

On the Launch of *Walking Between Worlds* at Addis Ababa University

Dear Yikunno,

First and foremost, please allow me to congratulate you warmly on your scholarship – well earned, well deserved. To see *Walking Between Worlds* reviewed by two Addis Ababa University professors and then approved with praise and unconditional endorsement by you the Chief Editor of the AAU Press is, for me, both humbling and deeply meaningful. Your message confirmed not only the strength of the manuscript but also the seriousness with which you and the reviewers have approached it. For that, I am sincerely grateful.

Thank you also for outlining the plan to launch the book during the annual AAU book fair in May. I appreciate the clarity of the schedule and the practical thinking behind incorporating the launch into an existing institutional event. The idea of a low-key ceremony, integrated into a routine academic gathering, genuinely suits my own personality. I have never been drawn to grand gestures, and throughout my life I have tried to let the work speak for itself. In that sense, the idea of a modest, orderly, and student-centered launch aligns with my own instincts.

By “low-key,” I understand your plan to make the event part of a routine annual book fair. Such an arrangement is practical, efficient, and respectful of institutional rhythms. It also reflects a kind of academic humility that I admire. Universities should not need spectacle to celebrate intellectual work; their traditions and calendars are themselves dignified platforms.

And yet, I feel compelled to share a gentle counter-thought.

While a routine setting suits my temperament, there is nothing routine

about **Walking Between Worlds**. This was the central message conveyed by the two professor reviewers. They recognized that the book does not merely recount the past but attempts to speak to the future—particularly to the next generation of the Ethiopian diaspora. In your own words, the AAU Press has historically published works that look backward, documenting history, institutions, and personalities. You noted that this book is different: it looks ahead rather than behind. You even described its publication under your editorship as the biggest achievement of your life.

If that is truly the case, then perhaps the word “biggest” should not be matched with the phrase “low-key.” The event, even if respectful and modest in tone, could still be large in reach and vision.

Allow me, therefore, to suggest a middle path: an event that remains dignified and purposeful, yet broad in participation and symbolic reach.

First, since you will be in Germany at the time, the event could be organized in a way that allows you to participate live on a large screen. Your presence, even remotely, would give the launch a sense of continuity and personal meaning.

Second, because the book is addressed to the next generation of the diaspora, the event could intentionally include both first- and second-generation diaspora individuals currently living in Addis Ababa.

Third, it would be meaningful to share advance copies with the press or book unit of the Prime Minister’s Office, and, if possible, place a copy directly into the hands of the Prime Minister himself through AAU’s institutional connections.

Fourth, media presence could broaden the reach of the event. Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation, especially widely viewed programs followed by diaspora families, could help extend the message beyond the hall.

Fifth, the event could include selected diaspora social media voices who connect strongly with younger audiences.

All of this is feasible. The months of February, March, and April provide ample time for thoughtful planning. Advance copies distributed during February and March would give invited guests and institutions sufficient time to engage with the book before the launch.

On the day itself, the two professor reviewers could be given prominent speaking roles, reinforcing the scholarly foundation of the work.

There is one additional point that I wish to share, inspired by your own observation. You noted that a significant percentage of young Ethiopians are looking outward, hoping to go abroad. This is a sad reality, but it is also part of the social context to which this book speaks. Ethiopia has more than ninety million citizens under the age of thirty—roughly seventy percent of the population. Yet English is not the primary medium of communication, and the language, tone, and nuance of **Walking Between Worlds** are directed especially toward readers who operate comfortably in English, including the global Ethiopian diaspora.

When I think about the size of that diaspora, and the size of the youth population at home, I imagine a long arc for this book—perhaps even a million copies over time, circulating among first- and second-generation Ethiopians across continents. My intention is that every dollar, every cent, and every Birr of proceeds go directly to Addis Ababa University. This is not a commercial project for me; it is a contribution. As AAU moves into a new era of institutional independence, with the responsibility of financing and managing its own affairs, it will need new and creative sources of support. If the book can become even a small stream of funding for the university, then its impact will extend beyond ideas into tangible institutional strengthening.

This, too, is a reason why the launch might aspire to be more than routine. A book that aims for global reach, that speaks to millions of young Ethiopians at home and abroad, and that may contribute materially to the university's future, deserves an event that reflects that scale of ambition.

In short, while the ceremony may remain modest in tone, the event could still be large in scope and symbolic importance. The book itself is large—both in volume and in ambition—and it speaks to Ethiopian communities across continents. Such work deserves a launch that reflects its reach.

At the same time, I want to reiterate that I remain comfortable with whatever decision you ultimately make. I am, by nature, a modest and low-key individual. If you choose the routine path, I will accept it with gratitude. But if there is room to imagine something slightly larger—something worthy of the word “biggest”—I encourage you to do so.

With appreciation for your leadership, your vision, and your support of this project, I look forward to whatever form the launch ultimately takes.

Warm regards,

Aynalem