



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

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**Encourages and Challenges the AFD
To Move Ahead with Swift Action**

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When the Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (AFD) was first formed, I endorsed the efforts of this group. The AFD was like the cotton white cloud in the sky over the sun-parched landscape of Ethiopia that gave us hope that more clouds would join until life-giving rains might soak the land and restore its life. I saw diverse Ethiopian groups unifying around the great principles of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. However, since that first cloud appeared in May of this year, attracting some others to it, the rain has not come. The AFD is on the top of everyone's list as the important topic of the day, but what is hampering its progress? Where is our rain?

Originally, I talked about the formation of the AFD being like the birth of a baby and cautioned that they needed time to develop. I am still agreeing with the AFD and am in support of it but I have been waiting to see its stated goals for the short and long term. I have seen no evidence of them yet.

We Ethiopians need further discussion and clarification with and from the AFD in order to become fully engaged. Because of this, the purpose of this article is to encourage and challenge the AFD to address some of the issues more openly so we other Ethiopians may join in on the effort. This joining together is like a life-giving rain that soaks down into the soil to water the roots. It does not come from a small solitary cloud, but emerges from many thick clouds coming together. Let our ideas come together like this so we are able to find meaningful and concrete solutions to the creation of a better future for Ethiopia. I would encourage the AFD, as one of the first clouds in the sky, to forge ahead in promoting others to join in with their great idea and vision, remaining open and flexible to examining the best possible ways to bring this all about.

As you may already know, I am not an analyst or a political leader. Even though I say this at most every public speaking engagement, I am still hearing that people think I am a member of the CUD, the UEDF, a Gambella political party, but in truth, I do not belong to any of these. If I were to be a member of a political group, I would not hide it, but would make it public.

Some people say I am pro-Anuak, pro-Amhara, pro-Oromo, or pro some other group. Some people say I am pro-AFD. The truth is that I am pro all of them. In actuality, I am pro-Ethiopian, pro-justice, pro-freedom and pro-democracy because I am for any organization that is working for the betterment of Ethiopia.

Most of all I am a human rights defender because I want to see a government, civic organizations and institutions that respect the full rights of every Ethiopian. I have been committed to this ever since the massacre of the Anuak people began on December 13, 2003 in Gambella, Ethiopia. I hope to eventually leave this work when we finally have a government that will uphold these principles.

Unfortunately, in the last weeks, we have received numerous new reports of human rights abuses, atrocities and the killing of many more Anuak in the Gambella region of Ethiopia. Instead of improving, the situation is worsening in the rural areas. So far in the month of July alone, twenty-one more Anuak have been killed. This amounts to losing one more Anuak life almost every day. Many of these are young Anuak men and women whose futures have been mercilessly robbed from them by the cold-blooded military agents of the EPRDF. This situation is intolerable! I am convinced that the same thing is going on across Ethiopia, especially in the rural areas of such places as the Ogaden, Sidamo, Oromia and in the Amhara region.

This EPRDF government policy must be stopped. However, the Anuak cannot do it alone. It appears to me that for justice to be achieved, we must not see the suffering simply from our own ethnic viewpoint, but instead see it as a fundamental characteristic of the EPRDF government that we must all confront together. Previously, the OLF (Oromo), ONLF (Ogaden), the Anuak and others were working on their own causes, but many of us have discovered that together, we can do much more. We must care about bringing relief to each other's groups as well as to our own. In fact, I believe each of us needs to see our own humanity so connected to one another's that we are not content until our government stops these abuses to any of our fellow Ethiopians.

This includes the release of our democratically elected political leaders who could have chosen to not stand up for the people or to go into political exile. Instead, they are suffering today in rat-infested, unsanitary conditions. These conditions are seriously affecting their health and are unacceptable under international human rights standards.

The AFD has offered us hope that we could work together towards ending these kinds of human rights abuses in Ethiopia. They have created a vision that has captured the imagination of the Ethiopian people and they have inspired us by coming together with a demonstration of unity. However, we now must see some of this vision come to life. With the constant reports of new casualties coming from the people on the ground in Gambella, I want to voice my concerns that we must move ahead quickly or many more will be killed even while the international community and those in the Ethiopian Diaspora may be directing their attention elsewhere.

In the last weeks, the tensions in the Middle East have erupted and the attention of the world has been directed towards Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Iran. Some attention has gone to the war breaking out between Ethiopia and Somalia. These are signs of how fragile the world's situation has become and how one event can impact another or simply divert attention away from the first event.

Even more disturbing is the possibility that Meles Zenawi has taken these actions to advance his own political interests. It is believed by many that he would do anything to hang onto his power, even sending Ethiopians to die in Somalia for a war that is not really understandable to the families of these soldiers and to the Ethiopian people.

The existence of terrorists in Somalia is real and of concern, but Meles seems to be using it for his own interests and may worsen the situation rather than help it. He may be motivated by wanting to ingratiate himself to the west, hoping to secure more money from the US government, supposedly to fight the War on Terror. In addition, as Somalis rally against all Ethiopians, he can attempt to gain the support of the people they see the pictures of Somalis in Somali, burning the Ethiopian flag.

The real question is, how can Meles think he could bring stability to Somalia when his own country is so unstable? How can he continue to put so much financing into the military when his own country has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world? What the Somali people do not understand is that Meles does not have the support of the Ethiopian people. Now, reports are emerging that Eritrea is going to supply Somalia with arms in order to carry out a “Cold War” type conflict with Ethiopia on Somali soil. What a potential mess—and at the expense of many lives. However, it and other matters are taking some of the world’s attention away from the deepening rift between the EPRDF government and the people of Ethiopia.

Within the last three weeks we have seen smiling faces of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi with former President Bill Clinton and again with Paul Wolfowitz, the head of the World Bank. It gives one the perception that “things are good again” in Ethiopia, portraying a “good government,” but we know differently. While Meles was laughing and smiling, Ethiopian defense troops were torturing, arresting and killing civilian Ethiopian citizens. This disjointed reality is enough to make one crazy!

Yet, it shows what denial of the truth and delaying information and resolution will do to the attention levels of most people—they tend to forget and move on to the next “event.” Paul Wolfowitz talked strongly about democracy, but did not attempt to visit the democratically elected prisoners in Kaliti prison. Clinton completely avoided the topic, at least in public. Human rights abuses, the imprisonment of the opposition leaders and thousands more prisoners of conscience, government corruption and media censorship were taboo subjects and treated as “non-reality.”

Just this past week I was in Washington D.C. when I was told that Meles had sent someone from Ethiopia to convince the United States Congress that there were no political prisoners in all of Ethiopia. How absurd is this? How absurd is it that Meles and company actually think that others could be convinced of it? It is like the old Ethiopian proverb in Amharic: “**Lekebariew Aredut**” meaning “Informing the gravedigger who buried the dead person that the person is dead”. We Ethiopians already know the facts! We know because we have family, friends and leaders who are political prisoners. There is no question about it! We are like the person who buried the dead man.

After extensive human rights reports, a hearing on the issue and other testimony, most in Congress also know that there are thousands of political prisoners! Again, this is a crazy-making attempt on the part of the Meles government to promote an illusion as reality and discarding reality as an illusion! Any participants in this “game” must stop playing because lives are being lost because of it.

I ask myself how long I will need to endure getting calls at all hours about another Anuak being beaten to death, arrested for no reason, shot dead or disappearing while these public smiles and handshakes create the illusion of a different Ethiopia than what we Ethiopians are experiencing.

Many have spoken out about the pros and cons of the Alliance itself, but most everyone wants the AFD, or something like the AFD, to succeed. Most recognize that it is a step in the right direction as disunity is a great threat to the future of Ethiopia. The formation of the AFD has the potential of bridging any transitions of government, but only if the AFD is able to effectively represent national interests and to respond to the public’s important questions with satisfactory answers.

For example, since the formation of the Alliance, some who originally supported the idea, are pulling out because they are becoming more suspicious because some of the basic questions have not been answered. The Alliance should not be afraid to answer these questions or to admit they do not have the answers yet.

Another major obstacle is one of simple practicality. We are hearing many opinions about the AFD that are posted on the Internet and elsewhere, but if one were to prefer communicating directly to the AFD, how would it be done? The AFD currently has no website, no e-mail address, no phone number and no office address.

If those outside the organization wanted to contact the AFD, who would they call? In other words, who are the members and who is in what role? How can they be reached?

Who is in authority and how are decisions to be made?

What are the requirements for membership and how would a person and his/her organization join?

If one simply wanted to advise, caution or encourage, are such suggestions, criticisms and feedback desired and how would they be utilized?

Is anyone working fulltime on developing the organization or are those in leadership attempting to accomplish the huge tasks involved while holding down other jobs and having other responsibilities?

How much funding does the AFD have and do they have what is needed to meet the challenges of launching such a large undertaking? What are their goals, objectives and strategies for accomplishing them? What kind of help do they need to accomplish these goals?

Will they be calling a forum or conference and if so—when? Do they need others to take responsibility for various aspects? What are they?

How will they communicate with the public in Ethiopia because these are the people who are at the center of the concern?

Others of you may have many other questions, as these are only the beginning questions. More serious questions pertain to concerns with what kind of Ethiopia is envisioned and how do we attain it. Answers to these questions require a sophisticated level of understanding in order to think through the various alternatives and to come up with a domestic and foreign policy strategic plan. We also must think about setting up adequate provisions so there is a system of checks and balances of power so the structure is put in place to maintain accountability for those in power?

Other questions include such things as examining what Ethiopia's relationship will be to others in the international community. Currently, no one, including the AFD, has any tangible plan to present to other countries regarding what kind of foreign relationship policy is potentially envisioned between Ethiopia and Western countries such as the US, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom and others. What will Ethiopia's foreign policy look like in terms of these countries and will these policies support the ongoing relationship between each other to the benefit of both parties?

In addition, what will Ethiopia's foreign policy look like in relationship to other countries in the Horn of Africa, in greater Africa, the Middle East, China, India, Japan and other Asian countries? Like it or not, if Ethiopia wants to enter into the world market, Ethiopians must become more global in their thinking, as the world has become very interconnected.

Even if we do not agree with the governments of every country, we sometimes must work with them. For instance, in order to help resolve the crisis in the Middle East, all the parties must be included in the effort—Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Iran. Thought must go into the development of a foreign policy action plan. Meles has one and it is definitely superior to not having one at all.

The same goes for a domestic action plan. How do we envision a free, prosperous and peaceful Ethiopia? The AFD has been seen as a means to accomplish the transitioning of Ethiopia towards becoming a more democratic government and then handing it over to the people and the political parties for free elections; however, how will this be done?

What kind of Ethiopia do we really want? Do we want a melting pot society like the United States where we speak one language and identify as Ethiopians while appreciating differences? Or, do we want something more multi-ethnic where we have multiple languages like Canada and Switzerland, and encourage multi-cultural expression in every aspect of our functioning? How will these choices affect our participation in a global market? How could it affect our academic institutions, scientific research, social institutions, health care and our general access to opportunities in the world? Would it promote or decrease the exodus of our educated citizens to other countries? The world is not the same and we need to think about what we want to preserve and what adaptations may be worthwhile for us as a society. We must think through our decisions, as they will impact our future.

Yet, as we reflect on these questions, many Ethiopians react with strong suspicion. Much of this suspicion may be attributed to living through the oppression of the last thirty or more years when our leaders exploited and manipulated us. We may be rightly concerned about the authenticity of prospective leaders and movements. Suspicions are strong amongst Ethiopians after the trauma of living in such a dysfunctional system, but what can the AFD do to rebuild the confidence of Ethiopians?

These suspicions go way back historically to the overthrow of the empire of Haile Selassie and are deeply entrenched in our thinking. Mengistu promised he was on the side of the people, but he never carried out his promises even though he had gained the initial support of the people. Instead, he abandoned the people and neglected their needs, becoming a tyrannical leader who killed thousands of people. He mismanaged the system so totally that it even compounded the problems caused by the drought, causing many more Ethiopians to die of starvation and many more to be displaced. Following this, the country fell into a civil war.

When he was overthrown, Meles Zenawi, the new Prime Minister, promised to bring freedom, justice, the rule of law, democracy, development and regional autonomy, like found in the United States and in Canada, to Ethiopia. Ethiopians joined him and believed that he would follow through, but instead, people are now saying he is another Mengistu and some even say he is worse.

No wonder people are suspicious. Like a dog that has been kicked by its owner, it may not come close to its owner the next time around. People are the same. Those who have experienced this series of betrayals, have reason to be wary and suspicious. Part of that caution is good in that it will warn us to avoid potential leaders who are simply duplicates of what we have already painfully experienced and rejected, but who attempt to hide their real agendas behind updated rhetoric.

Those who are part of these previous regimes, should not be burdened down by the weight of the old baggage they may still be carrying from being part of the old systems. The world has changed and they may also be seeing things differently. For them to move easily and to move forward, they may have to leave that baggage behind and start a new beginning. They may find that they will be able to walk faster and more easily. Because of all these issues from the past that are affecting us now, I suggest that the AFD address them right away as the longer they wait, the more suspiciousness will increase and it will make it much more difficult. On the other hand, as the AFD tackles these issues, they may find increasing support. The concern is that the EPRDF is now actively working against the AFD and others of us in the Diaspora, which can make it more challenging.

In fact, reportedly, the EPRDF has issued a 52-page directive as to how to silence the Ethiopians in the Diaspora. They also have been said to have hired consultants at \$50,000 per month who would lobby for the defeat of the Congressional House Bill # 5680, and Human Rights and Democratic Freedom in Ethiopia which, by the way, is not going to solve all our problems, but is just part of the solution. Regardless, this effort to destroy this bill by the EPRDF would not be necessary if they were not worried about what we in the Diaspora are accomplishing.

But, at this point, but we must not split up or ease up on our efforts as we cannot afford division or to relax our efforts. Division, such as within our political parties, in itself, will turn our energies inward rather than outward towards solving our crisis. Instead, we must “flesh out” the vision of the AFD! The shape of the AFD may change dramatically in this process and this is okay if it is for the better.

The majority of Ethiopians want this to become a true reality for all Ethiopians, but more must be done and we are in a position to do it being that Meles is thousands of miles away from Washington D.C. while the capital city of the United States has more Ethiopians living there than anywhere else outside of Ethiopia! In fact, Ethiopians are in a position to raise more money to hire our own lobbyists and pay more money than is Meles paying.

Another problem is that fantastic ideas can be advanced, but sometimes no one is available to develop them. In other words, it takes much time and money to set up an infrastructure for an organization like the AFD for it to be able to function legitimately and effectively. Does the AFD have such time and resources or should we as Ethiopians start looking for the way to make this possible? Practically speaking, we probably need the combined effort of many in order to develop, perfect and implement such a grand, but I believe attainable, goal.

The fear is that if the momentum is lost, hopes dashed may set us back further. So, the question we Ethiopians should ask the AFD is, how can we all help make the movement towards freedom, democracy and the rule of law in Ethiopia succeed? How can we build on the vision of the AFD so it reflects the broader interests of Ethiopians and is fully implemented?

One of the main conditions of success is to productively engage the assistance of others in the process. Not everyone has the same gifts and abilities. We need to use people where they can be most useful.

The leaders of the AFD have shown themselves to be visionaries. They were able to see what initially needed to happen in Ethiopia and to mobilize groups to come together in ways never accomplished before in our lifetime.

In addition to visionaries, we also need people who can encourage, critique and implement. The AFD should call on those who are expert in evaluating and critiquing. Those who can find the strengths and the weaknesses of their proposal can improve the final product before costly mistakes are made or before the project is sabotaged or fails because of these flaws.

Following that, experts are needed in organization and implementation as frequently, people who can envision a plan, might not be the best in practically carrying it out. We need to identify the experts in these areas and organize a way to utilize their expertise. We need experts in such areas as in:

- Setting up an organization
- Setting up an office
- Clarifying/writing goals
- Developing strategies to accomplish the goals
- Communicating goals
- Receiving and responding to input/questions from the public
- Developing by-laws (eg. How are decisions made? Who can be a member? What are the expectations of members? How is power shared? How can the organization protect the goals like Ethiopian national interests rather than ethnic interests, from those who may have hidden and destructive agendas? How is money used and who decides? etc.)
- Reaching out to other people/experts/groups/government officials and NGO's
- Setting up a forum/conference
- Maintaining proper accounting for expenses/funds
- Troubleshooting
- ETC

Very importantly, I contend that an absence of any concrete domestic and foreign policy plan for our future is the primary impediment to gaining the support of the international community and the support of our own people. It is of critical importance that what we come up is so far superior to what we now have, or what Meles can offer, that it convinces Ethiopians and the international community to join together in the effort. Now, we have no plan. I think the EPRDF government of Prime Minister Meles has shown its brutal and tyrannical nature to the world and no longer is it a secret, but what is now needed is a strong, well thought through plan for domestic and foreign policy that effectively competes with Meles's plan.

Second to developing such a plan for a more democratic and just government, the process of getting there is important. Most of us want such a transition to a better government to be accomplished in an orderly way, avoiding more bloodshed and chaos. The worst-case scenario would be ethnic and political infighting that spirals downwards into anarchy. Because of this, now is the time to pro-actively work towards a more cooperative transformation of our country into one where free elections are really free, where the media can truly speak out, where terrorism of the people by the government is not tolerated and where maintaining the rule of law and human rights applies equally to everyone, including the prime minister and those in top positions in the military and in the government. A plan must include a foreign policy strategy that details clearly how any new government would interact with the West, especially the US Government in its War on Terror.

We must come up with a better strategy for the War on Terror and present this to the US as superior to the current one. In addition, thought must be given to policies that would apply to the economy, human rights, terrorism, security issues, health and HIV-AIDS, education, the judicial system, freedom of the press, corruption, environment, resource development and allocation and so on. As progress towards these goals is realized, we Ethiopians may find that those in the international community may more strongly support the effort, but it is first and foremost, our job.

The US has been a partner with Ethiopia in the War on Terror. This is something that most Ethiopians also support and that the AFD should include in its plan. We must take a stand against terrorism in the world and be willing to join with others in the world who believe in the rule of law and the value of human life and liberty. This is what we are fighting for in our own country.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi says it with his lips, but in practice, we all know that it does not apply to the people of Ethiopia. A government that respects its own people as deserving of life and liberty is in a far better position to join together with others to fight the War on Terror with the goal of advancing peace and justice in the world.

Joining in with those who impose tyranny on their own people is like partnering with sheep in wolves clothing, as the Biblical passage warns.¹ The sheep follow you around for a while, but when you are not looking, you can be attacked. These kinds of partnerships are fickle and changeable on a moment's notice. There is an undercurrent of sabotage and destruction working against the spoken values. Your supposed friends can suddenly become bullies or enemies. Instead, forming partnerships with those who not only speak the language of democracy, but also carry it out without excuses, are the kinds of partnerships worth having. Can we be those kinds of partners? How can we ensure that we are?

The burden, which could also be seen as a privilege, of the AFD is to provide a framework for all of this to happen. They do not need to come up with all the details, but to instead organize and promote the formation of the process. Some may not join together with the AFD because they are not yet convinced that what is being offered is any better than what we now have. Some may worry that the AFD's current members have advanced secessionist agendas in the past and believe if this remains the case that Ethiopia may disintegrate into something worse. A strong objection has been the lack of clarification on issues related to secessionist agendas of AFD party members. The AFD and others must be open to ways to perfect, clarify, strengthen and effectively implement a plan so that a better, more just, more tolerant, more secure, more unified and more prosperous Ethiopia is made possible. As these goals are accomplished, the reasons for wanting to secede may evaporate and become "non-issues."

Some say the Constitution has been poisoned by ethnic federalism—something that has been used to promote great division between the people to the benefit of the EPRDF who have appeared to use it to maintain power and control. As a result, fundamental changes in the Constitution may be required so as to mend the damage and to prevent further problems. As the rights of all citizens are upheld in reality, not just on paper or in public rhetoric, it may be immensely more advantageous to Ethiopians to remain Ethiopians. The country itself is neutral ground that is changed for good or for bad by its government and its people. We have an important opportunity to make an Ethiopia of which we can be proud.

For now, working together promotes an awareness of each other's needs and relationships that can keep us more accountable to each other. Living out such unity by looking out not only for our own interests, but for the interests of other Ethiopians as well, will help us develop the best and most durable solutions to the present corrupt and tyrannical government of the EPRDF. Therefore, even if some groups and individuals chose not to initially join in the effort, the AFD should reach out again to such groups, offering a way to structure a dialogue where differences can be addressed and where such discussion creates better solutions. In addition, that discussion should include those bright intellectuals and thinkers and those proficient in organization and practical implementation, all of whom we need in order to accomplish this huge task.

In conclusion, I want to restate clearly that I am a defender of human rights, not a politician so my views are as an individual coming from this point of view who wants to see peace and justice replace the human rights abuses directed against the Anuak and the rest of the Ethiopian people. My thoughts on this can be examined, challenged and improved by Ethiopian politicians, academicians and Ethiopian thinkers who are more mature, more educated, more experienced or specialized than I am. However, what I can offer are simply my thoughts on this situation. I call on others Ethiopians to share theirs as well. Through this process, we may be able to come up with the best, so please realize that I am attempting to contribute to the public conversation.

As you already know, I strongly support the unity of Ethiopians in dealing with our crisis. In doing that, I call on the AFD to lead the way to more structured and goal-oriented discussions about what kind of Ethiopia we want and the strategies for getting there. This must include a domestic and foreign policy plan that reflects the new global world in which we live. In order for us to enter as players in this interconnected world, we must carefully assess our values, principles and goals as a nation. To do this successfully, it is obvious that we must leave something behind—like our ethnic division and a system that tolerates our leaders to pursue their own interests, utilizing the military to do it. We must be deliberate about protecting ourselves from ourselves and then work hard to accomplish these goals.

Those in the Diaspora are making a difference, but according to strategic contacts in Washington DC, our voice has quieted down while Meles has boosted his efforts to lobby against what has been accomplished here. This is a serious warning. We have much more to do and we must increase the volume of our voices by joining together with new energy and determination or our Ethiopian brothers and sisters in our homeland will continue to suffer.

Even now, Meles is campaigning hard to regain US favor by attacking Somalia on a “War on Terror Mission.” As part of his plan, I have heard that he has been scapegoating our brothers and sisters in Ogaden and Oromia, accusing them of terrorism when EPRDF Defense Troops have been committing acts of terrorism against their civilians. The people of these regions are vulnerable to false accusations due to the repression that has silenced their voices. We must speak up for them. We must be like their defense attorneys or others in the international community will accept this deception.

If we in the Diaspora had not spoken up for the Anuak, their deaths would have gone unnoticed. Collect and document those stories from Ethiopians who would face the gun should they do the talking. We can get the information out even if they cannot. We need the facts. The public must hear about it or our case will be lost for our own failure to speak out. We cannot allow ourselves to be distracted or to lose our momentum.

The AFD is in a strategic position to orchestrate a means to increase our action. One way to proceed is for them to create a more accessible public face and to start the discussion. We are looking for the AFD to create a forum where we can come together. They should not feel threatened or embarrassed to ask others for help. We need each other. If there are obstacles, share them so we can find solutions right away!

If the AFD cannot do it, we need to know so others can start the process to organize such a forum. We cannot delay or we will lose what we have already attained. We must continue to make the plight of Ethiopians known to the world and to each other as we work hard towards finding durable solutions to the crisis and a strategic plan for Ethiopia.

My final question is to honorable leaders of the AFD. Will you move ahead now to start this discussion by organizing such a forum? It will mark the beginning of a complex and important discussion that must be resolved if anything is to change in Ethiopia. If you do, we Ethiopians will be forever grateful and I, for one, will contribute, as I am able. If you cannot do so, please let us know why not and perhaps we can provide to you the encouragement, the support and the help you might need to start this process and to do it successfully.

Meles has revealed to the world that he has been a tyrant to his people, but the truth is, countries of this world work with tyrants. They frequently have to because the world has become so small that there may be no other alternative. Even if they would prefer working with a country grounded in principles of freedom and democracy, they cannot work with a phantom government like we Ethiopians in the Diaspora now have. We must make it materialize by developing a concrete plan that can be implemented. We must see our goal to provide a better alternative to the current regime or we will never change the system.

If we do not take the action to do so, we remain crippled victims, unwilling to even attempt to get up and to walk. In the Bible, Jesus approached a crippled man at the pool of Bethesda where the blind, the lame and the paralyzed waited for years hoping to be the first to jump in the waters when they stirred, believing the first one who entered would be healed.ⁱⁱ Jesus asked the man how long he had been there. The man said thirty-eight years. Jesus then asked the man if he wanted to be healed. The man did not answer yes or no, but told him that when the waters moved, no one helped him into the waters and someone else always got there first. Jesus then told him, “Get up, take your mat and walk.” The man turned his hope from the pool of waters to Jesus. But Jesus called him to take a “step of action,” demonstrating that faith.” The man did it and started walking.

Perhaps we Ethiopians should learn from such an example. Do we want to be healed from our lameness that has crippled our society, restricting our movement towards freedom? Are we justifying our lack of action with a myriad of excuses? Or, are we willing to get up and leave behind passivity, divisiveness, competitiveness, blaming, despair and lethargy? These may be paralyzing us more than we know.

Jesus was not willing to heal the crippled man until the man was willing to leave his “crippled mentality” behind and to trust in Him. Are we willing to leave what hinders us behind? Are we willing to “get up and walk!” If we are, amazing things may happen! Let us all start moving our legs and stand up! May the AFD pick up the speed as we Ethiopians start on our walk towards freedom! As we walk, let us look upwards to the voluminous clouds gathering together to form a widespread canopy over all of Ethiopia, heavy with the promise of rain that will satisfy freedom-seeking Ethiopians with the thirst-quenching waters of liberty! May God bring justice and peace to Ethiopia!

ⁱ Matthew 7:15-20

ⁱⁱ John 5:1-15