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Bill 38

An Act to proclaim the month of September as Ethiopian Heritage Month

Co-sponsors:

Ms D. Begum

MPP K. Wong-Tam

Private Members' Bill

1st Reading June 2, 2025

2nd Reading

3rd Reading

Royal Assent



EXPLANATORY NOTE

The Bill proclaims the month of September in each year as Ethiopian Heritage Month.

An Act to proclaim the month of September as Ethiopian Heritage Month

Preamble

While Ethiopians began migrating to Canada as early as the 1960s, significant numbers of Ethiopians only began arriving in Canada in the mid-1980s. Currently, Canada is home to more than 40,000 Ethiopian Canadians, many of whom have made Ontario their home. In particular, the Greater Toronto Area, Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo region, London and Windsor are home to large numbers of Ethiopian Canadians.

Ethiopia is an ancient country with a rich heritage and history extending as far back as around 1250 BC. It is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual state with over 80 different languages, including Amharic, Afaan Oromo, Tigrinya, Somali, Sidama, Wolaytta, Gurage, Afar, Hadiyya, Gamo, Gedeo, Kafa, Harari, Silt'e, Agaw and Argobba.

It is the only country in Africa never to have been brought under colonial control by Western European powers in the 19th century. During Emperor Menilik II's reign, Ethiopia defeated the Italian colonial forces at the Battle of Adwa on March 2, 1896. Ethiopia is home to devotees of the three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as other indigenous beliefs. In fact, in 615 AD during the Kingdom of Aksum (100 BC to 960 AD), which was ruled by a Christian King (the Negus or Najashi), it was the nation to which the first followers of Islam fled due to prosecution in Mecca — the first migration (Hijra) of Muslims. The King granted them protection and freedom to practice their religion in peace and to establish the Al Nejashi mosque. Located in the Tigray region of Ethiopia, Al Nejashi is the first mosque in Africa, and Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha have been observed there since its establishment.

Ethiopia boasts many distinctions:

It is home to some of the oldest sites of human remains, including the famous “Lucy” or “Dinkinesh”, a 3.2 million-year-old fossil;

The Arc of the Covenant is found there, preserved in the Church of Our Lady, Mary of Zion in the city of Aksum;

It is home to one of the world's earliest illustrated Bibles, written in Ge'ez and carbon dated to between the 4th and 7th centuries;

It is the oldest independent country in Africa;

During the rule of Emperor Haile Selassie I, Ethiopia became a member of the League of Nations (the predecessor to the United Nations), initiated the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (a precursor to the African Union), which had its headquarters in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, and provided material support for the decolonization of Africa and to the Pan-Africanism movement across Africa and internationally;

It is the birthplace of coffee and the place of origin of Teff, a grain used to make the flatbread injera;

It has its own calendar system, consisting of a 13-month year, as well as its own alphabet;

A unique system for measuring time is used in Ethiopia, consisting of a daytime cycle that begins at dawn and ends at dusk and a nighttime cycle that begins at dusk and ends at dawn;

It is home to hundreds of endemic flora and fauna, such as enset (false banana), Walia Ibex (a variety of mountain goat), Mountain Nyala (a large spiral-horned antelope) and the Gelada Baboon;

Among other African countries, it is home to one of the largest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites and of practices recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage. These include Lalibela (13th century rock-hewn churches constructed during the Kingdom of Abyssinia), Aksum (monolithic obelisks and stelae), Fasil Ghebbi (a fortress dating from the 16th century), Harar Jugol (a fortified historic Muslim town built between the 13th and 16th centuries) and Tiya (a famed archaeological site dated to between the 11th and 13th centuries), many festivals such as Maskel, Fichee-Chambalaalla, Timiket (epiphany), Shuwalid, Ashenda, Ashendye, Shaday and Solel, as well as an indigenous socio-political system known as Gada and the Sof Omar Cave System, which hosts an 11th century Islamic shrine;

It is the birthplace of Captain Abebe Bikila, a member of the Ethiopian Imperial Guard and a marathon runner, who became the first Black African to win gold at the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome, Italy.

As for the month of September, it is an important month for Ethiopian Canadians as it ushers in the Ethiopian new year, Enkutatash (gift of jewels), and features significant religious, spiritual and traditional celebrations.

The celebration of Enkutatash dates back thousands of years to the time of Makeda, the Queen of Sheba. It is a vibrant and joyous holiday celebrated either on September 11th or 12th of the Ethiopian calendar. This holiday holds a great cultural significance for the people of Ethiopia and Ethiopian Canadians as it marks the season for renewing bonds and unity among family and friends, and the community at large. It is marked by the exchange of gifts and bouquets of Adey Abeba, a seasonal flowering plant native to Ethiopia, as well as the wearing of elaborate traditional clothes (habesha libs) and attending religious ceremonies. It is also marked by the performance of the traditional song, Ababayehosh, by a group of young girls, which is intended to convey gratefulness for the blessings of the past year and offer prayers for the new year.

Moreover, the festival of Maskel, recognized by UNESCO as Intangible Cultural Heritage, is celebrated across Ethiopia and in Canada either on September 27th or 28th by devotees of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church to commemorate the unearthing of the True Holy Cross of Christ.

The month of September also hosts the annual thanksgiving celebration, Irreechaa, which serves to welcome the new season of harvest following the rainy winter season and is often celebrated at sacred lakes, including at the Bishoftu's Hora Harsadii/Arsadi.

By proclaiming the month of September as Ethiopian Heritage Month, the Province of Ontario recognizes the valuable contributions that Ethiopian Canadians have made and continue to make towards Ontario's social, economic, political, religious and cultural fabric and to Canadian society at large. Ethiopian Heritage Month is an opportunity for Ethiopian Canadians to celebrate their customs, traditions and proud history and to showcase their heritage to fellow Canadians. In doing so, they help preserve this heritage for future generations. Ethiopian Heritage Month will also provide an opportunity to celebrate and create awareness of the inspirational role that Ethiopian Canadians have played and continue to play in communities across Ontario.

Therefore, His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario, enacts as follows:

Ethiopian Heritage Month

1 The month of September in each year is proclaimed as Ethiopian Heritage Month.

Commencement

2 This Act comes into force on the day it receives Royal Assent.

Short title

3 The short title of this Act is the *Ethiopian Heritage Month Act, 2025*.