

Nehnan Elamanan (ንሕናን ዕላማናን), Now the Ala/ ዓላ Manifesto — Against Divide and Rule of the Past as well as the Present

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1.

1. Introduction መቐደም (ቀድደመ)

The document long known as *Nehnan Elamanan* has for decades been misrepresented—both in content and authorship. Commonly attributed to Isaias Afewerki and the early EPLF elite, the document is often invoked to justify authoritarian unity. However, a deeper reading reveals a different truth: this text, drafted by survivors of the 1969 purge and finalized in Ala in November 1971, is a call for pluralism, shared purpose, and national liberation through diversity.

By restoring its correct name, **ንሕና እውን እቲ ናትና አተንኛ** (We and Our Goal), and re-framing it as the **Ala Manifesto**, we return the document to the people of Eritrea—to the many ethnicities, faiths, and languages it was written to serve. This article revisits the manifesto's historical, political, and linguistic meaning and reclaims it as a tool for future education and civic renewal.

2. Historical Context (ታሪካዊ ኮንተክስት/ጥቕሲ/ጥቕስት, ታሪካዊት ቅጥኒ)

In 1969, deep internal tensions emerged within the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), as disagreements over ideology, leadership, and military discipline intensified. These tensions culminated in a violent purge (ፑርጋ/ስጉዳ) of leaders and thinkers, many of whom had advocated for inclusive and democratic principles.

The survivors of this purge—isolated, wounded, but not defeated—regrouped in a small, strategic place called **Ala (east of Dekamare, Ekkeleguzai)**. In 1971, away from the factionalism that had torn apart the previous leadership, these individuals composed a new document. This was not merely a response to past betrayals; it was a **vision for a new Eritrea**.

Ala became both a **geographic refuge** and an **intellectual base**. The manifesto they wrote there sought to realign the national cause with its original moral and social commitments. It emphasized unity across ethnic and religious lines, and the idea that Eritrean liberation was inseparable from equality and cooperation among its peoples.

By rooting their document in Ala, the authors reasserted a collective vision of resistance—one grounded not in hierarchy or personal power, but in **shared sacrifice and common purpose**.

3. The Core Message of the Manifesto እቲ ልብቢ መስሳጅጅዮ/ለበዋ/ልኡኽ ናይ እቲ ማኒፌስቶ (ግሉጽ/ክሱት)

The core message of the manifesto—which contains over **5,420** Tigrinya terms and four distinct images depicting (ትውክክል) interactions (ንስነት ግብሪ) between civilians and fighters—is that Eritrea is a land of many peoples: Abyssinian, Cushitic, Nilotic, and Semitic. Its population practices diverse religions—Christianity, Islam, and traditional beliefs—and speaks a rich variety of languages, including Afar, Bilen, Kunama, Nara, Saho, Tigre, and Tigrinya.

Far from being a weakness, this diversity is presented as a **foundational strength**. Hence the enduring slogan:

ሕቡራት ንጸንቦ; ከፋላት ንማረኽ

"United we resist; divided we succumb."

The manifesto is written in a clear and standard form of Tigrinya, as opposed to the form spoken, written and taught by the current dictator monopolist of the Tigrinya language, Isias Afewerki. It uses natural conjunctions such as "እውን", to use the eight parts of speech with precision, and constructs its arguments in a structured and accessible way. Despite occasional imperfections, it represents one of the first attempts to use Tigrinya to articulate a modern political vision, making it a rare and valuable linguistic model.

4. Correcting the Title/ምእርራም እቲ ሺመት: From “Objectives” to “Goal”

One of the most persistent misunderstandings of the original *Nehnan Elamanan* document lies in the translation of the word **ዕላማ** (*‘elama*). In many English renderings, it has been loosely and inaccurately translated as “objectives.” However, this choice of word is both vague and misleading.

The Tigrinya term **ዕላማ** carries a deeper, more focused meaning: it refers to a **target, aim, or purpose**—something one **intentionally works toward or strives to achieve**. It suggests clarity, intentionality, and shared direction.

For example:






- In Tigrinya: *ንስሳ ወቐዳ እቲ ዕላማ* — “The target was hit.”
- In English: “*She hit the target.*”
- In Italian: “*Lei ha colpito il bersaglio.*”

Translating this term as “objectives” reduces its emotional and philosophical weight to a list of tasks or administrative benchmarks. The true intent of the document was not to outline bureaucratic steps, but to declare a **clear national purpose**: unity, liberation, and collective self-determination.

Thus, the proper rendering of the title is:

- **Tigrinya:** *ንሕና እውን እቲ ናትና አተንና*
- **English:** *We and Our Goal* or *We and Our Aim*
- **Italian:** *Noi e il nostro scopo*

Correcting this one-word re-centers the entire document around its original spirit: a people bound together by a common goal—not just objectives, but a **shared future**.

<p>So, the Correct Translation of the Full Title/ሺመት Is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tigrinya :  <i>ንሕና እውን እቲ ናትና አተንና</i> • English:  <i>We and Our Aim</i> or <i>We and Our Goal</i> • Italian:  <i>Noi e il nostro scopo</i> <p>And yes, “Objectives” is still too vague and misleading.</p>	<p>ዕላማ (<i>‘elama</i>) in Tigrinya =</p> <p> Target (as in something you aim at, or try to hit — physically or figuratively)</p> <p><i>ንስሳ ሰሒታ/ወቐዳ እቲ ዕላማ.</i></p> <p>In English: Target: E.g.: “She missed/hit the target.”</p> <p>In Italian: Bersaglio: E.g.: “Lei ha mancato /colpito il bersaglio.”  (Literally: “She missed the target.”)</p>
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5. A Hijacked Legacy: From Unity to Control

ሐንቲ ዝምት-ቲ/ውርርቲ ርስቲ፡ ካብ እታ ሕብረት ናብ እቲ ኮንትሮልኦ

Un'eredità dirottata: dall'unità al controllo

While the *Nehnan Elamanan* document has long been associated with the rise of Isaias Afewerki and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), its core message stands in stark contrast to the political reality that followed.

The regime that later emerged—**autocratic, militarized, and ruled through fear**—has claimed the document as its founding charter. Yet, the very people who regrouped in **Ala in 1971** and articulated a vision of **inclusion and unity** would scarcely recognize what Eritrea has become.

Instead of embracing the country's pluralistic fabric, the current regime has adopted a strategy of **divide and rule**:

- **Ethnic groups** are played against one another;
- **Religious communities** are controlled and restricted;
- **Languages and cultures** are flattened under the weight of political conformity;
- **Historical memory** is tightly managed, allowing only one narrative—**that of the party and its leader**.

The irony is glaring: a text meant to **unify the nation's many peoples** is now used to **justify the silencing of those very peoples**. The slogan "*United we resist; divided we succumb*" has been emptied of meaning in official discourse—transformed into a patriotic chant without its original pluralistic context.

6. Renaming It “The Ala Manifesto/ዓለ ማኒፈስቶ”

The significance of Ala as the birthplace of this manifesto cannot be overstated (ግኑን -አግጋኑ-). After the devastating purge of EPLF leaders in 1969, Ala became the new stronghold (ዕርዲ) for those who survived (ትፋፋት ሕያው). It was here, in this place of quiet resolve, that the vision for a united Eritrea was reimagined and rewritten. Calling the document the “Ala Manifesto” restores its true identity and honors the spirit of resistance and hope that defined that moment. This name asserts that the manifesto is not a product of division or dictatorship, but of a collective struggle for inclusion and unity.

7. Linguistic Significance of the Text

Beyond its political importance, the manifesto offers a rare example of Tigrinya used in a formal, standardized way. The text employs natural conjunctions such as “እውን” and consistently applies the eight parts of speech, which many texts of the period fail to do. Its clear, structured arguments make it accessible both politically and linguistically. As such, the manifesto is a valuable tool for scholars and learners interested in the evolution of modern Tigrinya and its capacity to express complex ideological ideas.

♦ e.g.: “በዛዕባ ኩነታትና ሕቶታት ጥራይ ኣይኮነን ንሕተት፤ ርእይቶት እውን ይውሃብ እዩ።” (p.1)

English: We would like to clarify one important point. As fighters, it is our duty to speak only the truth to the Eritrean people. The people not only have the right to praise or criticize our actions, but also to contribute valuable information, advice, and insights that can help strengthen and advance the machinery of liberation.

8. Errors and Value: A Living Text for Learning

While the manifesto contains linguistic errors, these do not detract from its value. Rather, they humanize the text and reflect the conditions under which it was written—by activists under pressure, in a time of turmoil. These imperfections offer rich opportunities for linguistic analysis, showing how Tigrinya grammar and vocabulary were used and adapted in practice. The manifesto thus serves as a living document, one that can teach both language and history simultaneously.

♦ e.g.: ‘ንሕና ማለት እዞም ሕጂ ኣብ ቅድሜኹም ቀሪብና እንዛረብ ዘሎና ተጋደልቲ ኤርትራውያን እቶም ብመጋቢት 1969 ዓ.ም.ፈ. ካብ ምምሕድዳር “ቀያዳ ኣል ዓማ” ዝ ተፈለና ኢና።” (p. 1)

Tigrinya: ንሕና ኢና እቶም ተዋጋእቲ ዝ ሓድግና ተሓኦ ኣብ መግጋቢት 1969 ምእንቲ ኣድሐነ (ደሐነ) ናትና ሕይወታት.

English: We are those fighters who left ELF in March 1969 to save our lives.

Italian: Noi siamo quei combattenti che lasciarono l'ELF nel marzo del 1969 per salvarci la vita.

9. The Role of the Manifesto in Civic Education*

This manifesto remains an indispensable educational resource for Eritrea. It teaches that Eritrea’s diversity—in peoples, religions, and languages—is a foundation of strength rather than division. As a linguistic text, it provides learners with a model of standard Tigrinya usage, reinforcing both national identity and linguistic pride. Including this text in civic education programs can inspire young Eritreans to embrace unity, resist divisive politics, and value their cultural heritage.

♦ e.g.: ‘ኣብ ሓደ ሃገር ዝተደለደለ ወይ ማዕረ ዝኹነ ሓርነት ናይ ነፍሲ ወከፍ ዜጋ ናይቲ ሕብረተ-ሰብ ክሳብ ዝርከብ ጭኩናን ተጋድሎን ኣየቋርጽን እዩ።’ (p.3)

Tigrinya: ኣብ ሓንቲ ማሕበር ኣብ ኣየን ኣይኣልላን እታ ትኸኸልንነት/ማዕርንነት ኣልላ ወትሩ ጽቕጠት ወይ ጥቕዓት.

English: In a society where there is no equality there is always oppression.

Italian: In una società in cui non c'è uguaglianza c'è sempre oppressione.

* Civic education refers to the process of educating citizens about their roles, rights, and responsibilities within a society.

10. Conclusion

The “Ala Manifesto” stands as a testament (እውዋጅ) to unity (ሕብረት), resilience (ብርትዕ), and hope (ተስፋ). Reclaiming its rightful name and message is essential (ዓይነተይና) for restoring its original spirit—a spirit that continues to inspire Eritreans today. This manifesto challenges us to reject divisive tactics, to celebrate our rich diversity, and to work collectively for a future of peace and strength. It is more than a historic document; it is a living call to action.

♦ e.g.: ‘ኣብ ፖሊቲካዊ ምዕባለ ሃገርና ኣድቕቕ ኣቢልና እንተተዓዘብና ባዕዳውያን ዝእቲ ምስ ኮራኩሮም ... ሃይማኖት ቀንዲ መሳርሒ ከይኮነ ረኽብዎ።” (p. 5)

English: Eritreans require no lessons on how foreign powers forge alliances with local traitors to subjugate a people and seize their land—we have lived this history. One of the clearest examples is

Giuseppe Sapeto, the Italian Lazarist missionary who, under the guise of religion and diplomacy, purchased a tract of land in Assab in November 1869. This seemingly minor transaction marked the beginning of a calculated plan that culminated in the colonization of Eritrea in 1890. Sapeto taught us, through deed rather than word, how colonial conquest often begins—not with armies, but with betrayal and deception.

Furthermore, the manifesto concludes with an extremist attitude or belief that seeks to bring about political change through violent or extreme means outside Eritrea. This clearly reflects a lack of political maturity, as Eritreans have no right to enter another country and attempt to impose change. Such actions constitute interference in the internal affairs of others—an act the Eritrean people unequivocally condemn.

♦ e.g.: “ንእስራኤል ምድምሳስን” (p. 24).

Appendices

A. Side-by-Side Translation of the Title

- Tigrinya: ንሕና እውን እቲ ናትና አተንና
- English: We and Our Aim / We and Our Goal
- Italian: Noi e il nostro scopo

B. Key Tigrinya Terms and Their Meanings

- ዕላማ (‘əlama): Target, goal, purpose (not vague “objective”)
- ሕቡራት ንጸንዕ: United we resist
- ክፋላት ንማረኽ: Divided we succumb

C. Select Excerpts with Linguistic Commentary

- Examples of conjunction usage (እውን)
- Application of eight parts of speech
- Analysis of recurring vocabulary and stylistic choices

Summary of the Facts:

- **Manifesto title:** *Nehnan Elamanan (We and Our Objectives)*
- **Group:** Selfi Natsannet (Ala group, later PLF2)
- **Timeframe:** Written and circulated around **1971**
- **Authorship:** Not signed publicly.
- **Purpose:** To criticize the ELF and justify the splinter group's ideological and political position
- **Historical Impact:** It was foundational in paving the way for the eventual **merger of PLF1 and PLF2**, which led to the creation of the **EPLF** in the early 1970s

♦ Why It Matters



This act of drafting the **Nehnan Elamanan** manifesto was not just an academic or political exercise—it was a **founding ideological act**. It became:

- A **foundational text** for what would become the EPLF (Eritrean People's Liberation Front).

- A **justification for the breakaway movement**, defining its ideological independence from the ELF.
- A tool to **attract new recruits** and consolidate internal unity.

II. Who Really Wrote Nehnan Elamanan? The Vanished Voices Behind Eritrea’s Foundational Manifesto / መን አልሎዎ ብኡነት ጽሑፍ ንሕናን ዕላማናን? እተን ጥፋኣት ድሀያት ድሕሪ እቲ መሰረት ማኒፈስቶ ናይ አሪትራ/ Chi ha veramente scritto Nehnan Elamanan? Le voci scomparse dietro il manifesto fondativo dell'Eritrea

መሰረት ማኒፈስቶ ናይ አሪትራ/ Chi ha veramente scritto Nehnan Elamanan? Le voci scomparse dietro il manifesto fondativo dell'Eritrea

 By [Your Name]  ብ [ስምካ / ስምኪ] or ብ (እቲ ናትካ/ናትኪ ስም) = The person who wrote this piece.





For decades, the 1971 manifesto *Nehnan Elamanan* (*We and Our Objectives*) has been cited as the ideological and intellectual birth of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Often attributed to Isaias Afwerki, who would later become the country's authoritarian ruler, the document positioned the Selfi Natsannet/ሰልፊ ነጻነት (Ala group) as a principled alternative to the fractured Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).

But if we examine the document closely—and compare it with Isaias’s own public speeches over the past 30 years, especially his 34th Independence Day address in 2025—a different truth emerges. A truth many Eritreans have always suspected: *Nehnan Elamanan* was likely **not written by Isaias**, but by **democratic voices who were later silenced**, including Tewolde Eyob.

🔑 A Manifesto in Standard Tigriyna — But by Whose Hand?

The manifesto is written in a **clean, grammatically sound form of Tigriyna**. It uses natural conjunctions like “እውን”, applies the **8 parts of speech** accurately, and constructs arguments in a structured and accessible way.

Compare that to the **broken, jargon-laden, and often incoherent Tigriyna** spoken by Isaias in recent years. In his May 24, 2025, speech, he misused terms like:

-  **ልዑላዊነትናን** (for sovereignty) — instead of the correct **ንግስነት**
-  **ባዶ-ድምር** (to mean zero-sum) — misusing **ባዶ**, which means "lonely" not "zero"
-  **ሒደ አመልካቲ** (for “indicator”) — instead of proper terms like **ጸዓዲ** or **ሓብባሪ**
-  **ዝሓሰረ ተኸፋሊ** (cost) — a fabricated phrase, instead of clear Tigriyna like **ዋጋ**

Even basic expressions in his speeches betray **a lack of understanding of verb structure, infinitive forms, and core grammar**. Diplomats and Eritrean linguists alike recognize this — yet the myth of his authorship of *Nehnan Elamanan* persists.

Tewolde Eyob: A Democratic Voice Erased

One of the named leaders of Selfi Natsannet/ሰፊ ነጻነት alongside Isaias was **Tewolde Eyob**—a figure widely respected for his commitment to **inclusive, democratic ideals**. Many Eritreans believe he had a significant hand in drafting the manifesto.

And yet, Tewolde Eyob was **murdered under suspicious circumstances**. As the EPLF transitioned into a one-man dictatorship, many intellectuals and democrats were either **exiled, imprisoned, or eliminated**. Those who could have challenged Isaias’s claim to intellectual and political leadership simply vanished from the narrative.

The question then becomes not just: *Who wrote Nehnan Elamanan?*
But rather: *Who was silenced so that Isaias could claim he did?*

The Theft of Credibility

In revolutionary movements, words matter. Authorship matters. By attaching his name to *Nehnan Elamanan*, Isaias gained **early political credibility** and the image of a thoughtful nationalist.

But as the years passed, it became clear that **his strength was not in ideas—but in control**. He **shut down the University of Asmara**, crippled the education system, and implemented a policy of **divide and conquer** that destroyed social trust. In today’s Eritrea, it’s rare to see even two neighbors greet each other freely.

Meanwhile, the **language of governance deteriorated**, and so did the moral vision.

Conclusion: The Tweet That Sums It All

The Eritrean dictator, expelled from AAU early in the morning, spent 30 years as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, pretending to be a revolutionary.

He shut down the university and divided the people. He introduced a toxic “divide and conquer” policy that destroyed trust. It’s now rare to see two Eritrean neighbours even greet each other.

For 34 years, he acted like an intellectual. But consulates in Asmara know: he doesn’t even understand what an infinitive verb is in Tigriyna .

His speeches are filled with confusing terms and awkward phrasing:

- ◆ ልዑላዊነትናን (for sovereignty) — wrong. Use: ንግስነት
- ◆ “MAGA” and እዉጅ መርሓ — meaningless Use: መለሰ አመሪካ እንደገና ዓብባይ
- ◆ ሓደ አመልካቲ (for indicator) — better: ሐብባሪ, ጸዓዲ
- ◆ ዝሓሰረ ተኸፋሊ (for cost) — should be: ዋጋ, ስጥሳ
- ◆ ብኢንዱስትሪያዊ ውጽኢት (industrial output) — better: ኢንዱስትሪያል ፍርርያት
- ◆ ባዶ-ድምር for “zero-sum”? But ባዶ = lonely, not zero. Use: ዘሮ-ሱም. E.g. 1. ሐንቲ ጸልማት እውን ባዶ መንገድዲ a dark, lonely road. 2. እታ ነጻነት ናይ አሪትራ እያ ከውንቲ ሓደ ዘሮ-ሱም. ጸወታ ኣብ አየን ሓደ ሰብ ርቡሕ እንከ እቲ ካልእ ጥፋእ "Eritrea’s independence became a zero-sum game in which one man gained while the rest lost."
- ◆ ኣብቲ ምዕሪት (equation) — Use proper hybrid: አቅዋዝዮን e.g. 6x4=12x2
- ◆ ፕሪሚቲቭ (primitive) misused Use: ፕሪሚቲቭ e.g. ፕ. ጽሕፈት p. writing
- ◆ ቁጠባ ዕንጋሎ (subsistence) — better: ሱብሲስተንስ/ ቀለብ
- ◆ “ዘይተሓሰበሉ ሳዕቤናት” — replace with: ዘይህፋር መዘዛት
- ◆ “ዓወት ንሓፋሽ!” — ዓወት means “war,” not “victory.” Use: ድል ናብ ማሰስ

The dictator speaks neither like a thinker nor a liberator.

His speeches betray a broken tongue—and a broken vision.

To revive Eritrea, we must also revive the Tigriyna language.

May the next generation speak with truth, skill, and clarity.

(*Heddas Eritrea*, May 25. 2025 – p. 2)

Tweet

Tweet 1/2

Nehnan Elamanan (ንክናን ዕላማናን) (11.1971), Now the Ala/ዓላ Manifesto — Against Divide and Rule of the Past as well as the Present

With 5,420+ Tigrinya terms & 4 symbolic images, the manifesto declares: Eritrea’s strength lies in its diversity—Abyssinian, Cushitic, Nilotic, Semitic; Christian, Muslim, traditional; Afar to Tigrinya.

"United we resist; divided we succumb"

ሕቡራት ንጸንዕ፣ ከፋላት ንማረኽ

#Eritrea #AlaManifesto #Tigrinya #Unity

Tweet 2/2

Correcting the Title: From “Objectives” to “Goal”

The Tigrinya word ዕላማ (*‘alama*) means a **target, aim**—not vague “objectives.”

Correct translation of the title is:

• **Tigrinya:** ንክናን እውን እቲ ናትና አተንና

• **English:** *We and Our Goal*

• **Italian:** *Noi e il nostro scopo*

It’s about **shared purpose**, not administrative steps. Reclaiming the title restores its true spirit.

#NehnanElamanan #Eritrea #LinguisticJustice 20.06.2025

NOTE

Preserving Revolutionary Language: The Case of ሰልፊ ነጻነት

The phrase ሰልፊ ነጻነት (*Selfi Natsannet*)—literally “Freedom Front”—is more than just a political label. It reflects a historical moment in Eritrea’s struggle when organized groups chose indigenous and military-rooted terms over borrowed ones like *party* (ፓርቲ). Words like ሰልፊ carried ideological weight, emphasizing collective resistance, sacrifice, and unity in armed struggle.

Today, modern terminology such as ነጻነት ፓርቲ (Freedom Party) has become common in civilian political discourse. The use of such **borrowed modern terms** is not only practical but necessary—Tigrinya, though rich with around **60,000 native words**, still evolves through contact with global political, scientific, and technological realities. Borrowed words help fill gaps, update expression, and connect Eritrean discourse to broader world systems.

However, replacing older phrases entirely risks erasing the revolutionary worldview embedded in Eritrean foundational documents like *Nehnan Elamanan*. Rather than discard them, scholars and educators should **preserve traditional terms and contextualize them**—while embracing borrowed terms that serve modern needs. Language thrives when its roots are deep, and its branches reach forward.

Eyob Ghebreziabhier Bein

Sewwit.org

20.06.2025