



He has visited 216 countries

By Alemayehu Seife-Selassie

Professor Orhan Kural is celebrated in Istanbul, Turkey, for his enormous social activities. His anti-smoking, anti-television and green earth activist movements have earned him a well-deserved fame. Professor Orhan's name is registered in the World Guinness Book of Records for having conducted over 4,000 conferences on the protection of culture and environment all over the world. But that did not come at an easy price.

"I have been beaten and bruised from an attack caused by a few individuals who did not like my anti-cigarette speech," says the professor, pointing to a picture that shows his head wrapped in a bandage and his broken arm strapped up.

That, however, did not deter the dedicated professor from his strong activist speeches. Three days later, he had gone back on stage with the same preaching to a crowd. Professor Orhan is the head of the None-Smokers' Foundation in Turkey and he is responsible for the enactment of legislation prohibiting indoor smoking.

Today in his early 60s, the professor has visited 216 countries. Having made a trip to Ethiopia four times, he has set foot on all African countries except Sao Tome and Principe, Nigeria, Central African Republic and Angola. Countries like Ethiopia are among the beneficiaries of his peripatetic life. As a head of Turkey's Travelers' Club, the professor is obliged to make a trip to a country in group and he says that he has plans to travel with his group in his fifth trip. He adds that the Omo Valley is one of the places that he would like to visit.

"Ethiopia is a very important country in the field of culture. I would like more tourists to come to Ethiopia," the professor says, explaining why he made a trip for the fourth time. After setting foot on this East African country 10 years ago, he has made trips back to Lalibela and Gondar. On his third trip he had headed to Aksum. After his recommendation a few friends of the professor have made a trip to the country.

"I want to visit Harar to see signs of the Ottoman Empire there and the 'hyena man'. I never killed any animal and I want to see this man that feeds hyenas." Naturally, among the professor's hate list are hunters. "I gave a conference in Uganda and told the gathering that I have never killed a mosquito in my life and they were very angry at me because they know that the mosquito spreads malaria."

The professor runs a program on two television stations: Tereta Turkish and Today. He also

contributes articles to a major newspaper, Milliot, and several travel magazines. During the past decade the traveler has written various articles on Ethiopia in a dozen publications. As he was leaving here last week, he told The Reporter that he will be writing more from the notes he had scribbled down on his recent trip. "Every time I travel, I learn something; I see that millions of dollars are spent on wars where every day 22,000 people are dying from hunger and thirst." The one thing that the professor does not like is people who waste food. He has always made it his business to let the people know that there are lots of people starving and people should not be wasting food. But not often does he get a good response. "I have 22 court cases of this because I had a fight with them. I always tell people that they should finish their food on their plate. There are some people starving. And they say, 'It is not your problem. I paid the money', and I fight with them."

In the professor's book on coal, 22 presidents have written their forewords and that has also made the book registered in the World Genus Book of Records. The professor has handed out a copy of his book to be available to a library in Ethiopia.

For a traveler who has been in most parts of the world, the trip to the West is not much interesting. "I never like to travel to America and Europe; they are all the same for me. But Africa is the continent I love best. I love each country in Africa. The sun and the people here are different." Traveling around the world is a real money-consuming venture but the professor says that he has saved enough for him to see more. And partly what has contributed to his saving is his little spending habit. "I do not like fancy stuff. I am using second-hand clothes. When I go to a country I do not go there to see cigarette advertisements. I want to see how the people are preserving their culture. I hate those travelers who come here just for sunbathing. I say they should see the countryside more; they should see the people." Brought up by a teacher father and a housewife mother, he has privately taught statistics for 28 years. "I made a little money at that time. I bought small apartments and I sold some of them."

For professor Orhan, the sacrifice he has made for his passion of traveling is something he does not seem to regret. "My wife said, 'you are married with the environment and your travels.' So she left me." He reminisces on the biggest sacrifice he had to pay in 1988 to pursue his passion. Today he is enjoying his remaining life in the company of his journalist daughter. "I do not want to live long. My eye is shutting down, the doctors say. I need to get a scan for a brain tumor. But I want to die before I become a burden to others. If the end of my time has arrived, I shall die. I've changed a lot of things in Turkey. So I have no regrets."

Working on three daily conferences in Turkey, the professor says that if a single person hears his message and changes, that is a job well done. The professor is an activist against watching soccer, basketball and all the major popular sports on TV. "By watching it you lose a lot of life and gain nothing. It is like a drug," he explains.

In his travel around some poor countries, he has seen highly-paid players being worshipped and that has annoyed him. According to him, there are issues that the countries should consider solving instead of getting hooked on sport premiers. "If you are playing soccer, it is good but watching it is useless."

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When he is asked what he would take back home from Ethiopia, the professor teasingly says, “I think it was Menilik who said to the foreign visiting ministers to wash dust off their shoes when they leave the country to make sure that they do not even take a grain of sand from Ethiopia. I am not going to be taking anything back from here.”