

Thanks a million to Al-Amoudi We will do the rest.

By Mekonnen Kassa

Sheikh Al-Amoudi has done much more than his fair share for Ethiopia and Ethiopians, and I am at a loss for words to deservingly express his plentiful generosity. All I can say to him is Thank You 50 million times.

Since Al-Amoudi has had the opportunity to emigrate to his motherland, without much concern on return on investment (profit), he has invested in several business ventures including in some just to keep them in operation or to put them on the map; he has helped poor Ethiopian families put food on their table; and been generous to famous, and sometimes ungrateful, Ethiopian personalities.

All this time, while admiring his generosity from afar, I had only one reservation, and I tried to call attention to it about a year ago when I wore the following:

“Sheik Alamoudi, are you out there? Ya WoD BeLeDy. AleiKh AllaH, TaALa MaANa. NeHiNa BiNHIBeK KeTiR Wa NaShKuReK JeZiReN.....It is enough already, time to come up North.”

Roughly translated, I asked my fellow countryman, Sheikh Al-Amoudi, to please head North, as the region has been neglected for so long, and the people would love him and thank him much and would be grateful and appreciative of his generosity. Remember, this was last year at a time when Al-Amoudi was being persecuted in Addis Ababa’s court of public opinion for the simple act of practicing his democratic right and electing to vote for the incumbent party candidates. Boy, it sounds too long ago now, doesn’t it?

I don’t mean to take the credit, but I am happy to see that my call didn’t fell on deaf ears, and to a limited extent, my concern is now alleviated and my reservation lifted. Because as we saw yesterday, Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi pledged to contribute \$50 million birr (close to \$6 Million USD) towards the construction of Gondar University Referral Hospital.

And a thank you note is also in order to a fellow Gonderie Minister Bereket Simeon, the Public Relations Advisor to the Prime Minster. Mr. Simeon has been instrumental to the development of Gondar as well. Say what you will about his politics, but he is one of the few Yambajinie Lij (Kebele 01) who escaped Melaku Tefera’s brutality, and if I am not mistaken, who managed to become the highest ranking Gonderie in government since the capital city moved out of Gondar.

Because of Al-Amoudi’s generosity and Bereket’s unrelenting effort, the residents of Gondar region, who now number more than five million and growing fast, are on their way to have a world class hospital. A hospital that will help significantly reduce the number of people that die every year because they either have no relatives or cannot afford to travel to Addis Ababa for specialized treatment.

I was, and still am concerned, however, that much of the development and investment activities are overly concentrated in the capital city. All the previous administrations for the last 60 years spent over 90% of the nation’s capital in Addis Ababa, as the result, with a little over 3 million residents, Addis Ababa enjoys the highest concentration of public and private institutions including hospitals and schools. Despite this fact, the focus on Addis Ababa goes on.

It is true that a notable progress has been made within the last eight years to address this discrimination against the rest of the population, and the effort by the current government to increase the availability and accessibility of social institutions to the rest of 77 million Ethiopians continues. But a more equitable distributions is still far-off and remains much desired.

Non-profit and private capital investment is one way to address this disparity. Even in the richest countries in the world, capital investment, philanthropy and volunteerism by corporations, associations, and individuals are the machinery that build strong communities notwithstanding political persuasions and Party affiliations. There is an important lesson for Ethiopian Diaspora here, and some segment of the our population have already learned the lesson and are making individual and collective contributions to make life better to Ethiopians back home.

Gondar Development Association is an organization that was positioned to make tremendous contribution. But past activities of GDA indicate that it has not been a shining success story. I may be wrong, but it has been over ten years since I have heard of a completed project by GDA. The last project I actively participated was the construction of additional classrooms at Fasiledes Secondary High school. Since then, we have been mired in all kinds of problems including political infighting and have done nothing, and caused our people to lose faith in our desire and ability to help. And as for the current project, though Gondar natives are the largest population in North America numbering in tens of thousands in every major American and Canadian cities, the association has only managed to collect less than \$175,000 USD since the project to build a referral hospital was kicked off.

A major obstacle has been GDA's lack of effort to convince Gondar Diaspora not mix politics with development projects and GDA's leadership unwillingness to work with the Ethiopian government citing political ideology differences. That is completely misdirected. GDA should remain a non-partisan association whose main objective is to help improve the standard of living of the population of the region. GDA should do better by learning from successful experiences of other organizations like Tigray Development Organization (TDA), and GDA's President Tekalign Gedamu has to aspire to become what the late Araya Zerihun was for TDA. And now that a life saving medicine, in the form of 50 million Birr from Al-Amoudi, has been injected into this association, GDA can become relevant once more by successfully completing the construction of this referral hospital whose total cost is estimated to be over 175 Million Birr, about \$20 Million USD. It won't be easy to raise the required \$13 million plus USD.

To that end, GDA has to work hard and create a plan and hold fund raising events in North America and Europe cities. Reach out to TDA and learn their success recipe. I am sure Ethiopian restaurant owners and wonderful singers, most of whom are Gondar natives anyways, will support this noble cause by offering their venues and services free of charge. And I call on all Ethiopians, and particularly Gonderies, to put our politics aside and do what is required of us to complete this project. We need to pull together and attend fund raising events for this and other future projects. Doing this now may save our own lives later after we get old and retire in Gondar and become beneficiaries at the hospital, or if we are the lucky few that doesn't need its services, it will give us a sense of pride when we drive by and point to it and say "I helped build that." The way time flies in America, that time will come sooner than we all think.