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THE CROWN COUNCIL OF ETHIOPIA

HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS PRINCE ERMIAS SAHLE-SELASSIE HAILE-SELASSIE
PRESIDENT

Juneteenth and the Global Freedom Struggle

*A Statement from the Crown Council of Ethiopia
June 20, 2021 / 13 ሰኔ 2013*

The Ethiopian Crown Council applauds the passing of legislation this week to recognize Juneteenth as a Federal holiday in the United States of America, and we join the African-American diaspora in celebrating this special occasion. Juneteenth commemorates the day — June 19, 1865 — when a Union Army order first enforced the Emancipation Proclamation in the state of Texas. It has since grown into a symbol of freedom from slavery for the entire Black diaspora in the United States of America.

The story of Juneteenth is a story with close parallels to Ethiopian history. Ethiopia's emperors struggled to eradicate slavery in the nineteenth century. The Emperor Tewodros II's first attempts to end the practice in the 1850s predate those of the United States. Enforcement of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was slow, uneven, and often depended on force of arms. Likewise, under the Emperor Menelik II and the Emperor Haile Selassie I, Ethiopia's central government pushed for the abolition of slavery but encountered strong opposition from powerful regional landowners. Not until 1942 did Ethiopia enshrine abolition of slavery into law in its own form of Juneteenth.

In the following decades, Ethiopia became a world leader in the cause of freedom. Ethiopia's struggle against fascism and triumph over its invaders had inspired Africans at home and in the diaspora. As Black Americans fought the civil rights struggle in the United States, African freedom fighters turned to Ethiopia for inspiration and support in the struggle to end colonialism. We were instrumental in the creation of the Organisation of African Unity — the symbol of Africa's new-found freedom — and we are still the home of its successor, the African Union, today.

But this journey remains unfinished. Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie Haile-Selassie, President of the Crown Council, noted: "Juneteenth is the celebration of a pivotal event in human history. But a turning point is never the end of the story. Over the past year, events throughout the world have taught us that the struggle for full freedom is not yet over. As Ethiopians go to the polls this month, we pray that Ethiopia's leaders will act with the wisdom and courage necessary to give our people ever greater freedom."