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Mathiws Wondu Foundation

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<https://mathiws.org/> 

22ND YEARS ANNIVERSARY

PRESS RELEASE

APRIL 17, 2026,
ADDIS ABABA,
ETHIOPIA

Mathiws Wondu was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of two and began treatment at Tikur Anbessa Hospital. His recovery initially showed promise, and there was hope that he would soon return to school. Unfortunately, his condition deteriorated. Because advanced treatment options such as bone marrow transplantation were not available in Ethiopia, plans were made for Mathiws to travel to Washington, D.C., accompanied by his elder brother, Yonas Wondu (the donor), and his mother, W/ro Amsale Beyene. Tragically, before this journey could take place, Mathiws passed away on September 13, 1996 (E.C.) at 8:00 p.m., at just four years of age.

In the wake of this heartbreaking loss, the family chose to transform their grief into an opportunity to help others. Mathiws Wondu Foundation was established guided by the conviction that “if we could not save Mathiws, we can save other children like him”. On April 17, 1996 (E.C.), fifteen founding members came together at the Desalegn Hotel in Bole to formally establish the organization, turning sorrow into a mission of hope and lifesaving impact. At the time, under challenging circumstances, Mr. Wondu Bekele and the founding members established the foundation’s office within Mathiws Wondu’s family residence. This required Mr. Wondu Bekele to shoulder two major leadership responsibilities simultaneously. He served as the Executive Director of the National Tobacco Enterprise (NTE), with a good salary and benefits, while also acting as the Chief Executive Officer of the Mathiws Wondu Foundation. In addition, his wife, W/ro Amsale Beyene, worked as Secretary and Treasurer of the foundation. Both served the foundation for six years without any salary or compensation.

Despite these limitations, the foundation, through modest support gained from its membership in the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), began conducting anti-tobacco campaigns in schools. However, this dual role created unavoidable conflicts of interest between the tobacco-producing NTE and the anti-tobacco advocacy led by the foundation. As a result, Mr. Wondu Bekele was compelled to choose between the two responsibilities. Although the foundation was in a weak financial position, he voluntarily resigned from his secure post at NTE and dedicated himself fully to the foundation. This decision later led to his recognition by the American Cancer Society, which appointed Mr. Wondu Bekele as the Global Cancer Ambassador representing Ethiopia.



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The Mathiws Wondu Foundation, born in the family home of Mathiws Wondu, stands as a testament to the power of unity and commitment. It demonstrates how a single family, together with a small group of dedicated individuals, can lead to a meaningful change. Today, the foundation has reached more than 5,000 patients and their families, employs 43 full-time staff, and actively runs 10 projects. Through these efforts, it continues to deliver essential support that make a lasting difference in the lives of cancer and NCD patients as well as their loved ones. MWF covers the costs of:

- Round-trip transportation for cancer patients and their families from their home regions to Addis Ababa and back.
- Drugs and Medications that are not available at Tikur Anbessa Specialized Hospital.
- Diagnostic and laboratory services that are not available at Tikur Anbessa Specialized Hospital.
- A monthly allowance of 1,000 Birr to help cover basic living expenses while patients are undergoing treatment at the hospital.
- A monthly education support of 1,000 Birr for selected childhood cancer patients who pursue their education in between treatments.
- Offer psychosocial support, including transportation, meals, and accommodation at our 24-bed Phangisile Psychosocial Support Center, along with educational resources for cancer patients and their caregivers during treatment intervals.

By doing this, our foundation has earned admiration not only within Ethiopia but also across the world. Although the foundation is a non-governmental organization with limited financial resources, it continues to make significant contributions to the national effort led by the Ministry of Health, particularly in addressing non-communicable diseases in general, and cancer in particular. Among these contributions, the following key areas stand out:

1.National Cancer Control Plan/NCCP/

With the financial and technical support from Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon/GSK, MWF successfully recruited and seconded a Technical Advisor to the Ministry of Health for the development of the National Cancer Control Plan (NCCP) for 2015-2020, the first of its kind in Ethiopia.

2.National Childhood and Adolescent Cancer Control Plan/NCACCP/

With financial and technical support from the American Academy of Pediatrics, MWF assisted the Ministry of Health in developing and implementing the National Childhood Cancer Control Plan (NCACCP).

3.NCDI Report

With financial and technical support from Burgen University and PIH, along with a delegation secured from the Ministry of Health, MWF successfully implemented the Non Communicable Diseases and Injury/NCDI/ project which led to the development and launch of the NCDI report in 2018.



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4. Anti-Tobacco Proclamation

With support from Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids (CTFK) and the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), MWF provided financial and technical support to the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority (EFDA) in advocating for the House of Representatives of Ethiopia to pass one of the strongest laws on tobacco and alcohol in Africa. This led to Mr. Wondu being nominated as one of the six recipients of World Health Organization's World No Tobacco Day Award 2020 from the Africa Region.

5. NCD Alliance of Ethiopia

With financial and technical support from the Global NCD Alliance, MWF collaborated with CENCDA, a consortium of six Ethiopian NGOs focused on non-communicable diseases to produce the UHC/NCD in Ethiopia Report. This report has been recognized globally as one of the most outstanding and significant research contributions of its kind.

Mathiws Wondu Foundation has remained committed to fulfilling its founding objectives with integrity, transparency, and accountability. This commitment has earned the organization deep respect and trusts both nationally and internationally. In the past eight years alone, the foundation has received a total of nine awards, including six international and three national awards including the 2016 E.C Bego Sew Award.

After celebrating our 21st anniversary, the Addis Ababa City Administration granted the Mathiws Wondu Foundation 10,000 square meters of land. We have completed the necessary legal procedures and are now in the process of securing the site. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to H.E. Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and H.E. W/ro Adanech Abebe, as well as to all those who supported us in various ways to make this possible.

While our work began with a focus on childhood cancer, we have since broadened our scope to encompass other forms of cancer, as well as non-communicable diseases and their associated risk factors. As our mission evolved, we recognized that our previous name, Mathiws Wondu-YeEthiopia Cancer Society, no longer fully reflected the breadth of our work. To ensure clarity and alignment with our expanded vision, we have revised our name to Mathiws Wondu Foundation (MWF).

The Mathiws Wondu Foundation logo is a visual embodiment of its vision, mission, values and expanding scope of work. The revised logo symbolizes hope, growth, and a healthier future for all communities we serve, while honoring our origins in childhood cancer care. The heart-shaped design and human figures embody compassion and care. The two larger green figures represent the holistic support MWF provides while the smaller yellow figures symbolize the children and communities we serve. The interwoven figures also form the letters M and W (ማ and ወ in Amharic) anchoring the design in our identity.



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The colors of the logo also carry deep meaning. Golden represents hope and resilience in childhood cancer care, while green reflects wellness, healthy living, and sustainable growth. Together these colors symbolize our journey from a dedicated fight against childhood cancer toward a wider mission addressing health and wellbeing for all. This revised name and logo were shaped by the insights of the children and families we serve, as well as our board members, staff, and partner organizations.

Finally, our Chief Executive Director, Mr. Wondu Bekele, was unexpectedly diagnosed with Cholangiocarcinoma (bile duct cancer). For the past year, he has been undergoing treatment both abroad and within Ethiopia. His treatment is progressing well, and we hold strong faith that he will complete it successfully and return to his duties in full health. We continue to keep him in our prayers.

For more than two decades, the Mathiws Wondu Foundation has been serving the community with your support. Over the past 22 years, we have worked diligently to fulfill the objectives for which the Foundation was established, and we extend our deepest gratitude to the institutions and individuals who have contributed to this achievement.

In particular, we acknowledge the Ministry of Health, the Ethiopian Food and Drug Authority, regional health bureaus, civil society organizations, partner institutions, our members, volunteers, board members, and staff. With confidence in your continued support, we call upon all of you to join us in opening a new chapter for the health of our society.

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