Speech by Tekeste Ghebray, PENHA Fundraising dinner, 11th. December 2013

Tekeste started by briefly stating his service as Secretary General of IGAD, followed by being Representative of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation in Iraq and the Afghanistan.

I want to briefly tell you what I know about PENHA. Over the last 24 years, I have been watching PENHA relentlessly pursuing with its objective of advocating for pastoralists both at the national, local, regional and international level. At the local level it has been trying to improve the lives of the pastoralists in the Horn of Africa region by providing them with new skills, economic means, training and above all, focussing on training them that they have the right to ask for development. At the national level, it engages Ministries of various governments so that they understand what pastoralism means, what pastoralists needs are and what pastoralism is about. I remember in Eritrea, early in the 90s, when almost everybody was saying "Those pastoralists have to settle down. Why are they going around? We are not going after them to give them services - health, education and so on." Zeremariam was one of those who relentlessly put the view that it was wrong to force them to settle. It should be their own choice. He has educated many decision makers by advocating for the pastoralists to demand their rights from the state. At the regional level, PENHA interacted with many regional organisations like IGAD. It was quite actively participating in many fora of agricultural areas, not only confined to pastoralists. A little broader even than agriculture. I remember that PENHA was invited to the environmental and desertification workshops in Uganda and Ethiopia. Also at the national level, it has a good network of working with international organisations for example, Novib and IFAD. It created a network of friends, like you are here today - nationals from the region as well as internationals from the UK as well as in other countries. So it has been active at the local, national, regional and international level.

What makes PENHA unique is that it is a home grown regional organisation in the Horn of Africa. It is a role model for many NGOs and CBOs. It is the only one which they look at as an indigenous organisation. It is not a simple achievement. It also has a vast knowledge of the area. It shares is knowledge with other organisations. I recently attended one such meeting with Novib from the Netherlands who came to learn from PENHA a few weeks ago. It knew of its experience and wanted to learn from it forthcoming projects in the Sudan. PENHA has created a unique group of East African experts in the region. Zeremariam mentioned earlier the regional conflicts did not impede PENHA’s activities in the Region. Despite the conflicts, it has managed to create a cadre of experts from the region who are beyond the ethnic or national sentiments altogether, advancing the cause of PENHA. You see many examples today of the young PENHA members who are here such as Menbere, Bereket and others who have come from across the region of East Africa.

What is the future for PENHA? PENHA has now been active for the last 24 years. Next year it will celebrate its quarter century in a big way. Maybe the date will not be 11, 12, 13 as is today (a unique day). I look forward to that. It is not a simple achievement. At the risk of making Zeremariam angry, I give a lot of credit to him and the team he has created. He has
told me not to mention anything about him. I can't help it. I have been seeing him in all these years. If I go to Uganda, I find him there. If I go to Ethiopia, he is there. In Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan. I have met him in four countries of the six or seven countries where it is operating. So I give him a lot of credit - also to the young generation that is coming like Amsale and Bereket. Also to others like Kees who have helped PENHA for years and years. As the end of the time, many likeminded, selfless, good willing personalities. I wish PENHA to keep on the tradition of support to the pastoralist agenda. The main focus of PENHA is to advance the agenda of the pastoralists. It has successfully done so. It has put the advocacy at the tables of ministers and policy makers. I hope that in the next five years PENHA is intending to strategise its plan. This should be highlighted quite clearly.

You can also associate with PENHA which I encourage everyone to do. I myself will devote some of my time to work with PENHA. I also encourage everyone to associate with PENHA by giving of your time, sharing expertise, using its services, contributing at a personal or company level. So please support PENHA. Supporting PENHA is supporting the pastoralists of East Africa.