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Scientist Kitaw Ejigu Dies at Age 58
January 13, 2006

The former NASA Chief of Spacecraft and Satellite Systems engineer and Ethiopian patriot, Kitaw Ejigu died an hour past midnight on January 13, 2005 four days after he underwent surgery at North Austin Medical Center in Austin Texas.

Engineer Kitaw, a long time resident of California traveled to Austin to visit with his extended family over the Ethiopian Christmas holiday on January 7, 2006. A devout Christian and family man, Kitaw was having fun with children when he fell and hurt himself. A team of neurosurgeons were unable to stop the internal brain hemorrhage, according to family and friends who were by his side when he passed away.

Kitaw was born in Bonga, Keffa, Ethiopia on April 23, 1948 and, attended the Miazia 27th High School in Jimma province. He then went to Bahr Dar Polytechnic Institute and received his diploma in 1966 as a top student in mechanical engineering with specialization in Agricultural Technology. After graduating from the Institute, Kitaw worked at the Ethiopian Automotive Services and Sales Company (EASSCO) as Chief Technical Advisor and Assistant Manager for two years.

In 1972 he won a scholarship from the Japanese Overseas Technical Association and traveled to Japan, where he studied automotive engineering at Hiroshima University and language and Japanese economics at Osaka University. He later moved to the United States and began his intensive research and training, and earned an MS/MBA in business administration in 1979 and doctorate in space vehicle systems engineering from Northrop University in California.

Kitaw subsequently became interested in space technology. While pursuing his academic studies, he worked for different aerospace companies, such as Garret Air Research and Advanced Bonding Technology Labs. In 1977 he was hired by the Jet Propulsion Lab (JPL) of California Institute of Technology (a NASA research center) in Pasadena, California and achieved recognition for becoming Chief Spacecraft Systems Design Engineer.

Engineer Kitaw invented two aerospace mechanisms for JPL/NASA, which were patented under NASA's new technology; Kitaw's brilliant career also included working as Space Technology and Systems Research scientist at Boeing, Rockwell

International, and Loral Corp. In that position, he was responsible for the definition, design, development, integration, test and launching of advanced planetary mission spacecrafts and earth-orbiting satellite systems. As a systems design engineer at JPL, Kitaw also managed a joint NASA/ESA (European Space Agency) International Solar Polar Mission Spacecraft Systems Interface.

In 1978, Kitaw invented two aerospace mechanisms (patented under NASA's new technologies programs) while working with other NASA scientists and the Apollo astronaut Buz Aldrin, second man to walk on the Moon. In several related advanced technology application research effort on Mars missions, Kitaw managed Martin Marietta's research team and produced outstanding scientific results.

Kitaw joined Rockwell International (builder of the space shuttle orbiter), Space Systems Division in 1986. He became a Principal Investigator/Chief Research Engineer for several advanced space systems projects at Rockwell. He worked as a Project Manager in the Advanced Programs Engineering Department. He oversaw the development of advanced technologies for Kinetic Energy Weapons Systems in support of the SDI and related programs (ASAT, GBI, E2I, TMD). Kitaw was also a program manager for a Lunar/Mars Micro-Rover research and development effort in support of NASA's future exploration missions.

Kitaw then turned his attention to Africa and his beloved Ethiopia hoping to introduce and advance technology based development. He and colleagues established global technologies service systems - TransTech International, a privately owned satellite and related systems engineering company and Kitaw served as President/CEO until he passed away.

In 2001 Kitaw visited with former Ethiopian university students who, were dismissed from the national university and took refuge in Kenya, and founded the Ethiopian National United Front (ENUF) at the urging of the students. He was incensed at the loss of young talent and brain drain menacing African states. He attempted and succeeded in enrolling and supporting some students at the University of Nairobi. Others chose to join him in the struggle for freedom and democracy and a political organization was borne. Because of his deep concern and love for his motherland Ethiopia and her people, he dedicated most of his latter years serving as a visionary leader of this major opposition party -The Ethiopian National United Front.

Among Ethiopians in and out the country, he was known for his determination to build a democratic nation by first removing the current tyrannical ethnocentric regime through multi-pronged strategies. He had earned the respect on millions of followers due to his visionary leadership, generosity, exemplary personal achievements, and serving as a mentor and inspiration for young scientists. Members and supporters of the Ethiopian National United Front are determined and sworn to dedicate their energies to complete the mission that he envisioned and defended so vigorously. He will be truly missed.

He will be most missed by his spouse and ardent supporter Stella Ejgu and his three children Sarah Abigail, Benyam and Yared and the extended families and friends that he dearly embraced.