



Roadmap Addendum

Constituting a ‘National Committee of the Wise (NCW)’ to Launch the Ethiopian Systemic Transition Program የጠቢባን መመከርት

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*According to our Ethiopian political transition roadmap, a genuinely democratic process must aim at restoring peace and forging a democratic constitutional replacement. This lofty idea presumes the existence of an effective and legitimate body to orchestrate a ceasefire and pave the way for institutional overhaul by a responsible exercise constituent power (the power to create a new constitution). This save-the-country body is dubbed here “**The National Committee of the Wise, NCW.**” We explain this critical idea in greater detail than is provided in the Roadmap.*

A. THE TWO-PHASED TRANSITION PROGRAM

The Transition Charter identifies the following two bodies to lead the two-phased transition program:

- *Phase 1 (one year): **The National Committee of the Wise (አገር አድን የጠቢባን መመከርት)**, which issues a Transition Charter that includes provisions concerning the DDR and SSR processes to restore peace, a Caretaker Government that provides continuity in government, a consultative national dialogue process that builds legitimacy and political consensus, and the election of an interim parliament (Transitional Shengo) which will also serve as a constituent assembly to oversee the drafting of the new constitution.*
- *Phase 2 (two years): **The Transitional Shengo (የሽግግር ሽንገ)**, which, among others, establishes a Constitution Drafting Commission and supply it with guidelines concerning the substantive contents of the citizen-based constitution. The elected Shengo, which enjoys sovereign constitutional authority, presents the constitution for eventual public ratification by a national referendum.*

In this addendum to the Roadmap, we spell out in detail the process of (1) selecting the members of the NCW based on representation and competence, (2) its mandate and power, and (3) the timeliness of its establishment to ensure that a power vacuum does not hopelessly destabilize the country.

B. THE SELECTION, AUTHORITY, AND MANDATE OF NCW

Purpose: To specify how, on the verge of regime collapse, an agent needs to be established to launch a legitimate dialogue in Ethiopia to begin work on a comprehensive peace, and how diaspora initiative can assist without displacing domestic ownership.

Central judgment: National dialogue and de-escalation that lead to an enduring ceasefire proceed iteratively; neither can be made an absolute precondition for the other. Ceasefire, undertaken under the aegis of a credibly neutral and competent group is an unavoidable precondition for kickstarting the transition.

B.1. The In-crisis Environment

A brief national dialogue need not wait for a final military settlement. In a protracted civil war, the dialogue should initially be understood not as a single national conference but as an institutionalized peace-and-transition process. Its first task is to produce enough security for political bargaining; each political agreement must then produce additional security. This is the way out of the apparent chicken-and-egg problem.

The process should distinguish two kinds of legitimacy. The principal violence-capable actors must initially consent because they can enforce or destroy a ceasefire. The recently established Alliance for Survival among the major combatants (especially Fanno, TDF, and OLA), if anchored in a well-crafted blueprint for a post-Prosperity Ethiopia, can pave the way for a regime change that would also produce systemic transformation.

However, a coalition of armed groups without an explicit popular legitimacy should not confer authority on a permanent, democratic constitutional order. That authority must come from civilians, territorial communities, organized social constituencies, and ultimately citizens. Armed actors make the doorway usable; civilians decide what constitutional house is built beyond it. Otherwise, as in the past, the bullet box will inevitably trump the ballot box.

This is why vital details will have to be negotiated to ensure popular legitimacy:

I. Security guarantees must include a joint security mechanism led by Fanno to protect dialogue participants, a neutral monitoring body (AU, UN, IGAD), a ceasefire verification system, and a protection protocol for opposition leaders, journalists, and civic actors.

2. The legal basis for the Transition Charter must specify how it gains legal force or who ratifies it (armed groups, civic groups, opposition political parties, regional administrations, and diaspora councils).

3. Public participation mechanisms must also be specified in sufficient detail, including public hearings, civic education campaigns, digital participation platforms, diaspora consultation channels, and translation and accessibility guarantees.

B.2. Criteria for membership to NCW

Eligibility for membership to the Council is a critical issue. There two important criteria, the first of which is paramount: Merit or competence that is directly linked to the priority functions to be performed, and Representation of all stakeholders in Ethiopian society.

The membership will have to be drawn from civil society organizations, respected secular community leaders and civil servants, leaders of Ethiopian-nationalist political parties as well as ethnonationalist political parties willing to engage in the democratic transition program, independent businesspersons and academics, prominent religious leaders, prominent human rights activists at home and in the Diaspora. The selection criteria must include the following personal qualities: deep knowledge of the country, independent-mindedness, farsightedness, compassion, integrity, respect for diversity as well as the indivisible unity and territorial integrity of Ethiopia, and richness of life and work experience.

In terms of decision rules, NCW will craft its internal procedures. We expect that routine NCW decisions may be taken by ordinary majority. Fundamental decisions require concurrent consent: a two-thirds vote of the whole Council. Fundamental matters include national deployments, changes to the Charter, appointment or removal of the caretaker prime minister, emergency taxation, extension of the transition period, and election of the Transitional Shengo.

Our advice is that the emergency compact should activate only when ordinary federal executive authority has demonstrably ceased or become incapable of performing core functions. Relevant triggers include flight, death, resignation, detention, or disappearance of the executive leadership; inability of the cabinet to meet; abandonment of national command; competing claims to federal authority; or breakdown of treasury, security, and administrative direction.

Activation should be confirmed by several independent sources: available senior judges, the public-service continuity secretariat, representatives of multiple territorial administrations, and at least two major armed signatories including the lead guarantor. No armed actor should be able to manufacture collapse unilaterally and then invoke the compact to legalize its advance.

B.3. Authority and Enforcement

The legitimate authority of the transition council cannot rest on moral prestige alone. It must have a shared vision about the future of the country.

Competency matters, too. A council of respected persons may possess legitimacy without the capacity to protect ministries, airports, banks, power stations, humanitarian routes, or mixed cities. NCW's authority and mandate arise from a stabilization and national continuity agreement signed by the principal violence-capable actors and endorsed by a wider national civic

stakeholders, following a brief national dialog process. In other words, the emergency authority becomes credible when these fundamental stakeholders recognize one another through a published compact (the transition charter), and an in-built deterrence is included so that no participant can achieve its essential aims outside that compact at tolerable cost.

The armed signatories provide the negative guarantee: none will overthrow the arrangement or pursue unilateral military advantage. Fanno, as a guardian, can provide the lead positive guarantee: it organizes and, where authorized, supplies the principal force needed to protect common institutions and enforce agreed restrictions. Civilians and territorial representatives provide moderation, public scrutiny, and an independent basis for assessing whether enforcement serves the compact rather than factional expansion.

This is not equal power sharing. It is differentiated power sharing by function. Military capability weighs most heavily in security implementation; territorial acceptance matters most in local administration and deployment; civilian and professional competence matters most in rights protection, finance, justice, and administration; elected authority becomes supreme in managing the process and content of constitution making. The bottom line is that transition must join incomplete sources of authority rather than pretend that one source is sufficient.

Civilian groups cannot presently command the transition because they engage peacefully and organized engagement is weak at present. But, if better organized, they can prevent armed bargaining from becoming a closed division of the state. Their functions are to chair selected deliberations, document decisions, review humanitarian and rights performance, nominate technocrats and judges, monitor public finance, organize public consultation, and communicate the settlement to citizens and external partners.

The aim is progressive civilianization with a ratchet to avoid backsliding into partisan conflict. Civilian authority begins as moderation and oversight, expands through the elected Transitional Shengo, and becomes supreme when the permanent constitution enters into force.

The bottom line is that NCW should be a political direction and compact-supervision body, not a substitute legislature, military headquarters, court, and cabinet combined. A membership of roughly forty-five to fifty allows for a sufficiently broad representation without making daily administration impossible.

Its composition should reflect the real settlement that would ensure a post-ethnic dispensation. One bloc should represent armed signatories and professional continuity forces; a second should represent territorial and local administrations; and a third should consist of civilian, religious, business, professional, women's, humanitarian, opposition political party, and rights representatives.

There is a dilemma here involving organizational representation and citizen-centered systemic change. Because armed signatories, territorial administrations, and most opposition parties are ethnic-based, the transition can easily be hijacked by supporters of the failed status quo. Three safeguards are compelling: *participants must consent to the compact that embraces the principles of citizen sovereignty and equality, and national unity; Fanno should be well represented in the council, and civilians in the NCW should preferably form a governing majority.* If the genuine reason for an anti-

government rebellion is indeed the absence of democracy, a democracy pact should incentivize everyone to honor the transition pact.

B.4. The Mandate of NCW

The mandate of the NCW should be spelled out in the Transitional Charter whose template should be prepared ahead of time for ratification by the participants of the national dialogue. The mission of NCW must revolve around five tasks: stabilizing the country by silencing the guns, supervising a caretaker administration of technocrats and professionals, launching a robust DDR and SSR processes to ensure peacebuilding, launching transitional justice and restorative justice processes by establishing a Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission, and organizing elections for an interim parliament (Transitional Shengo) which will undertake constitutional and other institutional reforms.

The Council would also conduct confidential simulations of three contingencies: disappearance of the federal executive, fragmentation of national command, and contested control of Addis Ababa. Its products should be deposited in multiple secure locations and released when activation conditions are met.

B.5. How to Start the Process of Establishing NCW

Beginning preparatory work in the diaspora, for selecting nominees and specifying the mandate, would not automatically delegitimize the Committee of the Wise. It becomes delegitimizing only if a diaspora group claims appointment power, fixes the membership before domestic consultation, or presents its nominees as a government-in-waiting. The safer formula for NCW establishment is diaspora initiation, domestic nomination, mixed verification, and national ratification.

The final decisions concerning the composition, authority, and mandate of NCW will be made in Ethiopia. These tasks must commence immediately, albeit in a clandestine form.

Strong support for NCW must be garnered from the international community which supports the case for a stable and peaceful Ethiopia. Generous financial and technical support will be essential for the success of NCW in spearheading the transition.

C. THE MODALITIES OF THE FIRST PHASE OF THE TRANSITION PROGRAM

C.1. Reframing National Dialogue in an Active Civil War Setting

A conventional national dialogue assumes a minimally secure arena, identifiable delegations, freedom of movement, and participants who can speak without immediate coercion. Ethiopia's conflict conditions weaken each assumption. A single large conference convened prematurely could reward territorial control, expose participants to intimidation, and produce an ethnocratic elite bargain that communities neither understand nor accept.

Our recommendation for ensuring a citizen-based systemic transformation is a nested and sequenced dialogue. Negotiation begins wherever limited agreements are possible and expands

as compliance creates confidence. The process has a national destination but does not require every participant to gather in one place or every conflict to be resolved at the outset.

C.2. The Two-Track Architecture

C.2.1. Track One: Stabilization and National Continuity

The first track would bring together reform-friendly elements of the federal military and security establishment, the principal armed movements, relevant regional authorities, and civilian mediators. Participation would reflect the ability to affect security, not a claim to superior political entitlement. Its output should be a narrowly drawn Stabilization and National Continuity Agreement.

Its immediate agenda should be limited to:

1. Reciprocal cessation of offensive operations and protection of civilians.
2. Humanitarian access, exchange of detainee information, and safe return of displaced persons where feasible.
3. Protection of essential infrastructure, public records, the treasury, transport corridors, and relief supplies.
4. Local monitoring and incident-resolution mechanisms capable of containing violations before they unravel the entire process.
5. A temporary security coordination arrangement that prevents unilateral seizure of the capital, regional administrations, military installations, and public revenues.
6. Recognition of a civilian transitional framework and eventual subordination of all armed formations to constitutional authority.

This agreement would be a security compact, not a constitutional settlement which is forged in Phase Two by the Transitional Shengo (see the Roadmap and Addendum I). No armed participant should receive a permanent constitutional veto, guaranteed electoral office, or immunity from responsibility for grave crimes merely because it possesses coercive power.

C.2.2. Track Two: Civic and Territorial Authorization

The second track would progressively include communities from conflict-affected areas; professional, labor, business, women's, youth, religious, and human-rights organizations; independent political actors; universities; and the diaspora. It should culminate in a National Civic and Territorial Conference to establish the NCW and facilitate the election of a legitimate Transitional Shengo.

This track would:

1. Publicly review and endorse, amend, or reject the transitional compact.
2. Approve the mandate and selection rules for the National Committee of the Wise.
3. Nominate or confirm members of a caretaker administration and interim oversight bodies.
4. Establish the sequence for constitutional deliberation, transitional justice, security-sector reform, and elections.

5. Create channels through which constituencies unable to travel can participate safely and contest claims made in their name.

The two tracks are asymmetric but interdependent. Track One creates minimum security; Track Two converts a necessary bargain among coercive actors into a legitimate civic transition.

C.3. A Phased National Dialogue Sequence

Step 0 - Quiet preparation. Map armed commands, civic constituencies, local authorities, vulnerable groups, and possible guarantors. Agree privately on entry conditions, communications channels, and a code of conduct. No one should announce a complete slate or predetermined constitutional outcome.

Step 1 - Humanitarian and local bargains. Negotiate geographically limited pauses, aid corridors, civilian-protection arrangements, and mechanisms for missing persons and detainees. These agreements test command control and create evidence about who can deliver compliance.

Step 2 - Framework talks. Negotiate the Stabilization and National Continuity Agreement, including non-seizure commitments, interim chains of authority, monitoring, and the procedure for launching civic selection.

Step 3 - Distributed consultations. Conduct parallel consultations inside Ethiopia, in displacement settings, and in the diaspora. Use common questions and publish disaggregated results. Participation should not depend on physical attendance at a capital-city conference.

Step 4 - National Civic and Territorial Conference. Bring verified delegations together to authorize the Committee of the Wise, establish the caretaker arrangements, and approve the transitional charter. Armed actors may participate but should not chair civilian deliberations or dominate allocation of seats.

Step 5 - Constitutional dialogue. After minimum security and civic freedoms exist, begin the deeper debate over citizenship, federal or decentralized arrangements, rights, land, language, political institutions, accountability, and the distribution of power. These questions should not be settled in the emergency bargain.

C.4. Peacemaking as a Precondition for Peacekeeping

The relevant threshold is not a comprehensive ceasefire. It is sufficient political and physical space for participants to deliberate without the process becoming an instrument of battlefield coercion. At minimum, the following conditions should be secured in participating areas:

1. Temporary local ceasefires or non-attack undertakings around meetings, travel routes, and communication facilities.
2. No arrest, retaliation, or forced recruitment based on participation or expressed views.
3. Independent facilitation and secure channels for confidential submissions.

4. Plural delegation selection rather than government or armed-group appointment of all representatives.
5. Public agendas, transparent financing, and published records, subject to narrowly tailored security redactions.
6. Independent monitoring of civilian protection and compliance by all armed participants.

If these minimum conditions are absent nationally, dialogue should begin in zones where they can be negotiated. A modular process is less dramatic than a grand conference, but it is more likely to survive renewed fighting.

C.5. How Decisions Might Be Made

Consensus should remain the preferred rule for foundational questions, but unanimity would allow any armed or political actor to hold the transition hostage. The process should use graduated decision rules:

1. Consensus for the initial security compact followed by consensus on the national reform agenda.
2. A high supermajority for the transitional charter, the mandate of the Committee, extensions of the transition, and senior security appointments.
3. Ordinary majority voting for procedural and administrative questions.
4. Concurrent territorial or constituency thresholds for issues that might otherwise be imposed by a single demographic or political bloc.
5. Published dissents and referral to wider consultation when a foundational disagreement cannot yet be resolved.

The agenda should also distinguish interim necessities from permanent constitutional choices. The dialogue may decide how the state will be kept functioning; it should not allow temporary delegates to settle irreversibly the constitutional questions reserved for an independently constituted process and popular ratification. These understanding must be clearly spelt out in the Transition Charter.

C.6. Would Diaspora Initiation Delegitimize the Council?

Not necessarily. In conditions of surveillance, displacement, institutional collapse, and restricted civic space, the diaspora may possess freedoms, expertise, resources, and convening capacity that domestic actors temporarily lack. It can therefore provide a protected incubator for designing procedures, identifying selection criteria, and opening communications among otherwise disconnected constituencies.

But diaspora initiative carries three predictable legitimacy risks. First, expatriate politics may reflect older conflicts or social-media constituencies more than current conditions inside Ethiopia. Second, access to money and international platforms can give diaspora organizations

disproportionate influence. Third, a self-appointed committee formed abroad can easily be portrayed as externally sponsored or as a government-in-exile.

The decisive issue is therefore not where preparatory work begins but who controls nomination, verification, ratification, and removal. Geography is less important than institutional ownership.

C.7. A Legitimate Selection Formula

A defensible process would proceed through five distinct steps:

1. *Diaspora facilitation, not appointment.* A temporary diaspora-based preparatory group may draft proposed criteria, maintain communications, raise transparent funds, and invite nominations. It should have no authority to appoint the final Committee.
2. *Multiple nomination channels.* Nominations should come independently from domestic professional associations, religious bodies, universities, women's and youth organizations, regional and local civic forums, victims' groups, political organizations, displacement communities, and diaspora constituencies.
3. *Independent eligibility review.* A mixed vetting panel should assess integrity, competence, independence, conflicts of interest, responsibility for grave abuses, financial disclosure, and acceptance of a bar on contesting the first post-transition election.
4. *Provisional slate with public challenge.* The proposed slate and reasons for selection should be published. Constituencies should have a protected period to submit objections, corrections, or alternative nominees.
5. *Domestic and national ratification.* The final slate should be ratified by the National Civic and Territorial Conference. If this cannot meet immediately, members may serve provisionally under a short sunset clause until ratification becomes possible.

C.8. Representation without Mechanical Quotas

The Committee must be broadly representative, but it should not reproduce the existing ethnic-party system in miniature. Its legitimacy would be weakened if every member appeared to be an instructed delegate of an armed, regional, ethnic, or diaspora organization. *Furthermore, the end of ethnic federalism will not be achieved by packing the house with vested interests in preserving the status quo of the politics of communal hatred.* Representation should combine territorial inclusion, social and professional diversity, personal integrity, and independence of judgment.

The selection rules should require:

1. Meaningful participation by women, youth, conflict-affected communities, and historically marginalized areas.
2. Competence in constitutional law, public administration, economics, security, mediation, human rights, and humanitarian affairs.

3. A balance between persons residing inside Ethiopia and members of the diaspora, with domestic members forming a clear majority once conditions permit.
4. No organizational bloc large enough to control the Committee by itself.
5. Personal service rather than binding instructions from nominating constituencies.
6. Disclosure of citizenship, financial interests, political affiliations, and material relationships with foreign governments or armed organizations.

C.9. Institutional Safeguards Against Capture

Because the NCW may initially be selected under imperfect conditions, legitimacy must be renewable rather than presumed. Its transitional charter should contain the following safeguards:

1. A narrow mandate focused on state continuity, civilian protection, transitional oversight, and transfer of authority.
2. Separation between the Committee's guardianship role, a technocratic caretaker cabinet, a representative interim assembly, and an independent constitution-making body.
3. Judicial review, public budgets, recorded decisions, conflict-of-interest rules, and removal for serious misconduct.
4. Ineligibility of Committee members, caretaker ministers, senior election officials, and transitional security chiefs to contest the first national election.
5. Periodic public confidence reviews and a procedure for replacing members whose constituencies or conduct no longer sustain confidence.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Ethiopia needs a robust national dialogue to map out the transition and yet such a dialogue cannot take place as long as the current regime is in power. This chicken-and-egg problem is real only if peace and dialogue are treated as separate, all-or-nothing events. In practice, they must be mutually reinforcing stages of a single transition. Limited security bargains make wider dialogue possible; widening civilian participation makes the security bargain legitimate and durable.

A truncated national dialogue, if conditions permit, will have to proceed as a sequenced peace-and-transition process rather than await a comprehensive end to hostilities. Violence-capable actors, preferably led by Fanno, shall negotiate and observe a Stabilization and National Continuity Agreement sufficient to protect civilians, preserve essential state functions, and open civic space. The permanent political order shall not be determined by NCW and armed actors. It must instead be authorized through an inclusive civic and territorial deliberation and ultimately by the elected representatives of the Ethiopian people.

Preparatory work for selecting the National Committee of the Wise may begin in the diaspora because current conditions in Ethiopia require it. However, no diaspora organization shall possess unilateral appointment authority. Nominations shall be plural, eligibility review independent, objections public, and final authorization domestic and nationally representative. Any provisional appointment shall expire unless ratified within the period prescribed by the transitional charter.

Process-wise, diaspora origins do not themselves invalidate the Committee of the Wise. A diaspora-centered outcome would. The proper design is to use the diaspora's freedom and organizational capacity to open a process whose decisive acts - nomination across constituencies, public challenge, domestic majority participation, national ratification, and citizen authorization - progressively relocate ownership to Ethiopia.

The Committee would then emerge not as a self-appointed government-in-exile. It must be crafted as a provisional national trusteeship created through carefully layered consent.

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