

A Call for Unity and Cooperation among Fano Fighters

Press Statement by Prince Dr. Asfa-Wossen Asserate

Ethiopia has contributed much to the world in state-building, culture and heritage, diplomacy and international relations, the struggle for freedom, religion, and diversity in coexistence. It has been a source from which much has been learned, and it learned from the world too.

However, despite having many opportunities that could benefit other nations beyond herself, Ethiopia has been crippled by the lack of an honest and fair political system. Consequently, many of these opportunities have slipped through her fingers, and the nation is in a dire situation that is not befitting of her glorious history nor the greatness of her people.

The Derg regime, which took power from the government of Emperor Haile Selassie in the name of the "military" following the popular uprising, did not manage to transform Ethiopia into a democratic system; rather, it was overrun by social fascists and gave way to 17 years of war, mutual destruction, and immense suffering in which hundreds of thousands of citizens lost their precious life.

In May 1991, the TPLF took power over the Derg regime. Narrow nationalist forces with separatist agendas betrayed the people's demands and took over the central government. A new constitution of language and ethnicity was drafted. This framework was supposed to nurture unity in diversity, but it brought division and broke the integral fabric of the society, making Ethiopians look upon other Ethiopians as outsiders and killing each other.

And so, the democracy and good governance which the people had been looking forward fell under the grip of a few extreme nationalists. During these 30 years, Ethiopia suffered from human rights violations, instability, and misery among its people. Today, the unity of the nation is being tested more than ever before in modern times.

When the "Prosperity" government took over from the TPLF-dominated regime, a hope that change might bring better governance for the Ethiopian people began to incubate.

That hope was hijacked by a few ambitious groups who were seeking to fulfill their personal and childhood ambitions for power. This led the country into a crisis so troubling and shameful, very far removed from the people's aspirations and dreams. As the Ethiopian saying roughly translated 'I sent the bad one and brought the worse one', the country's hope further darkened.

It would not be hyperbolic to say that the destructive wars the regime of Prosperity waged against its own citizens since it assumed power have been unparalleled in scale and devastation hitherto in Ethiopia's long history. Any responsible government that loves its country and respects its people should learn from past wars, create conditions for lasting peace, and allow the people to determine their destiny in a just system.

These tasks, which involve establishing peace, justice, and the restoration of national unity, are sacred missions that any government worthy to lead Ethiopia has to assume. It is despicable to see leaders with no respect for the people, taking a nation with such a grand history as Ethiopia for their own property, as if they had the right to do whatever pleased them without any regard to rule of law, accountability, or responsibility. The top leadership of the Prosperity regime lives in a fantasy world; they jump from war to war without showing respect for the aspirations of the people who are hungry for peace and stability. They have stolen an era of political transition from Ethiopia in peace, thereby shaming the nation.

We find ourselves in this sorrowful time, where the golden opportunity once sparkling for our beloved Ethiopia and its ever-patient people was blown away by the hypocritical manipulative behavior of self-serving elites.

With the hard-earned victories that came from the struggles of our people, we failed to seize these opportunities and worse, we failed to learn from our mistakes. This has come at an expensive cost for all Ethiopians. It is sad and disheartening to know that we have fallen into the hands of one of the most inhumane and unjust systems in recent and distant history, a regime that has been out of sync with the faith, culture of solidarity, and national unity so long defined by the Ethiopian people. I feel extremely overwhelmed with feelings of national shame.

For six consecutive years under the rule of the Prosperity regime, our ancient proud country has been on a steep downward spiral unprecedented in recent times. It has devastated its citizens and deeply disturbed Africans who regarded Ethiopia as the symbol for freedom.

Innocent civilians were forcefully taken from their houses, called "migrants" in their own homeland, and then subjected to some of the most horrific violence. Such brutal killings, kidnappings, desecration, and burning of religious institutions, slaughter of fathers, and rape of mothers and children are not tales from some very distant history; rather, they constituted the painful realities we have witnessed in our lifetime under this regime. It is a heart aching and tragic truth.

Following the change led by the struggle of the people, the civil war between the TPLF and the Prosperity party, which has governed Ethiopia whimsically, has taken the lives of millions, displaced tens of thousands, and put in jeopardy the very unity and sovereignty of Ethiopia. As if that was not enough,

the Prosperity regime declared a genocide against the Amhara people and has been carrying out massacres for more than a year.

The tyrant government conducted the most barbaric war against its own civilians, unprecedented in the longest history of our nation. In these modern times, it is unthinkable even a foreign adversary would act as this regime has. It has carried out crimes of gross human rights violations, genocide and deliberate destruction of property to impoverish citizens.

The response of the heads of the prosperity regime to the basic human rights demands that the law-abiding people, subjected to multiple oppressions, presented in a peaceful way with great patience and incredible politeness, was neither positive nor appropriate. It did not suffice them not to give a good response; but the arrogant leader Abiy Ahmed's response translated roughly was

‘crying is their culture, let them be, give them some tissues to wipe their face’ displaying his blatant arrogance with neither empathy nor sense of responsibility to the people.

What the government offered as an alternative to the people was not ambiguous: to shut the door of peace and launch an all-out campaign against their existence. That was to submit and accept the cruelties of the government. The alternative left open for the Amhara people is not only the loss of rights to citizenship and human dignity in their own country but also to accept the risk of extermination of their race, as some of the Oromo extremist leaders shameless expressed in public and witnessed in action in Wollega, OR fight with all their power to protect their existence and save themselves from extermination. For the people, whose tolerance and law-abidingness were considered as fear and was subjected to multiple abuses, whose human existence was attacked because of their identity, had no better option but to continue the fight unto death even with bare hands.

The struggle of the Amara people, subjected to violence to secure its existence, cannot be oblivious to Ethiopia, which has made sacrifices for it since ancient times and has celebrated its unity and independence together with other Ethiopians. But what is beyond question is that he who arms himself and fights against the war of extermination of his race, has a natural duty and priority to safeguarding his own existence.

The fact which every well-meaning Ethiopian must grasp is that the Amhara people's struggle to save their existence is not an isolated one and has never forgotten Ethiopia, even for a moment.

Therefore, every Ethiopian who wishes and yearns for human dignity, justice, equality, freedom and national unity to prevail in the country should support and stand by the Fano patriot's struggle that carries the national emblem of Ethiopia.

The change brought about by the struggle of the Amhara people, supported by all Ethiopians, will give power to the people free from group tyranny in any form. Thus, if supported by all Ethiopians in the country and the diaspora, the struggle of the Amhara people should be considered as providing an opportunity for a transition that will lead to the establishment of a democratic-constitutional system that will make our country Ethiopia beneficial to all its citizens.

I truly believe that if we use this golden opportunity properly, the way to get Ethiopia and its people out of the mess is in our hands. That is why I respectfully ask you to stand with the oppressed Amhara people and support the Amara Fano forces who are paying a high price for the survival of the Amhara people and the unity of Ethiopia. Doing so is the way to save our country from the grave dangers that have befallen it. It is important to believe that this cause protects the future of Ethiopia, and our heritage and national unity passed on in history.

The Amhara People and the Origins of the Fano Struggle

The Amhara have played a central role throughout Ethiopian history in making it a proud, respected, sovereign and free country. Amhara people have a psychological bond built on their Ethiopian identity rather than their Amhara identity.

In the times when the Amhara was in power, at numerous periods within Ethiopian history, it made many sacrifices and contributions. The Amhara people were decisive not only in nation-building but also in spreading Ethiopia's culture, history, philosophy, architecture, and governance and political participation.

When TPLF was ousted and the reformist regime, backed by popular support, came into power; hope emerged that a culture of national reconciliation, dialogue and negotiation would prevail and the old politics of conspiracy and violence would be a thing of the past.

However, instead of correcting past misconceptions and achieving the results people hoped for, our political culture that is an alien to discussion and negotiation prevailed.

The popular struggle was hijacked for the personal ambitions of the new rulers and the people were ushered into a deeper cycle of conflict.

As a result, the nation lost its internal peace, and the entire population became victims of widespread conflict for various reasons. This perpetual effect created tremendous psychological distress and heartbreak, besides tearing apart hopes for Ethiopians aspiring to a better future. Entrenched political culture of conspiracy and power struggles does not only derail progress toward hopes raised by the regime change but tossed the country into turmoil, destroying our age-old values.

Currently, the Amhara people are facing the following real time attacks:

- diminishing the sacrifices Amharas have paid for their beloved country,
- desecrating the age-old Amhara character, value and culture of living together with other ethnic groups in peace, through intermarriage and love,
- discrediting the sacrifices Amharas paid at the beginning of this change for the sake of a brighter future
- turning a deaf ear to the peaceful and transparent appeal to stop ethnic based attacks in the Amhara and other regions while Amharas were shedding their blood to save Ethiopia

Therefore, Amharas were forced to abandon the peaceful struggle and take up arms to defend themselves.

The Amhara people have openly raised vital questions about constitutional amendments, establishment of a transitional government, resolving identity and internal boundary issues, restriction of hate speech and distorted narratives, accountability for genocide and war crimes, and political representation.

The above demands were peaceful and should have been dealt with through dialogue, open mindedness and good intent. However, these demands were met with ridicule and dismissed with a statement "the constitution will not be amended for the sake of one region". This response was intended to mock and was also an attempt to humiliate the legitimate concerns of the Amhara people.

In order to counter the government's arrogance and defend itself from ethnic based attacks, Amharas have risen up. During the last Ethiopian year, the Fano movement has won huge and unimaginable victories for the Amhara people. Its forces operate across the four Amhara Regions, managing to be effective against the military capabilities of what is considered one of the most powerful armies in the world through the use of guerrilla warfare strategies. The scope and size of Fano's victory has never been seen in the world before and has changed the balance of power.

The battle of the Amhara people, which had not been given much attention both at home and internationally, is currently in the radar of powerful nations, the United Nations, and international organizations.

The popular struggle led by the disciplined and ethical Fano leadership, has;

- Put an end to the relentless massacre of the Amhara people
- Stirred a revival of Amhara unity and resistance
- Established a just balance between the so called "it is our turn" oppressors and oppressed people
- Effectively stopped the planned and intended genocide on Amhara people,
- Become the ray of hope for the fight for the unity and freedom in Ethiopia and protecting the nation's future,
- Became a force committed to equality for all citizens that it seen with great expectation rather than a threat
- Seen as a force to correct historical wrongs,
- A force to protect the Amhara from attacks and cleanse the systemic injustice so that the voice of the Amhara is respected in the political environment of Ethiopia and,
- Establish equal participation of all ethnic groups in Ethiopia so that they have a say in determining the future of Ethiopia.

Call for Unity of Fano: Need to Surmount Internal Divisions

We understand that the current challenge of uniting all Fano Forces is sometimes inevitable and perhaps what all popular armed movements have gone through. However, the struggle is nonetheless a fight that has cost and will continue to cost the noble sacrifice of Ethiopian lives. The results that our people are anxiously waiting to see and desire depend upon unity being achieved within a short timeframe. This presents an opportunity that is critical for Ethiopia - a chance that in the past we have tragically let slip away.

We have full confidence that Fano Leaders understand the imperative need to look into the historical context and weigh the pros and cons of a move toward a realistic solution for unity based on a common cause and hope they give us a positive response to our call for unity.

History has shown that freedom fighters and the liberation movements have almost universally faced minimal resources and poor prospects of victory due to internal disputes. These divisions

often weaken the struggle and stall or delay key objectives. The historical examples are endless and among them the following may be mentioned:

- The split between Loyalists and Patriots during the American Revolutionary War
- The divisions within India's independence movement,
- The factionalism during the Vietnam War between the north and south and
- The split between the Syrian Freedom Forces and Islamic Forces during the civil war in Syria.

There were conflicts within African Freedom fighters that could be used as a learning experience. In our pursuit for Fano unity, we mustn't fall victim to the same fate that African freedom fighters who went through similar problems and failed but instead learn how they resolved their differences and became successful. The following are good examples of lessons learned:

- The Nigerian Civil War, with internal divisions in the forces of Biafra;
- The anti-apartheid movement of South Africa, with internal splits within groups like ANC and PAC;
- The Algerian War of Independence, wherein the FLN factions were internally divided;
- Ethiopia's own revolutionary struggles between 1974 and 1991;
- The Sudan Civil War's of 1955 - 1972 and 1983 – 2005;
- Internal Divisions within Ethiopian Opposition Parties for the last 27 years

All of these demonstrate that while there were conflicts, common vision and shared goals were essential to keeping the groups together and becoming successful. All these are valuable lessons that should be used in addressing internal division within Fano and achieving the needed unity.

Shared Vision and Common Goals for Working Together

The vision of the Amhara people has always emanated from a basis of national ownership and collective identity as Ethiopians. However, over time, some forces have tried to eradicate and make the Amhara identity ineffective by undermining its values, history, religion, culture, and language. This was meant to distort the legacy of the Amhara and render contributions irrelevant

However, Amharas have recently and finally been compelled to organize under the banner of our identity and fight-back against the cruel campaign to destroy us. It is impossible to regain the centuries of Amhara unity that our forefathers have built within a short time. However, a new sense of identity is unfolding that unites Amharas within the country and the diaspora under the banner of Fano. The new solidity at the front in fighting to end ethnic-based attacks and systemic injustices against Amhara peoples is something we have never seen in our history.

We have become united under Fano, with the clear and common purpose to save the Amhara people from this systematic oppression. We have risen up for securing a better future and justice for our people and halting the ongoing injustices that have been rampant for years.

Simultaneously, we have to keep in our eyes on the larger vision of working together with all other Ethiopians to bring about a democratic constitutional order that respects the integrity of the country and ensures its citizens liberty, justice, and equality.

Thus, as unity is our strength, I humbly make a citizen's call to Amhara scholars, investors, members of the diaspora, journalists, and political activists to come forward and work together for our noble cause and objective. We can overcome temporary problems ahead of us and assure a brighter future for the people of Amhara and for Ethiopia by joining our hands together in this noble initiative.

While the Amhara Fano have their own unique perceptions, strategies in embracing pluralism, and addressing their differences, now is the time to come together and develop a unified universal front. This is the only viable alternative going forward to achieve their goals.

Now, the Amhara people must quell the destructive campaign waged against them and secure their existence and assert that the Amhara people are in an institutional position capable of determining the fate of the country.

The outcome of any struggle is determined by the sum of the victories and defeats achieved over time since the beginning of the struggle and the sacrifices made. Victory is considered a true victory when it is worthy of the sacrifices that have been made and will be paid for the struggle and when the goal of the struggle is reached without overdoing it. Thus, there is no need to forget for a moment that victory is assured only when it reaches that stage.

It is important to use all our capabilities together in order to bring this golden struggle into a meaningful change, which has no second option for the Amhara people.

I call on the leaders of Fano who own the struggle: respected brothers

Eskinder Nega, Zemene Kassie, Mere Wodajo, Major Meketaw Mamo, Engineer Dessalegn Siyaseb Shewa, Major Habte Wolde, Colonel Fantahun Muhaba, and the devoted son of Amhara General Tefera Mamo

Fano leaders I haven't listed here, Fano fighters, the beneficiary of the struggle: the Amhara People

Let me call upon all Fano fighters, the entire Ethiopian people, the diaspora, media professionals, all those who are part of Fano's struggle to give more priority to cooperation and unity within the framework of the struggle of Fano. Let us establish one strong organization that has the ability to work together, hand in hand, to strengthen our position and continue the struggle by alleviating suffering from our people. It is vital that we do not let any differences and divisions polarize our struggle. Let us march forward in unity and determination to realize the vision of a better Ethiopia for all, as our forefathers rightfully envisioned.

Statement on Fano Unity and Future Cooperation

For Fano to realize its mission, the following elements are vital:

- Continue meetings and discussions between Fano leaders so that regular inter-communications are not severed;
- Setup an independent moderation committee;
- Make the support resource collection under one umbrella instead of fragmented;
- Have a unified message and coordinated statement when we request international support and cooperation;
- Establish credibility among the public and focus on the issues we agree on;
- Give the Fano leaders the opportunity to solve their issues on their own;
- Utilize religious and cultural mediation and reconciliation systems that Amara has had for centuries, values that we should strengthen and use in the future.

To this effect, I have been committed until the present to engage in constant dialogue with all Fano leaders to settle existing differences, solve logistical challenges, and impress upon them international situations and facts. As little as my contribution compared with others would be, the ideals attached remain firm in my heart.

Henceforth, I am prepared to work with all committed people who are dedicated to the freedom of the Amhara and the people of Ethiopia, to the honor and unity of our country. This is going to involve consultations with all Fano forces so that we move in the right direction towards reaching these goals.

In this Ethiopian New Year 2017, I wish victory to the fighters of justice, peace, and unity in our country and for our people.

Victory for Fano!

Victory for Amhara people!

Prince Asfa-Wossen Asserate, PhD.

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