

# Ethiopia: 'Land of Origins', Africa's fastest growing economy

Envoy speaks on Ethiopia's ties with Kuwait, investment opportunities, tourism potential



KUWAIT: Ethiopian Ambassador to Kuwait Abdulfatah Abdullahi Hassan speaks to Kuwait Times. — Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat

By Ben Garcia

**KUWAIT:** For the first time after seven months as head of mission, Ethiopia's envoy Abdulfatah Abdullahi Hassan sat down for an interview with Kuwait Times. The new Ethiopian ambassador to Kuwait presented his credentials to His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah on Jan 22, 2019. The envoy said he is here to make the life of every Ethiopian in Kuwait more vibrant, and wants further cooperation and diplomatic and bilateral ties with Kuwait.

"I was appointed by the newly-installed government of Ethiopia to assist our compatriots and further strengthen our relationships in all aspects," he said. The envoy said Kuwait and Ethiopia share a lot of common interests in many areas including culture, trade and commerce, tourism and manpower, among others. According to Hassan, Ethiopia and Kuwait have a long history of cooperation since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1967.

"Our diplomatic relations with Kuwait are very strong. We share lots of issues of common interest. Ethiopia is strategically located in the African region, where multinational companies thrive. Geopolitical issues are important for both countries, and it is common knowledge to many that when it comes to international issues, we share the same stands with Kuwait, such as in the global affairs of the United Nations and Afro-Arab regional groupings," he said.

According to Hassan, bilateral relations are growing steadily and cordially. He also lauded the wise leadership of His Highness the Amir of Kuwait for the stable political and economic climate, not just in

Kuwait but also in other GCC countries. "We enjoyed the generosity of HH the Amir, especially when he financed several infrastructure projects in Addis Ababa including the airport terminal, which turned into reality through the Kuwait Fund," he said.

#### Fastest growing economy in Africa

Ethiopia enjoys being labeled as one of the fastest growing economies in Africa - second to Nigeria - attributing the growth to the new and wise leadership of Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and President Sahle-Work Zewde. "We diversified our economy and it's doing well now, thanks to several economic initiatives initiated by our prime minister. We registered double-digit economic growth in the last decade or so and we are still growing. The World Bank has commended Ethiopia for creating a large number of jobs and opportunities for our people and for welcoming the largest foreign direct investment in the country, thanks to several reforms implemented by the new government, not to mention in the telecom sector. We have several industrial parks from which many of our compatriots have benefitted. We have several international brands that consider Ethiopia as their second home," Hassan said.

Kuwaiti investors to Ethiopia are also growing, from none in the 1970s to around 21 new licensed investors in the agricultural and manufacturing sec-

tors. "We want to attract more Kuwaiti investment to our market. Ethiopia is now very competitive; the good news is that our manpower can attract more and more employers than ever before, because they are now being trained and prepared for the job market," he added.

The volume of trade between two countries has been increasing as well, despite the fact that there is no trade protocol between the two countries. "Before the 1970s, the trade relationship with

Kuwait and the balance of trade was in favor of Ethiopia. Recently, however, the situation has changed - the balance of trade is now in favor of Kuwait. For example, bilateral trade in 2014 totaled \$945 million, with only \$2.86 million for Ethiopia against \$942 million for Kuwait. We import 100 percent of our oil and gas products from Kuwait. Ethiopia sends first-class coffee and livestock products to Kuwait. There is a huge disparity, and we hope to balance our trade in the coming years," Hassan said.

#### Negotiation ongoing on domestic helpers

#### Wooing Kuwaiti tourists

Ethiopia is also trying to attract Kuwaiti visitors with its new tourism slogan 'Land of Origins' and emphasizing the physical proximity of Ethiopia to Kuwait. Hassan said the country is rich in natural resources: the climate is cool with an average temperature of 22-25 degrees Celsius throughout the

year. "Geographically speaking, we are 3.5 hours away from Kuwait. Our country has been known even before the ancient and biblical eras. We have the best and most fantastic sceneries, plus several UNESCO natural and cultural world heritage sites. We are also known as the cradle of humanity, as we are considered the very first ancient civilization in the world," he said.

"We are a country that embraces all cultures and religions, and we are also proud that we were never colonized by anyone. We refused being colonized - in fact we have a victory celebration every 6th of April to commemorate the bravery of our ancestors when the Italians tried to invade and failed," Hassan said. He said Kuwaitis can visit Ethiopia with visa on arrival. Addis Ababa also has regular flights to and from Kuwait daily.

Kuwait Times asked if the Kuwaiti market is open for Ethiopian domestic helpers. "Not yet - we are waiting and renegotiating with Kuwaiti authorities. In the near future, perhaps. We also need to train and update our people and hope we can come up with a bilateral agreement similar to that signed by the Philippines and Kuwait. But I want to stress our workforce can provide the best manpower ever - we are training our people so that when they are deployed, they are ready and more competitive. We want Kuwait to know that Ethiopia is also open to sending skilled and semi-skilled workers and not just those in the domestic labor sector," Hassan said.

Ethiopians in Kuwait number around 30-35,000 - around 90 percent of them engaged in domestic work. Some are engineers, while the rest are in the hospitality business.

## Burgan Bank honors KFSD for dedication to employee safety

**KUWAIT:** Burgan Bank recently hosted the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate (KFSD) at its headquarters to honor their continued commitment to workplace safety and civic responsibilities. The ceremony appreciated KFSD's community efforts at conducting regular preventive and precautionary in-house drills for the Bank's employees. The ceremony was held at the Burgan Bank headquarter, in the presence of the Bank's senior management, in recognition of the Kuwait Fire Service Directorate's contribution and the success of the surprise emergency evacuation drill.

The ceremony was attended by the Director of Capital Governorate Fire Department, Colonel Ahmad Hayef Al-Rashidi, the Head of Al-Hilali Fire Station, Colonel Fahad Al-Ajmi, and the Head of Al-Madina Fire Station, Colonel Bashar Al-Nafe. Raed Al-Haqhaq, Chief Executive Officer of

Burgan Bank Kuwait said: "We extend our gratitude to the hardworking KFSD members for their world-class standards of emergency protocols in ensuring employee safety. Burgan Bank will continue its partnership with KFSD to accommodate the Bank's staff with up-to-date training procedures and real-life learning programs to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of our employees."

The Head of Al Hilali Fire Station, Colonel Fahad Al-Ajmi said: "We would like to thank the management of Burgan Bank for their support during the evacuation process and for following the highest standards of safety to ensure the utmost security of its employees. The Bank's staff successfully assessed the situation and evacuated its building personnel in a timely manner. We are committed to working continuously with the Bank's management and departments to ensure everyone's wellbeing."

Burgan Bank has always maintained the highest health and safety standards through yearly emergency drills and application of sustainable security measures as employee safety is a high priority. The exercises strengthen employee readiness to secure efficient response time and proper evacuation techniques in the case of a natural disaster or fire outbreak.





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