

UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA

hereby presents

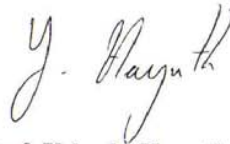
The President's Award of Merit

to

Addisu Messele

in recognition of his leadership and unceasing activity on behalf of the absorption of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel, and of his determination that this community gains full integration into Israeli society while preserving its unique cultural heritage.

15 Sivan 5758 / June 9, 1998

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Y. Hayuth".

Prof. Yehuda Hayuth

President

Addisu Messele

Born in Gondar in northern Ethiopia (1961), he completed high school and went on to study in a college. At the same time, he joined the underground that opposed the country's communist regime. In 1980, he fled Ethiopia and became one of the first Ethiopian Jews to reach Israel successfully by means of illegal immigration through Sudan.

In Israel, he studied at the Beersheva Technical College and then earned a B.A. in social work from Bar-Ilan University, after specializing in communal work. He has played an active role in helping Jews leave Ethiopia from the early 1980s. From 1984-1986, he worked for the Jewish Agency in absorbing immigrants who arrived with Operation Moses. Since 1987, he has served as chief absorption organizer for the Executive Committee of the Histadrut. With Operation Solomon (1991), he was sent to Ethiopia to help in the rescue of 14,000 Jews of that country and in bringing them to Israel in the course of twenty-four hours.

In 1983, Addisu Messele established Beta Israel, a grass-roots organization, and since 1990 he has headed the United Ethiopian Jewish Organizations, the roof organization of Ethiopian Jewry. His leadership ability, sensitivity, and sense of communal obligation were prominent when he organized a hunger strike in 1985 opposite the Chief Rabbinate building to demand that the Ethiopian community be given full recognition as Jews; and again, more recently, the demonstration opposite the Prime Minister's office protesting the spilling out of blood donated by former Ethiopians because of the purported fear of contamination. He has also represented his community in its struggle for proper treatment and full integration and often served as an emissary abroad on behalf of various governmental organizations.

His ability to resolve conflicts and straighten out complex situations, his ready involvement on behalf of Ethiopian Jewry, and his charisma are manifested in numerous communal activities as a member of the board of directors of various organizations: Public Council for Immigrant Absorption, Bahalachen-The Center for Ethiopian Jewish Heritage, steering committee of the Education of Ethiopian Children unit in the Ministry of Education, Center for Volunteerism, Unit for Advancing Culture and Art in Inner-City Neighborhoods and Development Towns, and the Sephardic Federation.

Addisu Messele, who has also been active in party politics, became the first member of the Ethiopian community to be elected to the Knesset, when he won a seat on the Labor Party list in 1996.

