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**View on the Formation of the Alliance for Freedom
and Democracy (AFD)**

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There is a new reason to celebrate. Something that was never expected to happen has happened. It has caused a cool, refreshing wind of change to start blowing over Ethiopia, from the west to the east, from the north to the south. As we enjoy the invigorating and gentle wind, we recognize that it comes from a new sense of unity and purpose that has been birthed with the formation of the Alliance for Freedom and Democracy, an organization made up of groups that have never before come together in such a way.

It is an unprecedented accomplishment; yet, many are asking whether such a promise for the future is to be trusted? Many wonder whether they will be included and whether it will last? Some point out its flaws and refuse to believe there are any real answers to the dilemma facing us Ethiopians, believing we are a people destined to suffering and victimhood at the hands of our leaders.

In response to the new Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD), I, Obang Metho, have received lots of phone calls and emails asking what I think of the AFD. Some ask if I think this is a way to justice for the Anuak and how it affects our advocacy work? I decided I should respond more publicly instead of individually.

First of all, I want to thank all the Ethiopians who have called or emailed. You have shown your concern for your country. Secondly, I want to congratulate the leaders who formed the Alliance. You have done something truly significant.

For all of you, I hope that after you read this statement, you will find something in it, a word or an idea, that can be shared or used to empower other Ethiopians to contribute to a better Ethiopia. I am only talking as a simple guy, an individual with my own opinion. Some of you may disagree with me, but in the free society we all want, the right of open disagreement is an important one that can lead to better ideas as we are able to dialogue with each other, perfecting each other's positions in a peaceable way.

On the day of the announcement of the formation of the Alliance, I was overjoyed as I considered it a new day for me, for the Anuak, for every individual Ethiopian and for Ethiopian communities and organizations—a new day of hope for prosperity, peace, justice and stability.

That formation is like the much-anticipated birth of a new child in a family where everyone is excited and sees the new life and the child's potential for the future. We want the best for this child so that some day, the child will grow up and contribute to the family and to the world. Like the child who is born, who starts off as a stranger, but after we name, nurture, guide and protect this child, the child becomes known to us and develops into the kind of person that we would want as part of our family. So it is with the birth of this Alliance, whose foundation are the principles of freedom, liberty and democracy that most of us value and seek. We hope its birth and development leads us to know it better and to support it in becoming more capable of promoting sustainable peace, stability, justice and the upholding of fundamental freedoms and civil liberties for all of us as laid out in its Memorandum of Understanding. We cannot argue with these principles. Instead, the question I am hearing is can this organization be trusted to deliver?

First of all, do not be surprised if you are hopeful on one hand and suspicious on the other. We Ethiopians have been so betrayed by our leaders that our ability to trust, even the trustworthy, has been severely damaged. We have been repeatedly promised much and have been repeatedly lied to so that our trust has been exploited. Therefore, do not be surprised if your fragile hope is accompanied by fear and worry that history will repeat itself.

We have been profoundly traumatized as a people and a culture and need recovery from a deeply entrenched woundedness. This woundedness and its partner, fear, darkens our outlook on most everything. We have become people who are hypervigilant of danger, expecting that it will come from anywhere, from anyone, from any ethnic group and at any moment, even if it is an imaginary threat. This suspicious outlook on life has become a way to survive under repeated trauma. Yet, it also becomes a controlling factor that dysfunctionally enslaves us in our fear. Yet, who can blame us? It has been our experience, but if we generalize our fear to every attempt for positive change, we disable our ability as Ethiopians to find our way out of the mess we are in.

I am not saying that we should turn off our minds, because our minds are critical to us in evaluating truth from lie, but we must realize how much a legacy of betrayal and oppression has caused us to reject and undermine the best attempts to bring about freedom and democracy. We cannot afford to lose an important opportunity that could provide the road to unity and freedom on which everyone is invited to travel. Because of its multiple members and openness to all, the Alliance has an internal mechanism of checks and balances to which it will be held accountable. I am thrilled with its formation and believe the Alliance is an organization that deserves our support and encouragement.

However, we must recognize that like in raising a child, there will be obstacles to overcome along the way. Some of them will be minor, but others more life-threatening. Yet, to accomplish our goals for our child, we must be willing to work hard to correct any problems that our child might demonstrate until our child "grows up" to be the kind of person for which we had hoped. Just like the Alliance may not perfectly reflect your desires at this time, neither are our children born without some imperfections and a need for correction along the way. Our children and this Alliance must be helped through these times and obstacles. As with our child, we must be patient until that child becomes an adult who can responsibly raise the children of the next generation.

The reason I am saying this is because I have heard that some are saying that parts of the Alliance are good and some parts are not. I want to remind you that like an infant, if something is imperfect with your child, we do not reject and discard our child, but instead we devote ourselves to help him or her become the best person possible.

This point is meant to help Ethiopians who are thinking that this organization should be born perfect and complete, to understand that this is an impossible dream. This is because we human beings are

imperfect—only God is perfect. Therefore, any human organization is made up of us imperfect people who can only attempt to do it “right.” Because of this, the Alliance needs time to develop, just like the infant who cannot feed itself, this organization is in the fragile state of formation and must be protected and nurtured like the newly planted crop that must be watered and cared for if it is going to yield an abundant harvest. Its harvest may be one of the best ever in the history of Ethiopia as it offers something that comes from the hearts and souls of people who are being transformed internally into people more willing to reach out to others.

The leaders of this Alliance appear to be committed and sincere to upholding the highest of principles. Their willingness to come together is exemplary, but of course, as the Alliance implements these values, their credibility will increase. Yet, we must support and help them as they will face many challenges, as it becomes the first organization of its kind at a very critical time in our history.

The Alliance is not a political organization in the usual sense of the word, but an organization that promotes the very right and freedom to have political organizations with differing agendas and representation. It is based on values that are life-giving rather than life-taking. It proposes a completely different mindset than the one of hatred based ethnic division that has been defeating us all.

Yet, we should not only unify against something, like the EPRDF, as it is only the basis for short-lived unity. Instead, long-lasting unity is found in joining together around principles that build up people, families and societies—principles built on God established truths of the way we individuals should behave in this world in relation to God and to others. As we live out these transformational truths in our own lives, others may join until our country may be one that goes through a national transformation starting in the individual hearts of its citizens.

I am saying to you that the formation of this Alliance is a sign that this transformation has started. It is a sign that Ethiopians are willing to work together to be in the same country and to be part of the same family. It is a sign that Ethiopians are willing to not separate from the country, but to come together. I am taking this day when the Alliance was signed, when these six groups joined together as one, as a momentous indication of the new fresh wind over Ethiopia. It is immensely significant that individual groups became willing to give up some of the things that were meaningful to each of them. They did this for the sake of Ethiopia and for the future generations of our country. The spirit of compromise was present, as the foundational principles of freedom and democracy were held supreme.

For example, no one ever thought that the OLF would join together with the CUD. Some never thought that those in the ONLF would join in with the rest, yet they and the others are showing that Ethiopians are Ethiopians whether from the north or south, the east or west. These groups are showing that Ethiopians are ready for tolerance, acceptance and the inclusion of all ethnic groups.

They have shown their willingness to compromise as an important means to do it. I am taking this as a victory and the first big step towards justice, freedom and a peaceful Ethiopia where everyone will be able to live their lives without the fear of oppression and terrorization by one’s own government.

Most of us know that the formation of the Alliance is a cause to celebrate; a shared celebration that we have heard was going on in the cities, towns and villages throughout Ethiopia when people danced in the streets after it was announced. It was recognized as the only way to bring this government to its knees and to offer hope for possible release for those leaders and others imprisoned for speaking up against injustice and oppression. This is a sign that the window of dialogue will be opened. It is a sign to the Western countries that did not help, claiming that Ethiopians were too hopelessly divided against each other to offer a better alternative to the current government.

More significantly, this formation is shaking the ground underneath the EPRDF and for the first time, we are hearing the words, “dialogue” and “negotiation” coming from them. Some are reporting that the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has approached what they consider to be their more “sympathetic friends” in an attempt to demonstrate a new willingness to talk with the opposition groups. However, for those of us well-acquainted with the tactics of this government, it appears to be a strategy to find a last resort means to hang on to a disintegrating hold on power that has been largely perpetuated by sabotaging our unity. To such a government, the formation of the Alliance is a most ominous development; yet to most Ethiopians, it is a reason to dance in the streets.

Yet, like a shooting star that we love to watch in its quick display of power before its light goes out forever, let us support the Alliance in such a way that its light is sustained and burns brightly. We should pray for the leaders and others who will join that they be equipped with the vision, wisdom, talent, energy and spirit that leads to the accomplishment of the worthy goals and objectives as set out in its **Memorandum of Understanding for Freedom and Democracy in Ethiopia**.

Think of what Ethiopians have already done to bring this formation about. They have not done it alone. Since last year’s election, you might not realize how Ethiopians everywhere have contributed to this day. No other African country or group in the Diaspora have continued to demonstrate for these values and have raised up these issues in every Western capital more than Ethiopians have done.

To those back home, they have done what they could, even if it has meant losing their lives or freedom. I would like to extend my thanks to every Ethiopian who has contributed to this cause, some without knowing it. To name a few I include the people in civil, churches or community organizations who have written letters, phoned friends to join a rally or who have given others rides to the rally. Others of you have contributed money to the cause or have made others around you more aware. Some have raised support for the families of those in prison or have prayed for those who have lost loved ones or for God’s help to bring about justice.

Many of you do not realize what you have done and how you have contributed to this day. If you are one of these individuals, be grateful and proud that you have been able to help. Call or email someone else who has helped in some ways, regardless of how small the contribution, because together, it all adds up to this accomplishment.

More than anything, thank God that He hears the prayers of the humble and the suffering of this world. This world will not change unless we do our part and it must begin by a transformation that starts in our hearts. God makes us into His new creation when we turn to Him. He then asks us to trust Him as He empowers us to become different people. Ethiopia needs the transformation that only comes from many of us surrendering to God and His plan for our lives. This country will not change unless we do. That is why I am calling on you to do more.

Peace and justice cannot come by itself. Right now, the Alliance is the result of the winds of change that many of you contributed towards. Do what you can to pray for the Alliance, to encourage and support them as they stand for all Ethiopians working together to bring peace and stability to our land. No one ethnic group can bring the needed change—we need each other.

The Anuak in prison are convinced that justice will not come for them under this regime. The same is being said in other parts of Ethiopia. Four thousand Anuak refugees will not return to Ethiopia until safety is assured. Again, they are convinced it will not happen under this regime.

Two days ago, two Anuak men were shot dead by Ethiopian Defense troops in Gambella town and no one was arrested, even though there were witnesses present during the shooting. Such flagrant disregard for

the law even in front of witnesses shows the atmosphere of impunity that the EPRDF is grounded on. We know that the justice the Anuak and others in Ethiopia are looking for will not come through the same people committing these injustices.

Ironically, the silver bullet against this regime is unity and empowering each other. It is giving acceptance and inclusion to minority groups with no voice. It is caring about others instead of robbing others of their legitimate rights. The regime's ammunition of division has been like a life-threatening disease, infecting the bloodstream of the body of Ethiopians. But, God has given us a medication that not only cures the disease, but restores robust health. That medication is genuine unity, based on principles that values all human life, my own and that of others like or unlike me. As the medication reaches all our extremities, be thankful and encouraged that the dying have been brought back to life.

Do not be negative and critical, but be part of the solution. Expect that the 70 million people of Ethiopia may have different political agendas and needs, but yet human beings by nature, crave freedom. There will be a time to form political agendas only if real freedom and democracy exists. In the meantime, we need a watchdog, made up of all groups, to uphold these values. The Alliance may be that watchdog.

For example, there are people who say that the Alliance should not be chaired by an Oromo, but someone must lead it and most likely, it may be someone outside our own group. Also, some want their own language to be included, but in a country of over 80 dialects, we cannot include every language.

I am hearing rumors that some believe Eritrea has provided support for the formation of the Alliance and may have a hidden agenda. Regardless, this organization is not run by Eritreans, but by fellow Ethiopians. Even the CUD, who most of us believe received the majority of actual votes from Ethiopians during the last election, have joined the Alliance, believing that it is a valuable means to freedom and democracy for all. I do not think the CUD would join if such a hidden agenda that they previously opposed, was included in its formation.

Instead of letting rumors fuel our fears, let us actively hold the Alliance accountable to their goals and principles upon which they were formed while at the same time, we put aside our prejudices and any destructive suspiciousness that can destroy this first significant step to a freer Ethiopia. Unity is our most effective medication against our disease that ails us. This does not just mean including the top 3, 4 or 10 ethnic groups, but every ethnic group in Ethiopia must join together, as we all are part of the path to our liberation.

As long as some are not free and are victims of human rights abuses, we are not free. Do your part to change your world for the better. Remember, a slave is someone who is waiting for somebody else to free him, even while complaining about being a slave. We should understand that we have to do our best to free ourselves and that we cannot do it alone. We must join together.

The duty of the leaders of the Alliance right now is a great one and I call on you leaders to seek God's help in guiding you to do your job well. Right now, you must reach out in every direction and engage the people of every different background. You must communicate in every way possible about who you are and what you are about. Demonstrate your principles by reaching out to those who may be suspicious—to those who may be in disagreement.

Come forward and show us Ethiopians what you have and listen closely to our responses. Be willing to listen to suggestions, criticism and even insults as you will be perfected and held accountable in a way that will lead to the betterment of the Alliance and ultimately to all of us Ethiopians if you do. Engage with the people, unlike someone like Meles who said he was for the people, yet never stepped foot in

Gambella or other places throughout Ethiopia. Stand up for the great principles of truth, like Ana Gomez who spoke the truth, despite becoming attacked by the EPRDF for saying it.

I challenge the leaders of the Alliance to well represent and carefully protect the interests of the 77 million Ethiopian people for whom you say you have been formed. You may be the founding fathers and mothers that help bring about true democracy in Ethiopia that is reflected in real liberty, justice, equality, and freedom of expression. What you do must reflect the interests of the Ethiopian people.

Handle this responsibility with great humility, diligence and care. These 77 million people are watching you to make sure you become who you say you are—that you stand up for the well-being of all, including the most disenfranchised. Once a climate of freedom exists, it will open up the way for political parties to elect the people they want as their leaders. These leaders then can work towards the universal availability of education, health care, women’s rights, environmental protection and a free-market economy.

The leaders of the Alliance may be called upon to negotiate with the government. I am not opposed to this, but those of you leaders must consult with Ethiopians and be extremely careful because the government knows its position is precarious with the birth of the Alliance, making them more open to dialogue, but not necessarily more open to actually giving up power and becoming accountable for its crimes, corruption and atrocities.

Consider the advice found in Psalms 94: 20-22:

Can a corrupt throne be allied with you—one that brings on misery by its decrees?
They band together against the righteous and condemn the innocent to death.
But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge.

Leaders of the Alliance, as you soberly view the task ahead, seek God’s help. As the Psalmist writes in an earlier verse (Psalms 94: 18-19):

When I said, “My foot is slipping, your love, O LORD, supported me.
When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul.”

Know that there will be mountains and valleys to this journey. As you reach out to people on the way, learn from them and do not depart from your passion for upholding what is right and good. Know that your journey is not alone, but that the memory of the lives of many who have been sacrificed, including the Anuak and student protesters, are constantly at your side. Appreciate how many Ethiopians have contributed to this opportunity and know that it not only to your credit, but is the answer to the prayers and efforts of many that have prepared the road ahead. Do not misuse your positions or be diverted from your mission and task. Be reminded that the work ahead is not for your own benefit, but for the benefit of those you serve—the people of Ethiopia. You must be servant leaders.

As authentic examples of such servant leadership, you could lead not only Ethiopia, but all of Africa to by a truly “new breed of leadership!” Meles was called this kind of leader, but never lived it out in his actions, deceiving many outside the country. Instead, if you truly live out the actions of being a servant of the people, you may be remembered as a true African who de-colonized Africa from the vampire African leaders who live on the blood of fellow Africans. These are the old breed of leaders. Be a new kind of leader.

When the Day finally arrives when freedom and democracy come to Ethiopia, many will thank God while being able to share in joyful singing and dancing as true contributors to this accomplishment. You and each and every Ethiopian will be like the rays from the rising sun over our beloved land of Ethiopia that illuminate the land with a new brightness that allows every Ethiopian from every ethnic group and

background to see their surroundings as never before and to find their way out of their darkness and silence.

At that time, the child will have been raised, not only by one or two parents, but also by 77 million Ethiopians who have had a share in nurturing, protecting, disciplining and then feeling the pride that comes from seeing that the adult child they invested in has become even more than the child of our hopes and dreams.

My honorable leaders of the Alliance and fellow Ethiopians, let us take this job ahead of us very seriously. The cool and refreshing wind of change is blowing. The momentum has begun. Do not lose the opportunity before us. If we fail to do all we can or if we tear down the efforts of others, we are giving more years to the EPRDF and we all know that it would mean more killing, more injustice and more suffering. We must do our best to join the effort—we may not have a second chance!