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University of Toronto and Bikila Award to host the 'Bikila Barefoot Challenge'

On Saturday August 6, 2016, the University of Toronto and Bikila Award will be co-hosting the 'Bikila Barefoot Challenge'. The family-friendly event will be held at the world-class Varsity Stadium at 299 Bloor St West, beginning at 5:00 pm.

The Bikila Barefoot Challenge is a fundraising initiative in support of the establishment of an Ethiopic Studies Program at the University of Toronto. Attendees will be invited to participate in athletic competitions and entertainment, and meet with elite runners including Belaineh Densamo - a 10-year marathon world record holder! Expected attendees include Canadian Government officials, Ethiopian community members and leaders, University of Toronto students and administrators, and running enthusiasts of all kinds.

This is part of a larger fundraising campaign that began in 2015 when University of Toronto Professor Michael Gervers pledged \$50,000 of his personal finances if the University and wider Ethiopian diaspora community would help to match and expand donations. Furthermore, we are very encouraged by the recent generous donation of \$50,000 by the renowned Grammy Awards winner, Artist Abel Tesfaye - The Weeknd, to this worthy cause. Hence over \$170,000 has been raised, which will be used to fund a course in Ge'ez (ancient Ethiopic script and language) beginning this year, which is hoped to be the beginning of a larger program in Ethiopic studies at the University of Toronto.

"This initiative is a rare opportunity and of historical significance in the discovery of Ethiopia's ancient civilizations, for the preservation of our rich culture, history and traditions", said Tessema Mulugeta, President of Bikila Award. "The benefits are enormous not only for the Ethiopian-Canadian community but also for the wider society as much has to be taught and learned about our ancestors who have made great contributions that have helped shape the very identity of modern civilizations as we know it today."

Tickets for the Barefoot Challenge can be purchased at the door. Adults are \$10, Youth (age 10-17) are \$5, and children under 10 are FREE. Athlete registration forms and further information about the event can be found online at: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/GdH6e/> .