanding service to the Australian population."

Members of other African communities also added their congratulations, including: Mr Jeremiah Temple from the Sierra Leone community; Prof Felix Mavondo from the Zimbabwean community; Ms Faten Mohamed from the Eritrean community; Dr Apollo Nsubuga-Kyobe from the East African community; Ms Bekelech Habteselassie from Ethiopian Community, and Lanre Bolarinwa from the Nigerian community.

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