



**Report on the Academic Freedom Conference held at Addis Ababa University  
in collaboration with the Embassy of Sweden in Addis Ababa and the Swedish  
International Development Agency (Sida), Stockholm, at the Ras Mekonnen  
Hall, Addis Ababa University on 24 November 2023**

**(Including summary of participants)**



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## 1. Introduction

In 2023, a series of papers were presented at Ras Mekonnen Hall, Addis Ababa University. Among them, this monthly seminar series is organized by AAU Public Seminar Organizing Committee under the auspices of the Offices of the Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer (VPRTT), in collaboration with the Vice President for Strategic Cooperation and Internationalization (VPSCI) at Addis Ababa University and the sponsorship of Sida and the Embassy of Sweden in Addis Ababa. The conference that took place on 24 November 2023 centered on the crucial theme of academic freedom, and it featured three notable papers presented by researchers from Ghana, Mozambique, and Ethiopia.

## 2. Welcoming and Opening Speeches

The opening session of the seminar commenced with warm welcoming, opening speeches delivered by esteemed speakers. Professor Brook Lemma, the Chair of the Public Lectures Organizing Committee, Professor Worash Getaneh, Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer, Dr. Samuel Kifle, Interim President of Addis Ababa University, Professor Birhanu Nega, the Chancellor of AAU and Minister of the Federal Ministry of Education, and Mrs. Åsa Andersson, delegate of H.E. Mr. Hans Henric Lundquist, the Ambassador of the Embassy of Sweden in Addis Ababa.

### 2.1. Words of Gratitude and Program Overview by Professor Brook Lemma, Chair of the Public Lectures Organizing Committee and coordinator of the AAU-Sida Projects



Your Excellency Professor Berhanu Nega, Chancellor of Addis Ababa University (AAU), and Minister of the Federal Ministry of Education of Ethiopia, Mrs. Åsa Andersson, Deputy Head of Mission, Head of Development Cooperation, and Delegate of His Excellency Mr. Hans Henrik Lundquist, Ambassador of Sweden to Ethiopia, Dr. Samuel Kifle, Interim President of Addis Ababa University.

Dear guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Before we proceed, let me provide you with a brief overview of today's conference program. It is worth mentioning that since the notable seminar organized by Professor Bahiru Zewde and Dr. Taye Assefa of the Forum for Social Science on Academic Freedom of Higher Education in Ethiopia in 2008, significant changes have occurred in the higher education systems of Ethiopia. There have been limitations placed on staff-student activities, and the various unrests have taken place in this country. The pandemic has also disrupted interactions within university communities, resulting in restricted academic discussions and mobility. The landscape of academic freedom was further eroded due to the COVID-related restrictions on movements, interactions, and meetings.

The quality of education has been a frequent topic of discussion among communities, among other issues. I leave a detailed exploration of these matters to our esteemed guests and distinguished speakers, who have been carefully selected based on their expertise. These circumstances have underscored the need to revisit the concept of academic freedom since 2008.

Today, as we gather here, Addis Ababa University is granted full autonomy. Moreover, we find ourselves in a time when the world is grappling with advancements in science, particularly artificial intelligence. Therefore, the timing of this conference could not be more appropriate than this. These and other pertinent topics will be addressed throughout this one-day program, which I will now outline briefly.

The conference will commence with a welcoming speech by our university president, Dr. Samuel Kifle, followed by an opening address by Professor Berhanu Nega, the Chancellor of Addis Ababa University and Minister of the Federal Ministry of Education. Subsequently, Ms. Åsa Andersson, the Deputy Head of Mission and Head of

Development Cooperation from the Embassy of Sweden will share with us her remarks. The core discussions and framework of this conference will be presented by Professor Kwadwo Apiagye-Atua from the University of Ghana, a renowned researcher in academic freedom. He will provide insights into the principles governing global universities within the framework of the UNESCO recommendations.

We will then examine an African perspective from Mozambique, presented by Professor Nelson Casimiro Zavale. This will provide us with a high-level global perspective, followed by a focus on an African experience. To shed light on academic freedom in the Ethiopian Higher Education Institute, with special reference to Addis Ababa University, we will hear from Professor Berhanu Abegaz.

This will lead us to the lunch break, and the highlights of the conference will be reflected at the general discussion facilitated by Dr. Damtew Tefera, an esteemed professor in higher education research from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. Finally, the closing remarks will be delivered by His Excellency Mr. Hans Henric Lindquist, who will join us in the afternoon, and Dr. Samuel Kifle, AAU's Interim President.

With this overview, I would like to invite Professor Worash Getaneh, the Vice President for Research and Technology Transfer, to moderate the upcoming sessions leading us up to the break.

## 2.2. Welcoming Speech by Professor Worash Getaneh, Vice President of Research and Technology Transfer, AAU



Good morning and a warm welcome to all of you. I would like to extend my greetings to the esteemed Excellences, invited guests, and colleagues gathered here today.

I am delighted to welcome you to the Academic Freedom Workshop of 2023, organized by Addis Ababa University in collaboration with Sida, to whom we are grateful for their support and partnership in making this workshop possible.

Academic freedom lies at the core of a university's mission, particularly for autonomous institutions like ours. At Addis Ababa University, we are witnessing a transformative phase as we strive towards achieving full autonomy. This period of transition requires us, not only to revise policies and institutional frameworks, but also foster a shared understanding and address the needs of our students. Academic freedom holds immense significance in this journey, and this workshop serves as a crucial and timely platform for exploration and discussion.

We anticipate that the presentations and deliberations throughout this workshop will shed light on various facets of academic freedom. To commence our proceedings, it is my privilege to invite Dr. Samuel Kifle, the Interim President of Addis Ababa University, to deliver a warm and welcoming speech.

### **2.3. Academic Freedom in the Context of AAU's Autonomy by Dr. Samuel Kifle, Interim-President of Addis Ababa University**



Your Excellency, Professor Berhanu Nega, Minister of Education and Chancellor of Addis Ababa University, Mrs. Åsa Andersson, Deputy Head of Mission and Head of Cooperation at the Embassy of Sweden in Ethiopia, and delegate of the Ambassador of Sweden to Ethiopia, distinguished speakers, ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning and a warm welcome to all of you. It is my great pleasure to host this special conference on academic freedom, organized jointly by Addis Ababa University and the Embassy of Sweden in Ethiopia.

Under the comprehensive reforms taking place in Ethiopia's higher education and training sector, the government has proclaimed the establishment and re-establishment of autonomous universities. Addis Ababa University has emerged as the first autonomous university, empowered by the Council of Ministers Regulations 537-2023.

This unique opportunity for public universities will enable our nation to establish institutions of academic excellence that serve their intended purposes. A key aspect of autonomy is granting academic freedom to the university community, which will allow us to attract and nurture talent by freely selecting our students, faculty, and researchers. Academic freedom empowers universities to design programs that align with the market-demand and student preferences, as well as to shape the development of their respective



institutions. This will equip our graduates with the skills needed to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Your Excellency Professor Berhanu Nega, distinguished guests, academic freedom, above all, provides a platform for scholars and intellectuals to engage in discourse and demonstrate their role as societal conscience.

Autonomy, as perceived and redesigned as a proclamation, has more freedom in terms of financial, administrative, and institutional freedoms just to support the exercise of academic freedom to its full capacity. At the same time, once AAU known to be a place of academic freedom, it lost its in 1977. Now it is time to reclaim it, which is very essential for the very existence of this university and the services it renders to the country.

This special conference offers us a remarkable opportunity to foster a culture of discussion and engagement among the academic community on matters of national, regional, and global significance. With this in mind, I am honored to invite His Excellency Professor Berhanu Nega, Minister of Education and Chancellor of Addis Ababa University, to deliver the opening speech.

#### **2.4. Opening Speech by Professor Berhanu Nega (Minister of the Federal Ministry of Education and Chancellor of Addis Ababa University)**





Good morning.

Upon being informed about the upcoming conference on academic freedom at Addis Ababa University, including the possibility of it taking place at Ras Mekonen Hall, I immediately recognized the necessity of addressing this subject. Usually, I am shy, I stay away from these official functions, but since I am the Chancellor of the university, I cannot avoid it.

Moreover, the issue of academic freedom holds personal significance to me. Therefore, I decided to attend the conference and potentially challenge some individuals. I did not ask anyone to prepare a speech for me, nor did I prepare one myself.

During my presentation, I will address three interconnected aspects of academic freedom: the personal dimension, the universal dimension, and the institutional dimension. These three issues are interrelated, and I believe they are crucial to discuss.

On a personal level, I came here today to discuss academic freedom at a significant moment in my life. It was in 1991, in this very same hall, when I witnessed the complete erosion of academic freedom at Addis Ababa University. At that time, a transitional government had just been established, and one of their initial actions was to assert their authority over the academia. The government officials requested the university to organize a discussion on Ethiopian history in this hall as a means of demonstrating their legitimacy. I vividly remember that day. The two speakers chosen to lecture the esteemed historians of Addis Ababa University on Ethiopian history were Bereket Simeon and Tafara Walwa, both government officials who lacked any academic background. They dismissed the rich historical narrative of Ethiopia, reducing it to a mere century and discrediting the scholarly work of Ethiopian historians. Some of the senior attendees, including Professor Tamrat and others, left the hall in frustration, while the rest listened left without comments. This event marked the beginning of the decline of academic freedom at the university.

The second personal experience I want to highlight occurred in 2000 when I was asked to deliver a lecture on academic freedom to Addis Ababa University students. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council, along with Professor Mesfin, invited me to speak on

this crucial topic. However, due to restrictions on student gatherings within the university, we had to hold the meeting at the National Lottery Hall in Piazza (downtown Addis Ababa). We emphasized the significance of academic freedom for a university, stressing that education, freedom, and the pursuit of knowledge are inseparable from it. We also highlighted that academic freedom is enshrined in the constitution, even though its implementation has been lacking. Little did I know that this act of advocating for academic freedom would result in me and Professor Mesfin to be arrested and imprisoned for several months simply expressing the importance of academic freedom. This led to accusations and unjust treatments. Surprisingly, Ethiopian academicians remained silent, failing to condemn the unlawful arrests. However, academicians from around the world signed a petition calling for our release in defense of academic freedom. This personal experience fundamentally altered the trajectory of my life and compelled me to reengage in politics.

Hence, academic freedom is not only a personal matter for me, but also a crucial issue that I have actively pursued. Upon my return to Ethiopia, I dedicated myself to advocating for university autonomy. When I joined the board of Addis Ababa University, we initiated efforts to promote academic freedom and the autonomy of educational institutions. I firmly believe that academic freedom cannot thrive without institutional freedom.

Now, let me delve into the theoretical, philosophical, and universal aspects of academic freedom. It is challenging to envision human civilization without a quest for knowledge and truth. Our development as human beings is intricately tied up with our continuous pursuit of knowledge. Knowledge is a collaborative endeavor that relies on the collective efforts of individuals committed to seeking truth. It requires constant communication, support, criticism, and engagement among like-minded individuals who share a dedication to knowledge and truth. This collaborative process, which defines academia, enables the creation and validation of knowledge. When someone makes a discovery, it is subject to rigorous scrutiny within the academic community. This entails internal critiques, evaluations by peers specializing in the field, and a rigorous refereeing process before publication.

Academic freedom is essential because knowledge, while valuable, can also be disruptive. It often challenges established beliefs and contradicts existing knowledge, be it traditional religious doctrines or politically motivated narratives. To foster an environment where people can freely think and debate, academic institutions must provide the freedom necessary for individuals to search for truth. Academic institutions should be spaces where the pursuit of knowledge is uninhibited.

Academic institutions provide a platform for a community of individuals who are dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and truth. The primary motive of becoming an academician is not financial gain, but rather the intrinsic desire to engage in the search for knowledge and truth. While a decent wage is necessary to support one's family, the ultimate motivation lies in the intellectual quest. Academic institutions and academicians are respected because they contribute significantly to society beyond the material rewards they receive from it. They play a critical role in guiding society towards what is right and wrong, moral and unethical, true and false, scientific and baseless.

The establishment of academic freedom within academic institutions is crucial because it allows individuals to pursue their yearning for truth and knowledge. Academic freedom creates an environment where the search for truth is uninhibited and fosters cooperative efforts among scholars. In the context of human civilization, our ability to think, explore, and cooperate are essential elements that have shaped our progress. In today's world, where communication often lacks reason and truth-seeking, the need for academic freedom and cooperation is more vital than ever. Without a strong commitment to knowledge and reason, society's communication and progress will suffer.

Considering the historical context of Addis Ababa University, it holds a special significance in promoting academic freedom. In the past, during the leadership of none other than Lej Kasa Woldemarian, who is the son-in-law of the Emperor, discussions and debates could freely take place within the university without fear of repression or persecution. While there were diverse voices, there was respect for knowledge, truth, and the researchers who contributed to them. Addis Ababa University has a tradition of hosting renowned academicians who have shared their expertise with both faculty and students. If Ethiopia is to advance towards peace, economic development, and a better

understanding of its place in the world, it requires individuals who can think freely and contribute to human knowledge through scientific research. Addis Ababa University has the potential to serve as a beacon of reason and academic freedom, serving not only the continent but humanity as a whole.

To achieve these goals, it is essential to ensure institutional autonomy and protect academic freedom from political interference. The university community may have experienced past traumas and doubts about the possibility of change, but the commitment to grant autonomy to Addis Ababa University is genuine and aimed at establishing a truly academically free institution driven solely by the pursuit of truth and knowledge. However, this responsibility also demands a sense of responsibility to prevent distractions and maintain focus on the search for truth. Addis Ababa University and its affiliated radio station should strive to be the voice of reason in society, disseminating research-based knowledge and truth. The university should aim to be internationally recognized, serving as a center of knowledge not only for the continent but for humanity as a whole.

This is the vision for Addis Ababa University and the path it should take, setting an example for academic freedom, not only within its own institution, but for all higher education institutions in the country. The success of this endeavor is crucial, as it will impact the opportunities and progress of everyone involved. Therefore, there is a significant responsibility to ensure its success. The focus should be on research, critical thinking, and the development of high-caliber students, rather than prioritizing ethnic affiliations or personal friendships.

In conclusion, we stand united in support of Addis Ababa University's journey towards academic freedom. Together, we will work to create an institution that prioritizes knowledge, truth, and the advancement of this country and its people.

Thank you very much!

## 2.5. Opening Speech by Mrs. Åsa Andersson delegate of H. E. Mr. Hans Henric Lundquist, Ambassador of Sweden to Ethiopia



I must say thank you very much for sharing that personal thought but also the positions that Addis Ababa University thinks and the perspective on academic freedom. Whatever I will say will definitely support what Your Excellency, Professor Berhanu Nega, the Chancellor of the AAU and the Minister of the Federal Minister of Education have already told us. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Samuel Kifle, Interim President of AAU, and of course, Professor Brook Lemma, our partner in prime but also a very, very capable coordinator for our support here at Addis Ababa University. Distinguished scholars, and guests also from other our partner countries and the continent. But not least, students, good morning to you all.

So, let me first say that in Sweden, at the embassy, and Sida, we highly appreciate that Addis Ababa University has organized this landmark conference on academic freedom. I believe it's a timely and much-needed discussion in the development of the newly achieved autonomous state of Addis Ababa University. Autonomy is essential to operationalizing and protecting academic freedom. For Sweden, it is important to underline our support for academic freedom as a necessary condition for quality in higher education and scientific research. Addis Ababa University is a long-standing partner to Sida within our research cooperation. I think we're actually on our 44 years of

cooperation. Over the years, we have been satisfied to see new generations of PhD students graduating and bringing new research with the potential to contribute to the development of Ethiopia. And we would like to congratulate Addis Ababa University for all these fantastic results.

In general, the Swedish priorities in the work with its development agenda are among others human rights, poverty reduction, promotion of freedom of expression, academic freedom, and gender equality. From the Swedish point of view, education, culture, science, and communication are powerful tools to promote resilient societies that are able to resist and recover from crises and conflicts, climate change, pandemics, social, political, and economic instability, as well as to promote human rights. Freedom of expression and safety for journalists, artists, and researchers is emphasized by Sweden. Gender equality includes strengthening women within research as an important priority.

Scientific freedom or academic freedom are not human rights in themselves. The concepts are much broader. However, some other aspects may be protected and promoted by the international human rights framework. The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights explicitly mention the right to benefit from scientific progress and its application. This means recognition of the high value of science for human culture and human dignity.

In recent interventions, the UN Special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights reminded of the importance of looking at all the human rights related to science, including access to knowledge, methodologies, and benefits, access to scientific publications, participation and direct contribution to scientific research, academic and scientific freedoms, and the corresponding obligations of states and other duty-bearers. Research is necessary for new discoveries and creative innovations within science. We have learned from history that new knowledge and pioneering research results are brought about when researchers are committed to following their ideas, thoughts, and objectives. The innovative potential of scientific researchers is best served without undue restrictions. This also relates to research environments characterized by a human rights-based approach where researchers are empowered to develop and grow regardless of gender, ethnicity, or other forms of discrimination. Academic freedom is necessary for scientific research of high

quality and reliable new knowledge. Scientific research is dependent on a free and open debate, review, criticism, and collegiality among peers.

Independence from external pressures and critical reviews by peers are necessary conditions for the production of high-quality scientific research. Finally, academic freedom is necessary for societies and policymakers to trust and build confidence in universities, scientific researchers, and science. There must be reasons to believe that scientific knowledge which informs policy processes and sustainable development is reliable. This means that research production needs to be driven by researchers' quest for new knowledge, not by external pressure. Confidence in scientific research might never be developed or the public might lose trust in science if research is perceived as driven by external pressure. The research needs to be driven by external political and economic interests.

We are here today to discuss academic freedom in the context of Ethiopia, but also to learn from the experiences of other experts from the region. But I must stress, context and ownership are extremely important. Academic freedom is a challenge worldwide. In Sweden, we have our own challenges to address academic freedom, and other countries may struggle with other issues. Contexts differ between regions and countries. Implications in practice may not be the same as in theory. Different countries therefore need to find their own ways to protect scientific and academic freedom depending on the local context. That's why I'm extremely happy to also see here today experts from our neighboring countries who are with us, colleagues from Mozambique, Tanzania, Ghana, and also many parts of Ethiopia.

The ownership of research agenda and scientific capacity, strengthening efforts by researchers and institutions in Ethiopia and other countries in Africa is a necessary condition for academic freedom. Sometimes academic freedom is restricted by financial flows and research agendas from the global north. We in Sweden intend to continue our work to counteract historical power imbalances within scientific research, to promote academic and scientific freedom, and national as well as local ownership of research. We highly appreciate AAU taking the leadership in promoting academic freedom. For the Embassy of Sweden, I would like to underline our support in creating a supportive



environment for not only high human and institutional capacity to produce high-quality research. We would also like to see how academia can contribute to the achievements in human rights as well as in education and create evidence based and informed policy in favor of scientific development. To achieve this, institutions must start in their own house. I look forward to following the coming discussions and hearing about different ideas, challenges, and aspects of academic freedom coming both from Ethiopia and also from the African perspective.

Thank you!

### **3. Summary of the papers presented at the conference**

#### **3.1. History and International Principles of Academic Freedom and Recommendations of UNESCO by Professor Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, School of Law, University of Ghana, Lagos**



The speaker discussed the history and principles of academic freedom, focusing on its evolution, the role of science in empire-building, the colonial university system, and the coloniality of higher education. It also explores the relationship between academic freedom and constitution-making in Africa, as well as UNESCO's recommendations on academic freedom.

The concept of academic freedom encompasses the right to science, academic freedom itself, institutional autonomy, and the freedom of scientific research. The right to science is both explicit and implicit in international agreements, emphasizing the importance of respecting freedom in scientific research and recognizing everyone's right to benefit from scientific progress.

The pre-modern African societies had formalized education systems that fostered the right to science and gave rise to early African universities. Academic freedom in these universities focused initially on religious education but expanded to various disciplines such as linguistics, law, and medicine. Notably, these universities made significant contributions to scientific and technological advancements.

In Europe, the establishment of universities like Bologna, Oxford, and Paris played a crucial role in the development of academic freedom. During the Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, academic freedom flourished, leading to advancements in the natural sciences. However, the document highlights the role of classics in shaping European culture and the subsequent downgrading of ancient civilizations from other regions.

He also discussed the impact of science as a tool for empire-building. European colonization disrupted the academic freedom cultivated in Middle Eastern and North African universities, leading to the domination of scientific knowledge by Europe. This domination perpetuated Africa's scientific and technological backwardness, as Europe aimed to exploit Africa's resources while maintaining technological superiority.

The colonial university system in Africa had four types: missionary, independent states, settler colonies, and pre-independence universities. These universities were influenced by political-colonial objectives, perpetuating mind colonialism and hindering the decolonization of knowledge production. The purpose of the university is seen as truth-seeking, the resolution of societal problems, and supporting democracy. However, the document acknowledges the tension between academia's self-determination and the collective self-determination of society.

The professor also explored the four generations of constitution-making in Africa and their impact on academic freedom. He highlighted the transition from liberal constitutions during independence to one-party states and military rule, which suppressed academic freedom. Subsequent generations witnessed a return to democratic order, but the explicit recognition of academic freedom varied across constitutions.

Finally, the UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel (1997) is discussed. It directly recognizes academic freedom for academics and institutions, while indirectly addressing academic freedom for students. The recommendation emphasizes self-governance, tenure, and the freedom of scientific research, teaching, and learning. In general, Professor Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, provided an overview of the history, principles, and challenges related to academic freedom. He further highlighted the importance of academic freedom in promoting scientific progress, knowledge dissemination, and societal development.

### **3.2. Academic freedom in Mozambique by Professor Nelson Casimiro Zavale from Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique**



Professor N. C. Zavale provided an overview of the historical accounts and the state of academic freedom in his country, Mozambique. He covered the historical context, legal protection, institutional autonomy and governance, freedom to research and teach, freedom of exchange and dissemination, and campus integrity.

From 1975 to the late 1980s, Mozambique had a one-party political system and faced restrictions and limitations on academic freedom due to a socialist, centralized economy and instability in the country. From the 1990s to the late 2000s, Mozambique transitioned to a multi-party democracy and free-market economy, granting new rights to higher education institutions (HEIs) and institutional autonomy. However, from the 2010s onwards, there has been a rise in authoritarianism, leading to restrictions on academic freedom.

The Mozambican constitution does not explicitly mention academic freedom but protects general civic rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of scientific, technical, literary, and artistic creation. Laws related to higher education reaffirm constitutional rights and institutional autonomy, but academic freedom is absent in specific statutes for academic staff.

HEIs in Mozambique have a constitutional right to institutional autonomy, which includes scientific/pedagogic autonomy, administrative/financial autonomy, and disciplinary autonomy. However, there are limitations to autonomy, such as government authorization for new academic programs, appointment of senior leaders, and control over administrative issues. While there are no official restrictions or censorship on the freedom to research and teach, practical limitations exist due to underfunding and self-censorship by academics in socially and politically sensitive areas.

In general, there are no restrictions on access to scientific literature, freedom of collaboration and travel, or publishing research findings. However, restrictions are felt when disseminating socially and politically sensitive research, particularly at conferences and seminars. Academics expressing views on social and political affairs face serious restrictions. HEIs in Mozambique are not only spaces for academics, but also for recruiting personnel for political parties. Threats to campus integrity come from government intelligence agents present on campuses and representative units of political parties.

Factors contributing to the deterioration of academic freedom include low-intensity military clashes, power struggles over natural resources, disclosure of hidden debts,

reduction in funding, and increasing authoritarianism. Overall, the professor highlighted that there is a general decline in academic freedom indicators in Mozambique since 2010 due to various political, economic, and governance challenges.

### **3.3. Academic Freedom in Ethiopian Higher Education Case of AAU: Reflections on the Expectations of What Full Autonomy of AAU Brings in Terms Of Academic Freedom by Professor Berhanu Abegaz, Emeritus Professor, Department of Chemistry, AAU**



At the introduction Professor Berhanu Abegaz discussed various aspects of Africa's population growth, higher education in Africa, and the challenges faced by the sector. He began by mentioning the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its recognition of the right to life. The document highlights Africa's population growth and questions whether it presents an opportunity or a risk for socio-economic and sustainable development. He mentioned the significant increase in Africa's population from 1 billion to 4 billion people, with a projection that almost half of the world's children may be African by the end of the century. He also briefly touched upon the history of higher education in Africa, starting with pre-colonial and colonial institutions. The Professor provided a list of universities in Africa, along with their historical names and current

names and countries. He further, discussed global historical milestones in education, such as Plato's Academia, Aristotle's Lyceum, and the establishment of the first universities in Europe.

In addition, the presentation addressed the growth of student enrollment in African higher education, noting that Africa's tertiary enrollment is just over 9.4% compared to the global average of 40%. Professor Berhanu Abegaz also mentioned the challenges of staffing issues, including the shortage of faculty with doctoral degrees in Kenya, and the need for East African universities to recruit more lecturers. Credibility issues in African higher education were discussed, with a specific example of invalid PhDs awarded by a university in Uganda. He also mentioned the top 30 universities in Africa, highlighting the dominance of South African, Egyptian, and Nigerian universities.

The overall state of African higher education is described as being in turmoil. Expansion has outpaced the allocation of human and financial resources, leading to diluted quality and unemployable graduates. The lack of research infrastructure, access to data, and poor remuneration for staff members are identified as challenges. The impact of COVID-19 on higher education and conflicts in Ethiopia are acknowledged as additional obstacles. Lastly in the introduction section of his presentation he mentioned that he is worried about the increasing use of social media platforms by African university students and highlighted his concerns about their impacts on academic performance.

Then, he went on to discuss discusses several key concepts and definitions related to academic freedom and autonomy in higher education. Academic freedom refers to the freedom of academic staff, students, and academic units to fulfill their responsibilities in teaching, research, and community engagement without interference from external influences. Autonomy, on the other hand, refers to the level of self-governance necessary for academic work, standards, and management while being accountable to public systems and respecting academic freedom and human rights. It is seen as a prerequisite for universities to fulfill their functions effectively. The presentation emphasized that the pursuit of truth and the production and transmission of knowledge, which are fundamental to universities, cannot be achieved without university autonomy.

Institutional accountability, he stated that it should be discussed in terms of both external and internal aspects.

Collegiality is another important principle mentioned, which involves academic freedom, shared responsibility, participation in decision-making, and the development of consultative mechanisms. According to him it is seen as essential for improving academic excellence and quality for the benefit of society. The professor mentioned to highlight the decline of academic freedom in 22 countries worldwide, including India, China, Mexico, Britain, and the United States. However, there are countries where academic freedom remains robust, such as the Czech Republic, Luxembourg, Sweden, Peru, Portugal, and Canada. In many other countries, academic freedom is either stagnant or at a low level.

Professor Berhanu Abegaz mentioned, Academic Freedom Index scores (AFI) of different countries. He noted that by ratifying the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, 171 states have committed to protecting academic freedom as an indispensable freedom for scientific research. Infringements on academic freedom are considered violations of internationally recognized human rights. The AFI scores of various countries are discussed, with some countries having high scores, such as Burkina Faso, Switzerland, Costa Rica, Portugal, Lithuania, Australia, France, and Ireland. Russia's AFI score has declined over time, while countries like North Korea, Myanmar, Eritrea, Turkmenistan, China, and Cuba have low scores. The presentation also highlighted specific cases, such as Egypt experiencing a significant fall in AFI score, and the decline of the same in the United States' since 2016. Overall, he provided insights into the status of academic freedom in different countries.

Continuing his discussions on the international scenario of academic freedom, he talked about six conventions and recommendations related to academic freedom. These included:

- The ILO/UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers (1966)
- The UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1977)
- The 1974 Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers



- The 1990 Dar es Salaam convention
- The 1990 Kampala Declarations of Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility
- The 1988 Lima Declaration

Among these, the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel (1977) was highlighted as the most comprehensive and internationally recognized standard for academic freedom. He recognized the crucial role of higher education and research in the pursuit of knowledge and cultural development. The UNESCO recommendation emphasized the importance of academic freedom and institutional autonomy for teachers to fulfill their responsibilities and contribute to the advancement of higher education and society as a whole.

According to him, the recommendation defines academic freedom as the right of higher-education teaching personnel to teach and discuss without prescribed doctrine, carry out research, disseminate findings, express opinions about their institutions, and participate in professional and academic bodies. It asserts that teaching personnel should be free from discrimination and repression by the state or any other organization of similar status.

The recommendation, he said, also highlighted the duties and responsibilities that come along with academic freedom, such as respecting the academic freedom of others, conducting teaching and research in accordance with ethical and professional standards, and addressing contemporary societal issues while preserving cultural heritages. In terms of governance and accountability, the recommendation, he emphasized, the need for a balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability, considering the substantial financial investments made in higher education. He suggested that higher education institutions should open their governance to ensure accountability. He also mentioned that the responsibilities of the state in setting goals, providing guidance, regulating higher education, and steering its development. On the other hand, universities have obligations such as maintaining academic and administrative standards, conducting institutional self-review and upholding quality, ethics, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Overall, he highlighted the key conventions and recommendations related to academic freedom and the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in ensuring its preservation and effective implementation.

Further, Professor Berhanu Abegaz mentioned that the Ethiopian government has taken steps to establish and support institutions for higher education, such as the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), the Higher Education Strategy Center (HESC), and the National Pedagogic Resources Center (NPRC). These institutions were created to ensure the quality and relevance of higher education in Ethiopia.

However, despite these efforts, according to him, there have been significant challenges to academic freedom in the country. The government's response to student protests has often involved harsh measures, including campus raids, police occupation, violence, and arrests. This has resulted in the suppression of critical inquiry, creativity, and the free exchange of ideas within Ethiopian higher education institutions. These actions not only hinder academic development but also pose a threat to the nurturing of democratic values and norms within the education system.

In connection to this, the historical background of higher education in Ethiopia was also discussed. The University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) was inaugurated in 1950 and later granted a charter by the Imperial Government in 1954. The document, he said, mentioned a survey team from the University of Utah that was commissioned in 1959 to develop a Higher Education Development Program for Ethiopia. The team recommended that autonomy and academic freedom be granted to the university, to ensure freedom of teaching, research, and publication. The team also emphasized the importance of financial self-reliance for the institution.

The presentation by the professor included the recommendations of the Forum for Social Studies (FSS) publication of 2008, entitled “Academic Freedom in Ethiopia: Perspectives of Teaching Personnel”. These recommendations call for greater awareness of international human rights instruments among the higher education community in Ethiopia. The publication also advocated for the institutionalization of principles of autonomy and academic freedom by incorporating them into the charters and regulatory frameworks of educational institutions. The FSS further emphasized the need for institutionalized governance characterized by the rule of law, consistency, and accountability.

In addition, the FSS in its publication recommended taking affirmative action to improve women's access to higher education and expand their career opportunities in teaching, research, and academic leadership. FSS urged teaching personnel to actively promote and protect academic freedom, institutional autonomy, professionalism, and excellence. In the same report, the student community was encouraged to rise above divisions and prejudices and embrace universal ideals of equality, justice, freedom, peace, and progress.

Professor Berhanu Abegaz also highlighted the importance of international engagement and support. He called upon the government, academic community, civil society, and international organizations to engage in dialogue and provide the necessary support for the application of UNESCO's 1997 Recommendations and the findings of the FSS studies. This support was seen as crucial for translating provisions and research findings into practice and improving the higher education landscape in Ethiopia.

Furthermore, he mentioned the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, a document that outlines principles of academic freedom and autonomy. While many universities worldwide have signed this document, none from Ethiopia have done so to date. The positive correlation between university autonomy and performance is also emphasized, suggesting that universities benefit from being freed from state micro-management and having the ability to make independent decisions.

Lastly, the Professor introduced the principles set forth by the International Association of Universities (IAU) that every university should uphold. These principles include the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake, tolerance of divergent opinions, and the obligation to promote freedom, justice, human dignity, and solidarity. The rights and obligations that society should ensure for universities are also discussed, highlighting the importance of independence from external interference and the freedom to conduct teaching and research. Overall, he provided a comprehensive overview of the challenges and recommendations regarding academic freedom in Ethiopia. He emphasized the need for institutional autonomy, freedom of expression, inclusion, accountability, and international engagement to foster a conducive environment for higher education and promote academic excellence in the country.

Finally, Professor Berhanu Abegaz outlined several key messages and observations regarding the state of universities in Ethiopia when viewed from the perspectives of academic freedom. These were:

1. Universities have the responsibility to engage with and address global challenges while benefiting humanity and contributing to sustainability.
2. Intellectual and moral autonomy is essential for universities to fulfill their societal responsibilities effectively.
3. University independence should be recognized, protected, and defended by governments, society, and the institutions themselves.
4. The *Magna Charta Universitatum* has been signed by numerous universities worldwide, but Ethiopian universities have not participated.
5. The university community, including management, lacks awareness of critical conventions and recommendations relevant to their academic freedom.
6. The university retains significant power over academic staff appointments and resource allocations, but lacks control over student enrollments and curriculum revisions, which are subject to government interferences.
7. The academic community has limited participation in decision-making processes, lacks a teachers' association to protect their rights, and faces restrictions on academic freedoms.
8. Conditions of services are considered non-negotiable, leading to job insecurity and self-censorship among faculty members.
9. Students should express dissatisfaction with library facilities, dormitories, food provision, and recreational amenities, questioning the leadership's commitment to academic excellence.
10. The current state of the university deviates from the ideals of the UNESCO Recommendations, with limited institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and non-existent teachers' associations.
11. The lack of awareness of the UNESCO Recommendations among university staff suggests the need for its publication and distribution to increase awareness.

12. The Ethiopian Revolutionary Democratic Front's actions were not aligned with principles of democracy and academic freedom, with incidents of student suppression and repression of the Ethiopian Teachers' Association.

13. Two encounters in the FSS book of 2008 with university staff members revealed a reluctance to fill out questionnaires, expressing distrust and dissatisfaction with those in positions of authority at a university in Ethiopia.

Overall, he emphasized the challenges faced by Ethiopian universities in terms of autonomy, academic freedom, governance, and the need for awareness and advocacy which have to be addressed in this new initiative to re-install academic freedom at Addis Ababa along full autonomy of the institution.

#### 4. Discussions session



From left to right Professor Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua, Professor Nelson Casimiro Zavale, Professor Damtew Tefera, from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa and Professor Berhanu Abegaz

##### 4.1. Questions raised by the participants

During the seminar, Professor Damtew Tefera, a renowned discussant of academic freedom from KwaZulu-Natal, SA, commenced the afternoon session by providing an overview of the historical significance of academic freedom. He emphasized the viewpoints of prominent figures such as Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, who

championed freedom within higher education institutions. Quoting their thoughts, he evoked the essence of freedom in the context of academia. Furthermore, Professor Damtew Tefera posed a series of thought-provoking questions regarding the essence of academic freedom and its relevance within higher education institutions. He delved into the reasons behind the importance of academic freedom, highlighting its potential to benefit not only the institutions themselves but also the wider community.

After presenting his insights, the convener graciously opened the floor to the conference participants and requested them for questions, comments, and discussions. This encouraged an interactive and engaging atmosphere, allowing participants to actively contribute to the discourse surrounding academic freedom.

The participants raised the following questions during the discussion:

- 1. Participant 1:** At the University of Dar-es-Salaam, we had a similar workshop with anecdotal stories from East Africa. How can local academicians navigate circumstances together? My understanding is that obstacles to academic freedom come from government interventions, and cultural and belief restrictions in higher education institutions. Conversely, teacher-student relationships promote academic freedom. The convener added that the main detractor of academic freedom is the government, but non-governmental external bodies also influence it.
- 2. Participant 2:** Nowadays, there is not much emphasis on learning scholarships; universities mainly offer degrees. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Bologna University allowed students to freely move and pursue their interests in Persia. The Kampala Declaration advances the mission of academic freedom and encourages academicians to work on empowering human rights and democracy beyond the campus. How does academic freedom relate to provoking higher education professionals outside the campus, especially at Addis Ababa University where leaders are not actively participating? How can we activate autonomy in our institution?
- 3. Participant 3:** How does academic freedom contribute to the improvement of academic indices?

4. **Participant 4:** How can we navigate the challenges between university autonomy and academic freedom? University professors often face difficulties speaking without censorship.
5. **Participant 5:** Are there any African universities that openly discuss academic freedom?
6. **Participant 6:** Do the government and society at large believe in the value of research output? I have noticed new variables like the autonomy motivations of the ministry. Do you think these factors push us toward academic freedom?
7. **Participant 7:** Academic freedom reflects the dynamics of the governmental system. If that is the case, is it possible to maintain academic freedom without governmental support?
8. **Participant 8:** Academic freedom raises questions about human desire and free-will. How does human free-will relate to academic freedom? Which comes first; human free-will or academic freedom?

#### **4.2. Answers and comments of the presenters:**

##### **1. Answers and comments by Dr. Nelson Casimiro Zavale:**

- The definition of academic freedom has an impact on the boundaries and limitations within universities. Drawing from the experiences of Bologna University, original ideas flourish and promote academic freedom. In today's world, children are innovative, and academia should not restrict their potential. Professors should recognize this, which raises the question: why is higher education freedom affected? Therefore, we should prioritize students' freedom.
- Regarding Kampala University, academic freedom goes beyond writing books and publishing articles. Education should have a practical aspect, and many teachers fear censorship. I recommend that teachers should not be overly fearful to promote academic growth and democracy.
- I understand that academic freedom of students' means providing equal opportunities. Academic freedom in higher education should not imply a lack of accountability towards society; we should still be accountable. As for the question about the familiarity of the concept of academic freedom in African universities, I cannot provide a definite answer. However, from a democratic perspective, we



should value academic freedom. More modern communities tend to be accountable and have academic freedom.

- It is challenging to define freedom as something that is granted; it requires challenges and struggles. Freedom varies from place to place and its implementation is context-sensitive.

**Answers and comments by Professor Kwadwo Appiagyei-Atua,**

- It is good to believe in the power of science, but we must also acknowledge that there is still a significant gap between scientific knowledge and its application within our communities.
- The existence of good academic freedom in modern societies is not always guaranteed. In Europe, for example, there are countries and higher education institutions that do not fully uphold academic freedom. The reality on the ground may differ from what is stated in written documents, so we must examine the challenges that exist.
- Freedom of expression and academic freedom have some overlap, but they are not identical. Freedom of expression primarily focuses on the right to speak, while academic freedom is associated with the sharing of ideas and thoughts within academic communities. However, outside of educational institutions, professors and students can express their expertise freely.
- Academic freedom is not something that is simply granted; if it were, we might take it for granted. It requires a fight and struggle to attain and maintain academic freedom.

**Answers and comments by Professor Berhanu Abegaz,**

- The student-teacher relationship requires further attention and improvement. Academic freedom should begin internally by allowing students to express their thoughts and take on responsibilities. Academic freedom necessitates commitment, so it is important to empower students by assigning them certain responsibilities. I encourage you to remain optimistic and work towards achieving the desired outcomes or success.
- How do we ensure accountability? It is a gradual process that requires time and repeated efforts to bring about change gradually.

- Academic freedom faces challenges. Solutions that work in Sweden may not necessarily be applicable in Ethiopia. It is important to recognize the contextual differences and tailor solutions accordingly.

After a discussion session of more than one hour and a half, Professor Damtew Teferra, the discussant acknowledged the active participation of the audience and the knowledgeable responses of the three presenters of this conference.

The afternoon sessions was concluded at 4:00 pm with closing remarks delivered by distinguished individuals. Professor Brook Lemma, the Coordinator of Sida and chairperson of the Public Seminar Organizing committee of AAU, Professor Worash Getaneh, the Vice President of Research and Technology Transfer, and Dr. Amina Jama, the representative of the Sweden Embassy, shared their concluding remarks.

Professor Brook Lemma expressed gratitude towards the presenters, audience, and collaborators, specifically mentioning Addis Ababa University and the Swedish Embassy in Addis Ababa.

Professor Worash Getaneh also extended his thanks to the presenters, audience, and the university community as a whole, while emphasizing that the seminar will continue until the end of the transition period of Addis Ababa University. He encouraged further discussions and the sharing of thoughts and knowledge for the collective success of the university community.

Closing Remarks by:

**Dr. Amina Jama, Senior Research Advisor at the Embassy of Sweden in Addis Ababa delivering her closing speech on behalf of Mrs. Åsa Andersson**



Lastly, Dr. Amina Jama drawing from her own experience at Harvard University, emphasized that it is not coincidence that this conference on Academic freedom is conducted here in the Ras Mekonnen Hall. According to Professor Berhanu Nega, Minister of the Federal Ministry of Education, it was in this hall that academic freedom was killed by the military government that over threw Emperor Haile Selassie and he himself was imprisoned as a consequence. It is not therefore a coincidence he reinstated academic freedom in this same hall of Ras Mekonnen.

### **Acknowledgement**

Dr. Zenawork Assefa, researcher in forensic linguistics at Addis Ababa University compiled this report.

See the annex below with summary statistics of the participants

**Number of organizations and participants of the AAU Academic Freedom conference held at the Ras Mekonnen Hall Main Campus at Sidist Kilo on 24 November 2023, Addis Ababa**

We had a total of 157 attendants

They fall into the following categories.

No.	Institutions	Counts
1.	Ministry of Education (including the minister)	4
2.	AAU Management (President and Vice Presidents)	7
3.	College of Natural Sciences, AAU	3
4.	College of Veterinary Medicine	1
5.	College of Education	3
6.	Institute of Ethiopian Studies	5
7.	Ethiopian Power and Electric Authority	1
8.	College of Social Sciences	6
9.	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	1
10.	AAU students (a mix of undergraduate and graduate students)	56
11.	Addis Ababa Institute of Technology	3
12.	ESA-TV	2
13.	Oromia Broadcasting Network	3
14.	ETV (Ethiopian Television)	4
15.	Fana TV	4
16.	GWR TV	4
17.	AELC-TV	3
18.	Multimedia Broadcasting Corporation	6
19.	AAU Radio	2
20.	AAU Public Relations	2
21.	AAU Technology Transfer	2
22.	AAU Space Science	1
23.	Horn of Africa Environment Center and Network	2
24.	Ministry of Health	1
25.	College of Journalism, AAU	4
26.	Addis Ababa Municipality	1
27.	College of Law and Governance Studies	1
28.	Embassy of Sweden	2
29.	College of Development Studies, AAU	1
30.	Institute of Peace and Security Studies	1
31.	College of Health Sciences	5
32.	Addis Ababa Science and Technology University	2
33.	Sida Projects' Coordination Office	7
34.	Quality Assurance Directorate, AAU	3
35.	International Guest Speakers	4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>