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Oromo Studies Association  
**Oromo Studies Association**

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President Barack Obama

The White House

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(202) 395-2020

RE: OROMO STUDIES ASSOCIATION'S APPEAL ABOUT THE CONTINUED REPRESSION OF OROMOS BY THE PRIME MINISTER MELES ZENAWI MINORITY REGIME

Your Excellency;

The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) is a not-for-profit scholarly organization registered in the United States of America. Its members come from diverse academic backgrounds, many with international reputes covering all continents. OSA's mission is to promote studies relating and relevant to the Oromo people.

For the last two decades, OSA members and the international community following events in East Africa have witnessed a unique phenomenon in Ethiopia - the transformation of a minority ethnic group from Tigray, a small northern province, reigning over and terrorizing an overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian population. As a scholarly organization familiar with the bitter consequences of ethnic conflicts and hate driven politics, we are obligated to bring this serious matter to the attention of the international community.

Since its rise to power in 1991, the Ethiopian minority ethnic regime has dominated the socio-politics, economy, and military of Ethiopia, promoting the unconditional supremacy of its tribal monopoly. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the current leader of Ethiopia, via his links with the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF), uses the state in a patrimonial manner to guard the interests of Tigray at the expense of the interests of the other 94 % of Ethiopia's population. All key political positions including state owned financial institutes, industrial sectors, military and security personnel, and key political offices are manned by trusted Tigreans and loyal cohorts, creating hate and animosity between Tigreans and the rest of the ethnic groups of Ethiopia. This institutionalized ethnic supremacy has fueled anger in Ethiopia to a dangerous degree, a level which must become an imminent concern to all interested in peace and political stability of the region.

In order to weaken opposition and extend his regime's tenure, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has also used a divide-and-rule policy, creating conflict among ethnic groups, for example, Afar and Somali, Sidama and Oromo, Gumuz and Oromo, etc. His regime also concocted conflicts within political associations of the same ethnic groups such as the Guji and Borana Oromos. Tigrean students are used to supervise and spy over their peers from other ethnic group in dormitories, and this has recently become a source of major fighting even inside university campuses. Whenever such conflicts arise, TPLF's security police always interfere with vengeance, arming and supporting Tigrean students. This growing hatred among ethnic groups in Ethiopia, which has been concocted and used for cheap political gains by the TPLF, unless pacified in time, is certain to blow into a serious conflict that could destabilize the region, becoming another recipe for genocide in East Africa.

### **Sham elections to appease donors:**

After intense pressure from the international community, and to hide its cruel face, the Ethiopian regime declared to conduct parliamentary elections, the next to be held this summer. As the date approaches, the regime has become extremely hostile, kidnapping, arresting, and murdering perceived leaders of the opposition and influential individuals of the society. In fact, no real opposition is allowed to register for the elections, and dissenting voices are dealt with harshly. Because of a growing rejection it faces among the civic society in Oromia, contrasting the growing support that Oromo political organizations enjoy from their people, the regime has shown exceptional brutality in the Oromo region. . For example, the TPLF security forces tortured a young Oromo man Biyyansaa Dhibba Gaaddisaa to death and reported as if he died of a natural cause. To further deceive the local and the world community the Ethiopian government reported as if he was a member of the ruling party. Later on Biyyansaa's father and his cousin told VOA that the Ethiopian government report distorted the cause of Biyyansaa's death and his party membership. They both assert that the Biyyansaa's cause of death is physical torture perpetuated by the Ethiopian security forces. They also stated that Biyyansaa has never been a member of the ruling party.

## **Unjust Verdict on Peaceful and Non-violent Oromo Civilians:**

Escalating its preemptive strike to demoralize opposition and eliminate fair competition to its ethnic domination, the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi minority regime recently arrested suspected civilians from the non-Tigrean ethnic population in mass. The total number of Oromo political prisoners including, those kept in clandestine centers, is estimated to be in the several tens of thousands. Fifteen of these detainees were charged for allegedly supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a front that fights for self determination of the Oromo people. Among the detainees are a famous Oromo businessman, Eshetu Kitil, and General Secretary of a legal Oromo political party, Mr. Bekele Jirata. The defendants were denied access to their families and lawyers. In fact, Human Rights Watch report states that the detainees were tortured.

At a trial held on the 31st of March 2010, the 3rd bench of the Federal High Court of Ethiopia sentenced Engineer Mesfin Abebe Abdissa to death, and another co-defendant, Engineer Tesfahun Chemedda Gurmessa, to life imprisonment with out parole. Other defendants were sentenced to prison terms ranging from ten to fifteen years, all without parole. These victims, who are promising professionals of Oromo identity, come from diverse professional backgrounds including journalists, businessmen, entrepreneurs, Lawyers, scientists, statisticians, high school and University students. Two of the victims escaped from jail, and currently reside abroad to tell their stories. One of the escaped defendants later told VOA, that he was charged with contributing 150 birr (about \$10) to the OLF. Such are the bogus reasons that citizens lose lives for in Ethiopia. The detainee was beaten and tortured while in detention. Many others have been falsely accused and abducted from their homes and their work places. Obviously, the sentences are politically motivated, designed and executed in order to harass opposition forces, intimidate and stifle democratic and political rights, and discourage citizen participation.

### **Abductions:**

The two able engineers, Mesfin Abebe Abdissa and Tesfahun Chemedda Gurmessa, were kidnapped from Kenya in April 2007, while under the custody of the UN High Commission for Refugees and the legal protection of the Kenyan government. After kidnapping, they were kept in an Ethiopian jail incomunicado for two years, and brought to court In Addis Ababa recently under manufactured charges. The deportation of refugees and asylum seekers is in breach of international agreements of which both Ethiopia and Kenya are signatories. Under Article 33 (1) of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951 U.N.T.S. 150), “[n]o contracting state shall expel or forcibly return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his ... political opinion.”

The Ethiopian government has a well-documented record of gross and flagrant violations of human rights, including imprisonment and torture of its citizens who were forcibly returned to the country. There have been credible reports by Amnesty International, Africa Watch, and other human rights organizations, of serious physical abuses including bodily injury, committed against political prisoners in Ethiopian jails and secret detention centers. For example, in 1998,

Ethiopia executed a man named Jamil Sherif Yasin. Oromos are routinely singled out for arrest, kidnapping, and torture, simply for voicing their opinions, or for objecting to mass arrests and tortures going on in Ethiopia.

Because of the widely reported abuses and the hundreds of thousands of refugees residing in neighboring countries, including Kenya, the Kenyan government is fully aware of Ethiopia's flagrant violation of human rights. By deporting the two refugees from under its legal protection, the Kenyan government shares responsibility for the subsequent torture, imprisonment, and all other illegal actions the victims were subjected to, including death. The Kenyan Government also breached its obligations under international treaties as well as customary laws and humanitarian values. Under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1465 U.N.T.S. 185) Kenyan Government has the obligation to protect refugees and asylum seekers, and not return such individuals to a place where they face torture or killing.

### **Jamming VOA:**

In its bid to win the sham elections, the regime has recently jammed the Voice of America radio transmission to all Ethiopian languages. In light of this, the white House, on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010 stated that: "While people gained greater access than ever before to information through the internet, cell phones and other forms of connective technologies, governments like China, Ethiopia, Iran, and Venezuela curtailed freedom of expression by limiting full access to and use of these technologies". When asked what he thinks about the testimony of the US ambassador to the UN Commission on human rights Mr. Meles Zenawi arrogantly replied "I have not heard of such idiocy. But if it has occurred, it proves the idiocy of the person in Geneva". Moreover, in an Ethiopian television interview, he reacted angrily saying "not the US Ambassador, not the Mars Ambassador" will have any impact on the election process".

### **Banning Non governmental Non-profitable Organization:**

For no apparent reasons the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi minority government has banned majority of non-governmental non-profitable organizations (NGO) from Ethiopia. NGOs have served the Ethiopian people in times of hunger crisis and continued to help the Ethiopian people. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi used his rubber stamp parliament to ban NGOs. The negative impact of banning NGOs in Ethiopia is being felt in all States of Ethiopia including Oromia.

### **Eviction of native Oromos from their land and selling it to international investors.**

Today the whole world is witnessing food shortage and wide spread hunger in Oromia. The famine situation in Oromia is basically man made. The Minority government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is evicting Oromo farmers and is selling their land to foreigner investor, at the expense of Oromo people livelihood. The Oromo people are becoming victims of neo-

colonialism and modern day slavery because of loosing their land to the so called international investors.

The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) calls on the United States government, all neighboring countries of Ethiopia, including Kenya, all regional and international human rights organizations, and western donor and democratic countries, as well as diplomatic communities in Ethiopia to continue putting pressure on the Ethiopian government by demanding:

1. The immediate release of all political prisoners including those recently sentenced in the Ethiopian court.
2. To stop the kidnapping of refugees from neighboring countries.
3. To commit to the respect of human rights and allow freedom of expression and assembly.
4. To allow ethnic equity in Ethiopia and recognize that all citizens are equal in the face of law.
5. To stop jamming VOA, the only popular free media.
6. To implement the Ethiopian constitution and allow all ethnic groups to freely exercise the right to determine on their affairs.
7. To conduct free and fair election and create conditions for justice, peace, stability and sustainability in the region.
8. To restate non-governmental organizations without preconditions
9. To stop unlawful evictions of Oromos and illegal selling of Oromo land.

Respectfully,

Haile Hirpa, PhD

OSA President

Cc:

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