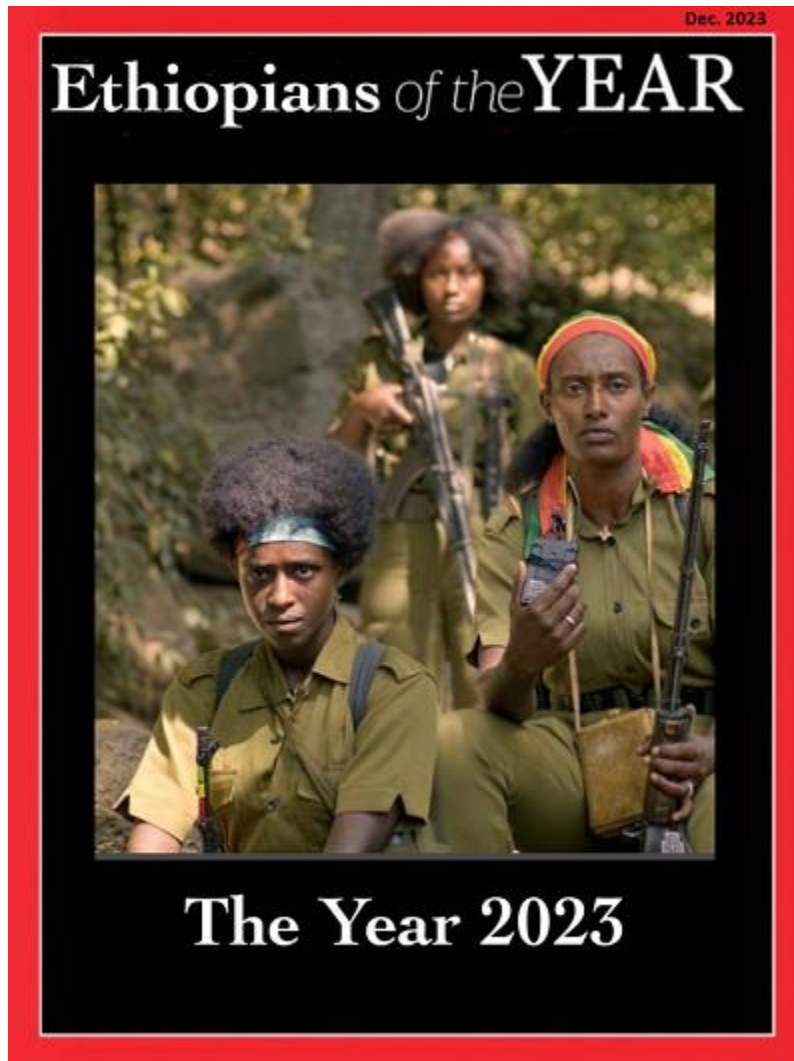


Fano Freedom Fighters: 2023's Ethiopians of the Year.



In 2021, Concerned Ethiopians selected Ethiopia as the Country of the Year. That choice was based on several challenges Ethiopia faced that year but had seemingly overcome, especially the war in Northern Ethiopia. Unfortunately, as we enter 2024, PM Abiy's government has clearly become a dictatorship or EPRDF 2.0. In 2024, Ethiopia still faces the specter of injustice, insecurity, and instability. However, in the past year, the Amhara people's resistance led by Fano has shown itself to be a principled, disciplined, and popular resistance force. Fano epitomizes the perils and promises Ethiopia faces. For this reason, Concerned Ethiopians (CE) has selected Fano Freedom Fighters as "2023's Ethiopians of the Year".

As we look back at this past year, several major events affecting Ethiopia were recorded. At the beginning of the year, there was faint hope but great unease about if and how the Pretoria Agreement would be implemented as it had been diluted by secret follow-up agreements with the much-despised TPLF. That fear was soon replaced by fury at another significant event. In early January, a breakaway faction of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church Bishops formed a synod of “Nation and Nationalities” orchestrated and encouraged by Oromo extremists. The Ethiopian Orthodox followers were outraged as this action was in direct violation of the centuries-old unified tradition of the Church. They correctly saw it as an attack on two of the pillars of Ethiopia (The Orthodox Church and Amhara) that TPLF or EPRDF 1.0 had targeted to weaken. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church’s Synod navigated this challenge with exemplary tact, guided by its deep-seated faith in God, and was able to overcome PM Abiy’s interference and pressure to recognize the breakaway Synod. By mobilizing the faithful yet restraining their emotions, the Synod exemplified why the Orthodox Church is revered by Ethiopians. Concerned Ethiopians considered selecting the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church as “2023’s Ethiopia’s Institution of the Year” but chose Fano as its impact in 2023 was much more profound.

Fano, with its alliance with Amhara Special Forces (ASF) and The Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), gained valuable military experience from 2018 to 2022 during the Northern Ethiopia War. Leaked documents from 2022 show that PM Abiy considered Fano the number one threat to his power as it has the organization and skill to challenge the weak and ineffective Amhara Prosperity Party. Therefore, he began and soon stopped a disjointed effort to demobilize Fano and ASF in May 2022. Then, in March 2023, PM Abiy started a disastrous military campaign against Fano under the guise of integrating all ethnic-based special forces into regular forces. The fact that the TPLF had not disarmed and Oromo Special forces were, in fact, strengthening themselves were not lost on Amharas or other Ethiopians. The image of “Julla” sitting with “Junta” at a Kenyan resort was a jarring reminder to Ethiopians that PM Abiy was more interested in power over principle. However, what PM Abiy thought would be a quick victory had turned into a quagmire, and in August and September of 2023, Fano briefly captured many major Amhara cities such as Bahir Dar, Gondar, Debre Markos, and Debre Birhan. Fano then withdrew from the Urban area when ENDF started shelling and terrorizing those cities and their environs using heavy weapons and drones. Fano is currently in control of 60% to 75% of the Amhara Region. However, drone attack for the ‘[Collective punishment](#)’ of Amharas still continues to this day as reported by Aljazeera.

In 2023, Fano showed the world that it is a disciplined and principled popular resistance force that enjoys the support of the vast majority of Amharas. Fano is being recognized for its fairness, as demonstrated by the release of TPLF soldiers imprisoned in the

Amhara region and the facilitation of their return to their families in the Tigray region. In 2023, Fano also showed that its loose organizational structure and guerrilla military tactics were difficult to defeat. PM Abiy's rudderless rule by then had shifted to promoting Oromuma and trying to attract Oromo partisans. Since there are more "real" Oromo nationalists than PM Abiy, he had to instead rely on his "Military base" and couple it with propaganda. Those two actions have been ineffective. Many see the command Post type of military response, use of riot dispersing militias, and social media as nakedly transparent and amateurish. The Temesgen Tiruneh intelligence failure, Berhanu Julla's military failures and the threat of using drones, and Deacon and parliamentarian Daniel Kibret's "Jawissa" discombobulated propaganda is seen as fake and useless as what Hitler tried with Göring, Goebbels and Himmler in Nazi Germany. It is worth noting that Daniel Kibret has done nothing for his Addis Ababa Constituents and instead focuses on calling for the defrocking of Bishops who call for resistance against human rights violations.

Similar to his trio entourage, PM Abiy has completely lost the trust of Ethiopians and is correctly identified as a non-credible person. PM Abiy announced major undertakings, such as demanding a port in the Red Sea, without explaining how it would be accomplished. On the first day of 2024, [Reuters reports](#) that PM Abiy has promised recognition of Somaliland secession from Somalia and a stake in Ethiopian Airlines in exchange for a 20 KM long "port and naval base" at Berbera. The implication for Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and the African Union has been glossed over. PM Abiy is seen as someone who is in over his head, and his Prosperity Gospel philosophy has turned out just to be an attempt to "fake it until you make it".

Ethiopians do not believe Prosperity is around the corner while they are suffering from poverty. Prosperity Party (PP) is known as the Poverty Party as Inflation, corruption, and injustice are turning even well-paid citizens into poor people. What PP has given us in 2023 is a country with an imploding economy. Ethiopia defaulted on its loan and beat up African Development Bank Diplomats after "mistakenly transferring" millions of dollars to a "wrong" account. Internally, the displacement of non-Oromo residents in Addis Ababa under the guise of imminent domain development or action against illegal land holding has been tragic. In capitalist countries where private ownership of property is nearly sacrosanct, you are not allowed to make anyone arbitrarily homeless without due process. In those countries, let alone the poor or those with disputed property ownership, even squatters have rights. The unjust evictions have manifested in protests voiced at the Addis Ababa Great Run, where support for Fano was defiantly and loudly voiced. For all the problems that PM Abiy had caused in 2023, Concerned Ethiopians considered selecting PM Abiy as "2023's Ethiopia's Person of the Year" for his negative

impact but again chose Fano for the promise it holds. In the past, many “evil” people have been selected as “Person of the Year” around the world.

Fano’s promise comes with perils. Its strength is also its weakness. While its loose organizational structure and guerrilla military tactics make Fano strong against a conventional army, the lack of clarity about its leadership chain and political agenda makes it less effective in achieving its stated goal of entering “Arat Kilo.” Giving Amharas a voice and a proper share of power in Ethiopia is what its supporters and constituents have mandated Fano with. Whether it is to take power and form a government that has major Amhara influence “አማራ አማራ የሚሸጥ መንግሥት” or preferably to form a transitional and representative government until elections are held, Fano is respected for its exemplary resistance. However, coordinating battlefield operations, diaspora support, fundraising activities, and eliminating public discord about insignificant issues is critical. Fano should heed the saying, “Your harshest critic is always going to be yourself.” By evaluating its progress and challenges, Fano can only grow and strengthen itself.

The West, especially the US, seems to be playing the wait-and-see approach with Fano. True to form, the US foreign policy remains a lagging indicator. US statements reflect who is on the ascendancy on the ground. Once Fano’s victory becomes inevitable, support will follow. Therefore, cultivating contacts and good relations with the national security establishment at the NSA, the State Department, and the US AID is vital. The recent congressional hearings, while it seemed to be backward-looking for its repeated discussions on Tigray and giving limited attention to what is happening in Oromia and Amhara, show that the US is hedging its bet. They know PM Abiy is on a death spiral. To the US, Fano is still a force to prove itself, hence the Kabuki dance at the Congressional hearing, ignoring the Amhara movement. It is imperative that Diaspora Fano support groups and Advocacy councils work with congressional staff to push for US support of Fano. The US likes winners, and it knows Fano has a solid cause, ample support, and means.

Ethiopia’s friend, Jeff Pearce, in his [Substack Article: Yes, “Fano is Coming!” But what happens when it arrives?](#) provides commentary on making Fano stronger internationally. The work of the coordinating committee of Ambassador Berhane needs to be supported. The Diaspora should utilize a two-pronged strategy to continue its communication with and support of Fano fighters and leaders in Ethiopia while simultaneously working on coordinating support activities for the safety of the Diaspora. Even with the above challenges, the fact that Fano will be victorious is undeniable. Concerned Ethiopia is not just picking the trendy winner. It supports the Amhara people’s popular resistance against an unjust war and the political goal of transitioning to a democratic Ethiopia.

That is exemplified by our reasoning for choosing Fano Freedom Fighters as “2023’s Ethiopians of the Year.”

The following poem shared with Concerned Ethiopians succinctly captures why we chose Fano Freedom Fighters as “2023’s Ethiopians of the Year”. We are captivated by the promise of Fano, and in 2024, Fano Shall Continue to Prevail.

ብናነብ መፀሐፍ ታሪክ ብናጠና፡
ውለታ አለብን ያልከፈለነው ገና፡
ፋኖስ ብርሀን ነበር አገርን ያቀና።

We read books and study history
Yet we still owe a debt to the legacy
To the *Lantern that brightened our country.

በድቅድቅ ጨለማ መሄጃ ጠፍቶት፡
ስልታዊ ማፈገፈግ ባይሆነው ኩራት፡
ፋኖስ ድረስ አለ ጨለማ ወሮት።

Lost in the pitch dark
Full of pride yet unable to make a strategic retreat
Cried for the Lantern to get it out of the dark night.

ጥሪውን የሰማ ፋኖስ በየቦታው፡
ለኩሶ ተመመ ጨለማን ሊያጠፋው።

Lanterns everywhere who heard the call
Rose up and marched to destroy the darkness.

እራሱን አንድዶ ለሆነው መብራት፡
ድሮን ሰደደለት ለአማራሳይነት።

But to the Lantern that shined, fueling itself
Drones attacked it in Amara Sa’int.

ወርቅ ላበደረ ተሰጠው ጠጠር፡
ሕዳሴ አለ ተብሎ ፋኖስን መሰበር።

As the gold lender that was repaid with pebbles
Tried to break the Lantern claiming to have a renaissance.

መቼም አይሳካ ቢተውት ይሻላል፡
ጥልያንም ሞክሮት እዚሁ ተቀብሯል።

Better to not start than fail
As Italy had tried the same and was buried.

*The Lantern was used to symbolize Fano using similarities in the Amharic words Fano and Fanos that means Lantern

By Concerned Ethiopians

