



## Show Your Words In Action

June 14, 2022

The strengths and shortcomings of democracy in a given country are partly attributed to the actions of its scholars, activists, and public figures. These individuals, by their fresh new ideas and dissents, increase public awareness and influence the government to change or improve any misguided politics and economic policies. But, at the same time, if they stay silent on the government's human rights violations and disregard the rule of law, they will also be held accountable for the collapse of democracy.

When such individuals are given the opportunity to serve in government institutions, that creates a profound opportunity, a much more significant role than would be available for an activist as an outsider, and a chance to serve from within to bring about real and lasting change. However, if they misuse this opportunity, or lose sight of their commitment to democracy due to greed for power, then they themselves become the force they have been fighting and protesting against and ultimately become the reason for the downfall of democracy.

With that introduction, let's get to the matter we are addressing today. On April 7, 2022, the House of Representatives approved the nine nominees for the Media Board elected by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. Unfortunately, in violation of the media law that the body approved into law the previous year, they were confirmed: 11 out of the 243 members of the House of Representatives voted against it, with 17 abstentions, and a majority in favor.

Article 11 Sub-Article 6 of the Media Proclamation No. 1238/13; declares an individual who belongs to or is a member of a political party can not be a board member. Among the nine nominees for the House of Representatives is the current State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Redwan Hussein (Ambassador), and Addis Ababa City Council member Agardech Jemaneh (Dr.) were approved for their appointments knowing that they are members of the Prosperity Party. In addition, the appointment of Ambassador Redwan Hussein as Chairman of the Board is not only a violation of the law but also a clear interference by the government in disseminating and controlling its own political agenda. In addition, it is a conflict of interest as Ambassador Redwan Hussein serves as a special adviser to the PM. Both the Prime Minister's Office and the

House of Peoples' Representatives have repeatedly ignored calls from civil society, political parties, private media, and civil society activists for the House to reconsider its decision.

It is at this critical juncture that, as we have seen, scholars and celebrities have the opportunity to play a key role in the development and decline of democracy in the country. An excellent example of this is Dr. Bedilu Waqjira (Dr.) and Dr. Wedajeneh Maerene (Dr.), amongst the nine candidates nominated by the Prime Minister for the Media Board and approved by the House. Over the past few years, the two celebrities have been widely acclaimed for their writings, interviews, and public speeches on the country's current political and social issues. Realizing this, the Prime Minister nominated these scholars to serve their country as members of the state-owned media board. The Prime Minister should be commended for doing so. The nominees are also expected to use their historic opportunity to work for media freedom and democracy and do their part.

We believe that one of their most important contributions is to uphold the rule of law. As a result, although the nominees were not held accountable for violating the law enacted by the House of Representatives, they should have taken appropriate action by recognizing the opposition and the media following the nomination of candidates. First, the two members of the board who had been improperly appointed have to resign voluntarily, recognizing that they have been appointed in violation of the law. However, by failing to do so, the rest of the board should take full responsibility for the violation of the law and replace the two board members with alternate candidates. Unless proper measure is taken, the entire slew of appointees should voluntarily resign from their positions to uphold the rule of law and show that they are fulfilling their civic and moral obligations.

The strength of an institution, as well as its independence from government interference, is primarily measured by the ability, competence, and neutrality of its leaders. Based on this, especially now that the government itself has repeatedly violated the law. The arms registration has shifted to law enforcement throughout the country, especially in the Oromia and Amhara regions. According to government sources, over the past two weeks, more than 4,500 people have been arrested in Amhara Region alone, and an unknown number have been killed. In particular, bold journalists and prominent community activists who criticized the government with their sharp pens were abducted like terrorists. The government should prosecute these journalists in accordance with the Media Proclamation No. 1238/13. Instead of producing baseless accusations that are changing frequently and extending their prison days, they have been subjected to suffering. The nominated board members, whose names are listed below, did not say anything.

As shown above, the participation of all stakeholders is crucial for the growth and development of democracy. More importantly, the ideas and public discourses will be balanced if they are put into practice. As a result, these appointed board members, especially the two community activists and public figures, must play a leading role in voluntarily stepping down and leaving their mark on the rule of law and the development of democracy.

Not accepting this proposal undermines public confidence in politicians, community activists, and intellectuals and undermines confidence in the political process. More importantly, it will encourage the government to continue lawless actions without holding individuals accountable. But, on the other hand, if you resign in protest of this lawless act, your courage and your righteous principles will give strength to the younger generation to tackle problems during their lives with candor. Otherwise, you will become an example of historical guilt and hypocrisy.

**Therefore, we urge all members of the Board listed below to voluntarily resign from your position while encouraging you to fulfill your civic duty for the sake of the rule of law.**

1. Ambassador Redwan Hussein from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Convener (PP Security Adviser)
2. Ambassador Nasise Chali from the Ministry of Tourism; Member
3. Ambassador Hassan Abdul Qadir from the Center for Democracy Building; Member
4. Agardech Jemaneh (Dr.) from Addis Ababa University; Member
5. By Dulu Waqjira (Dr.) from Addis Ababa University; Member
6. Mesaye G. Mariam (Dr.) from Addis Ababa University; Member
7. Your friend Maren (Dr.) Consultant: Member
8. Kesis Tagai Tadele from religious institutions; Member
9. Ustaz Yassin Nuru Religious Institutions; Member