

## PRESS RELEASE

# The First Bikila Barefoot Challenge was a blast

*Toronto, August 12, 2016* -- University of Toronto and Bikila Award hosted the 'Bikila Barefoot Challenge' on Saturday August 6, 2016. The family-friendly event was held at Varsity Stadium in Toronto. The Bikila Barefoot Challenge is a fundraising initiative in support of the establishment of an Ethiopic Studies program at the University of Toronto and to remember the legacy of our marathon hero Abebe Bikila.

Invited attendees participated in athletic competitions and entertainment and met elite Ethiopian runners including Belaineh Densamo - a 10-year marathon world record holder. Ethiopian community members and leaders, University of Toronto students and administrators, and several volunteer entertainers made the event a fun filled one.

A brief opening speech by Mr. Tessema Mulugeta, President of Bikila Award and remark by Professor Michael Gervers, History and Arts Professor at U of T were made, which highlighted the background of this historic co-operation between the University of Toronto and Bikila Award and the objective of the campaign.

The unique and spectacular barefoot walk around the Varsity Stadium track was attended by 90% of those present for this event. This symbolic walk was designed to immortalize the determination and heroic act of Abebe Bikila who won the 1960 Rome Olympic Marathon barefoot and established a new world record. This expression of love and admiration for Abebe Bikila, whose 84<sup>th</sup> birthday falls on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016 gave the barefoot run a special energy and inspiration.

During the event, various and exciting running competitions for adults, youth and children were conducted in co-operation with Mr. Belaineh Densamo and other noted runners. Runners who won 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> places were awarded medals.

The most encouraging highlight of the event was the announcement and formal check presentation of generous donation of \$50,000 by the renowned Grammy Awards winner, Abel Tesfaye - The Weeknd, to this worthy cause. Bikila Award is very appreciative of this generous donation which has made the establishment of Ethiopic Studies at the University of Toronto a reality.

Traditional Ethiopian entertainers such as Sebseb Belu and Hagere Dance Group, Afrosonic entertainment, DJ Abey, DJ Eskinder, Rapper Rasselass and vocalist Rebecca Demirew as well as our hosts Kalkidan Temsgen and Gezahegn Mekonnen displayed their talents on stage which mesmerized the attendees.

Bikila Award expresses its heartfelt gratitude to all attendees, athlete Belayneh Densamo and marathon runners, volunteers, donors, entertainers, our Gold Sponsor Ethiopian Airlines, and the University of Toronto. A very special thanks to Dr. Gervers and The Weeknd - Abel Tesfaye's parents for their support to make this event a great success.

Thanks very much.