



## Oromo Studies Association

### OSA Newsletter

July, 2008

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#### Message from the President

Greetings OSA Family!

Our annual conference is about two weeks away and this is the last newsletter that will be published before the event. As you make final preparations to attend the conference, I would like to provide you with some highlights in regards to the schedule as well as certain relevant information.

This year's conference marks the twenty-second annual convention of our Association. Ever since the initiation of the conference, we have witnessed progressively, significant improvements in the quality and quantity of research papers presented at the conference. I am pleased to inform you that there are over thirty research papers that are scheduled to be presented at this year's conference. These scientific papers, along with a number of round table discussions, are organized into twelve concurrent sessions. I have included the program schedule for your review.

As stated earlier, the theme of the conference is "Oromo and the Horn of Africa: The Search for Freedom, Peace and Democracy". Accordingly, effort has been made in planning the program to reflect the theme of the conference. To this end, the Executive Committee (EC) has invited a few scholars of the Horn. First and foremost, world-renowned African Scholar Professor Ali Mazrui will

deliver the keynote address. In addition, we have prominent Ethiopian, Somali, European, American, and Canadian scholars who are also scheduled to speak at the conference. In this respect, I am proud to report that our conference has gained a reputable international stature.

Another feature that is unique this year at our conference is the Oromo cultural arts and crafts display. Sorasay Ragassa, a prominent Oromo businesswoman from Finifine, is expected to bring along to the conference uniquely Oromo artifacts that will be on display for the two days. I hope the exhibition will offer an opportunity for participants who are not familiar with the rich cultural and artistic Oromo heritage to see it first-hand.

As part of the program, I am delighted to report that the EC has assembled a team of prominent Oromo scholars and political figures to share a platform in order to discuss the state of Oromo political movements. The panelists include Professor Mohamed Hassen, Professor Assafa Jalatta, Dr. Guudata Hinika, Mr. Lubee Birru, Mr. Lencoo Latta, Mr. Dimma Noggo, and Dr. Fido Ebba.

On behalf of our members, the OSA Board of Directors, and the Executive Committee, I would like to extend our gratitude to our panelists for heeding our call to share their views. I would like to mention that we have made a serious effort to diversify the pool of speakers. However, I regret to inform you that our attempt to reach out to certain individuals has not fully materialized.

In talking about this panel, the EC has given ample consideration to the format and the degree of civility expected of the audience. To this effect, we

have designated a moderator to facilitate the conversation and I am pleased to announce that Professor Ezekiel Gebissa has accepted our call to serve in this capacity. The goal of the panel is not necessarily to concentrate on the past; rather, the emphasis is to identify some of the existing hurdles and envision a common platform that would invigorate our people to rally around a common cause.

In addition to the programs and presentations, I would like to draw your attention to a few things that are of importance in the conduct of the conference. First of all, we have an extremely compressed schedule that runs from 10 am until 9 pm on both days. Each and every minute of the schedule is accounted for, leaving no room for flexibility. In other words, we need to follow the schedule strictly in order to make the best use of our time. I would therefore like to stress the need to begin the program on time and request that participants value and respect punctuality. As we all know, time is of the essence and we are committed to observe and follow the schedule.

As part of the registration process, participants will also be receiving last year's conference proceedings. Unlike in the past, where hard copies

of the proceedings were distributed, the documents will be made available this year on a CD-ROM. I am grateful to Drs. Mesfin Abdi and Abebe Adugna for conceiving the project and producing the CD.

In closing, I would like to mention that at the conference, there will be an election of new officers. My term as OSA President expires at the closing of the conference. I have been honored and privileged to serve our esteemed association over the last two years, first as its secretary and currently as its president. In the course of my term, I have worked with a team of highly dedicated and outstanding officers. I am grateful to have served with such great Oromo intellectuals - Ms. Dune Banti, Mr. Ibsa Ahmed, and Drs. Abebe Adugna and Mosisa Aga. I also have received unsurpassed cooperation from the Board of Directors, who have shown extraordinary support and guidance to the Executive Committee.

I look forward to seeing you in Minneapolis.  
Have a safe trip,

Melaku Mekonnen, Ph.D.  
OSA President

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### Letter from Dr. Mohammed Hassen

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*Dear OSA members,  
I am writing this short note to express my profound appreciation for the good job that has been done by two members OSA Board Directors. I have been a member of OSA Board of Directors for many years. I do not remember any time in the past when OSA Board of Directors discussed repeatedly important issues as we have been doing this year. I remember a year when we never discussed any issue at all. I remember a year when OSA Award was given without any consultation or discussion by OSA Board of Directors. I remember a time, when OSA Board of Directors discussed issues only when there was conflict within OSA. What makes this year very different from all the previous years from my experience has been two individuals, who professionalized the activities of OSA Board of*

*Directors. They are the chair person and the secretary of the Board of Directors. This year we have been blessed to have elected Bonnie Holcomb as the Chair person and Dr. Mesfin Abdi as the Secretary of OSA Board of Directors. The two truly professionalized the activities of the Board. We have had regular discussions. There has always been an agenda for discussion, which we rarely, if at all, did in the past. Minutes have always been taken meticulously by the secretary, which is a new departure from our old practice. Because of this simply professionalization, the records of activities of the Board for the first time are well kept. And it is an extensive record. I have two folders of those discussions and minutes covering the time since the election of the chair person and the secretary.*

*For me this is the last year to serve as a member of OSA Board of Directors. Two things make this year a memorable one for me personally. First, there has been a wonderful civility during all OSA Board of Directors discussion. In an environment of civility, discussions are productive. Secondly, since 2005, we discussed during annual conference business meetings how to send the Journal of Oromo Studies freely to colleges and universities in Oromia and, if possible, in Ethiopia. That cherished goal of all OSA members have been achieved this year, thanks to the selfless dedication of Dr. Mesfin Abdi, who single-handedly digitalized all the previous issue of JOS on CDs. Twenty copies of those CDs were distributed among the colleges and*

*universities in Oromia, which is not a mean achievement by itself.*

*Finally, by all means I am not suggesting that OSA Board of Directors achieved all that they wanted to achieve this year. Far from it, there are still a number of issues that have to be tackled. But we must learn how to appreciate the little that has been achieved. It is precisely for this purpose that I write this note to inform OSA members what OSA Board chair and secretary have done up to now. We are indebted to them for professionalizing the activities of the Board of Directors.*

*Mohammed Hassen*

**OROMO STUDIES ASSOCIATION  
2008 ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
SCHEDULE OF PROGRAMS AND EVENTS**

*Saturday, August 2*

TIME	EVENT/PROGRAM	PRESENTER	LOCATION
10:00 – 11:00 AM	Registration	Local Organizing Committee	Lobby
11:00 – 12:00 Noon	Welcome & Opening Remarks Opening Prayer	Melaku Mekonnen – OSA President Bonnie Holcomb – Chair – OSA Board of Directors Dabasa Guyo	Great Hall
12:00 – 1:30 PM	Keynote Address	Professor Ali Mazrui	Great Hall
1:30 – 2:30 PM	Lunch Break	Local Organizing Committee	Lobby
2:30 – 4:00 PM	<i>Oromo Political Movements: The way Forward Part I</i>  Professor Ezekiel Gebissa Moderator	Panelists: Professor Mohammed Hassen Professor Assafa Jalatta Dr. Gudata Hinika Mr. Lubee Birru Mr. Lencoo Latta Mr. Dimma Noggo Dr. Fido Ebba	Great Hall
4:00 – 4:30 PM	Break	Refreshments - Local Committee	Lobby
4:30 – 5:30 PM	<i>Oromo Political Movements: The way Forward Part II</i>  Professor Ezekiel Gebissa Moderator	Panelists: Professor Mohammed Hassen Professor Assafa Jalatta Dr. Gudata Hinika Mr. Lubee Birru Mr. Lencoo Latta Mr. Dimma Noggo Dr. Fido Ebba	Great Hall
5:30 – 7:30	Business Meeting	Executive Committee and Board of Directors	Great Hall
7:30 – 9:00 PM	<b>Session I</b> Demographic Patterns and Trends  Gobena Huluka Chair	Getahun Benti <i>“Majority” within Majority: The Demographics of Major Urban Areas in Oromia and Oromo-Minority Relations</i>  Haile Hirpa <i>All Oromos Must Have Permanent Last Names</i>  Daba Gedafa <i>Causes and Effects of Oromo Migration Since 1900</i>	Great Hall
7:30 – 9:00 PM	<b>Session II</b> Health  Asfaw Beyene Chair	B. Dugassa, Ph.D; T. Taye, MD; A. Negassa, PhD <i>Iodine Deficiency Disorder: A Major Public Health Problem in Western Oromia</i>  Kulani Jalata <i>The Political Economy of Diseases in Oromia</i>	Mississippi Hall

*Sunday, August 3*

TIME	EVENT/PROGRAM	PRESENTER	LOCATION
9:00 – 10:00 AM	Registration	Local Organizing Committee	Lobby
10:00 – 10:30	Keynote Address II	Obbo Diribi Demissie Boku - President Macha-Tulamma Association	Great Hall
10:30 – 11:00 Noon	Youth Panel	Lense Solomon – Convener Habptamu Abdissa and Messay Tamrat - Panelists	Great Hall
11:00 – 12:30 PM	<b>Session III</b> Art and Culture  Mesfin Abdi Chair	Daga Abdulle Said & Damitu Mamma Argo <i>Oromo Art as a Political Resistance</i>  Debissa Arero Godana <i>Oromo Culture and Language</i>  Steven W. Thomas <i>The Oromo Renaissance within the Marketplace of World Literature</i>	Great Hall
	<b>Session IV</b> Agriculture & Economics Assafa Jalata Chair	Harwood David Schaffer <i>Boserup and Ag/Econ Policy in Oromo-led Government</i>  Musa Guro Hawasi <i>The Impact of Land Privatization on the Pastoral Life of the Karrayyu Oromo</i>  Bichaka Fayissa <i>The Contributions of Social Movements to the Oromo National Struggle for Political and Economic Power in Ethiopia</i>	Mississippi Hall
12:30 – 1:30 PM	Lunch Break	Local Committee	Lobby
1:30 – 3:00 PM	<b>Session V</b> Education /Social Issues Abebe Adugna Chair	Kebede Feda <i>Challenges and Significance of Education in Oromia: Evidence from Family Size, Birth Order and income Diversifications</i>  Zakia Posey <i>A Look at Ethnicity in America: the Challenges and Prospects of its use in Oromo Diaspora Social Mobilization</i>  Rundassa Eshete <i>The Oromo Identity, the Story of Spin, Scandal and the Selling of Oromo Cause</i>	Mississippi Hall
	<b>Session VI</b> Human Rights  Dunee Benti Chair	Fowsia Abdulkadir <i>The Role of Mothers in the Struggle for Self Determination: The Case of the Somali Mothers in the Ogaden</i>  Garoma Wakessa and Tesfaye Deressa <i>Human Rights and Development in Oromia</i>  Habtamu Dugo <i>Oromo Diaspora, Quest for Freedom and Democracy, and New Media</i>	Great Hall
3:00 – 3:30 PM	Break	Refreshments – Local Committee	Lobby

TIME	EVENT/PROGRAM	PRESENTER	LOCATION
3:30 – 5:00 PM	<b>Session VII</b>  Historical Perspectives  Bichaka Fayissa Chair	Mekuria Bulcha <i>Some Notes from Unacknowledged History: Episodes of Oromo Resistance against and Complicity in the Abyssinian Conquest of Western Oromia in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century</i>  Mohammed Hassen <i>A forgotten Oromo Nationalist</i>  Seifudein Adem <i>Ali A. Mazrui and the Oromos</i>	Great Hall
	<b>Session VIII</b>  Philosophy  Mosisa Aga Chair	Charles C. Verharen <i>Comparing Oromo and Ancient Egyptian Philosophy</i>  Lubee Birru <i>Culture of Reconciliation Among Oromo Nation</i>  Jimma D. Tuffa <i>A Roman Summer: The Role of Geography, Culture and Social Environment in the Development of Oromo Athlete and athletics in the Ethiopian Empire</i>	Mississippi Hall
5:00 – 6:30 PM	<b>Session IX</b> Culture & Language Mekuria Bulcha Chair	Sorasay Ragassa <i>Oromo Cultural Revival</i>  Kadiro Amae Elemo <i>Afaan Oromo for the Federal Working Language</i>  Debela Goshu Amante <i>The Sociolinguistic Profile of Afan Oromo for the Federal Working Language</i>	Mississippi Hall
	<b>Session X</b> Government Guluma Gamada Chair	Mohammed Hussein <i>Ethiopian nation State: Theory and Practice</i>  Michael Mamo <i>Electoral Competition, Checks and Balances, and Economic Development: Growth prospects in an independent Oromia</i>  Debissa Arero Godana <i>Oromo Political Movements: Challenges and opportunities for Unity</i>	Great Hall
7:30 – 8:30 PM	<b>Session XI</b> Peace and Conflict Resolution Bonnie Holcomb and Ezekiel Gebissa Co-Chairs	<i>Panel Discussion: Toward Understanding and Interpreting the Oromo Concept of Peace Philosophical and Practical Dimensions</i> Panelists: Charles Verharen Tsega Endalew Bonnie Holcomb Lubbee Birru Ezekiel Gebissa	Great Hall
	<b>Session 12</b> Faith Dararaa Maati Chair	<i>Round Table Discussion: The Book Daaniyaa and Waqeffannaa</i> Participants: Ibsa Ahmed Haile Hirpa Lammu Shunna	Mississippi Hall
8:30 – 9:00 PM	Closing Remarks	Melaku Mekonnen, outgoing President, and Abebe Adugna, incoming President	Great Hall

### **To members of Oromo Studies Association**

We, members of the Management Committee of Saphalo Foundation, write this statement for three purposes. The first is to officially thank OSA members for their financial support in the past three years. With your limited financial support we have been able to educate thousands of Oromo refugees in Kenya. This year we are educating 2,642 Oromo refugees in Kenya. Secondly, it is to let you know that Saphalo Foundation needs OSA members' financial support more than ever before. We are requesting OSA leadership to collect small donations for Saphalo Foundation during OSA Conference as it was done last year. If every participant in the OSA Conference donates any amount with which he or she feels comfortable, it will provide the foundation with much needed resources, which will enable us to educate and help more Oromo refugees. Please help us to help our unfortunate refugees. The Management Committee members and the beneficiaries of Saphalo Foundation will be deeply indebted to OSA leadership and conference participants for their generous donations. The third is to provide OSA members with the activities of Saphalo Foundation in Kenya. The rest of this statement is devoted to that end.

Saphalo Foundation was established in Feb 2001 with the initiative of Oromo refugee intellectuals and community members residing in Kenya. The name SAPHALO was given to the newly established Organization to keep alive the memory of Sheikh Bakrii Saphalo, the famous Oromo nationalist, an outstanding poet and brilliant intellectual who invented the Oromo writing system in 1952." He was an activist scholar, whose works reflect deeply seated passion to spread knowledge among the Oromo. For him knowledge was a powerful weapon for those in search of social justice, while ignorance was darkness that was imposed upon the Oromo by the Ethiopian rulers. He struggled all his life to free his people through the weapon of education. He wrote, taught and preached

tirelessly to uplift the spirit of his people and secure respect for their language, culture, human dignity and national identity." The great scholar taught for sixty years, and struggled with his pen for the freedom of his people until his death in 1980 at a refugee camp in northern Somalia. Inspired by his love for educating his people and devotion to the cause of our people, we are trying our best to educate our refugees in Kenya. With OSA members financial support we are hoping to educate many more Oromo refugees.

### **Objectives of Saphalo**

Saphalo is an Oromo institution with clear objectives to serve the disadvantaged Oromo refugees who have been forced to flee their home land to save their lives. Many of our refugees suffered serious physical and psychological torture under the current Ethiopian regime. Saphalo foundation started to function in compliance with its fundamental objectives of providing common forum to enable Oromo refugees to come together irrespective of their region, religion or political affiliation under one umbrella that keeps us united. What is more, Saphalo Foundation has many more specific objectives including but not limited to:

1. Providing formal education, food and shelter for refugees within the constraints of its limited resources.
2. Encouraging peaceful co-existence between Oromo refugees and the host community.
3. Educating Oromo children on the importance of understanding Oromo history and their national identity with the aim of creating a young generation that is committed to their national cause.
4. To promote progressive culture and to eliminate harmful practices.
5. To initiate and enhance the culture of intellectual growth and academic excellence among the youth.

6. To improve the socio-economic development of our refugees.
7. To create venues and provide forum through which the community can discuss issues pertinent to their problems and share experiences on a day to day affairs of the modern world.
8. To create net working with different partners or organizations of Oromo and non Oromo origin that the organizations deems to be important to promote its short and long term objectives.
9. To offer and organize workshops and educate refugees on gender issue and rights of children as well as peace and conflict resolution mechanisms.
10. To develop our community awareness on the dangers of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

In short, the main goal of Saphalo Foundation is to empower Oromo refugee community in Kenya and enable them to tackle their daily multidimensional problems.

Since its establishment, we have been working to realize the highlighted general and specific objectives of the foundation through its devoted volunteer Oromo intellectuals who have been determined beyond any reserve to serve their people with the limited resources at their disposal. In the past seven years Saphalo Foundation has gone through a lot of milestones with remarkable successes in achieving the envisaged objectives. Though limited, there have been measurable and non-measurable achievements that are supported by reliable and thoroughly evaluated documents that show that so far we have taught and trained the following number of students in seven to eight years. Number of students Saphalo Foundation has accommodated for formal education, computer literacy and various work shop training are indicated below.

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of students</u>
2001	1,500
2002	1,700

2003	2, 000
2004	1,200
2005	1,456
2006	2,100
2007	2,333
2008	2, 642

Total number of Saphalo Foundation Student beneficiaries so far is 14,931. However, this figure does not include;

1. Temporary and short term seminars given on matters such as gender issues, children right and conflict management.
2. Every year we teach our refugee community about the danger of HIV/AIDS and how to protect them- selves from this pandemic.

Besides these measurable achievements there are other non measurable successes. For instance, Saphalo Foundation launched a broad campaign to deal with the challenge of idleness among Oromo refugee youths who have been hooked by the habit of eating stimulating green leaf known as jima/gat. Saphalo is making determined efforts to help these young members of our community. For that purpose, we approached relevant organizations to intervene and eliminate these prevailing social ills in our community. Luckily Saphalo has received warm welcome from GTZ, a coordinator of the program who joined our efforts to address the problem and tackle this problem through intensive counseling at Saphalo center. Young people of 50-100 have received this counseling treatment and finally relieved from their bad habits. Many of these people have changed for better and constructively engaged in helping Saphalo Foundation and their peers of similar background..

### **Major challenges of Saphalo Foundations**

In the past seven to eight years we have encountered many difficulties. Some of the major problems are:

Shortage of resources including but not limited to:

1. Financial constraints: Saphalo Foundation has been usually troubled when it comes to payment of house rent and other expenses because it had no regular and reliable source of income and this in

turn has had its own influence on its overall activities.

2 Lack of skilled man power. As a result of financial constraint we could not employ skilled teachers to give quality education as needed.

3. Another equally challenging problem is directly related with nature of our community, we are operating in the environment where things are on constant move as a result of resettlement in 3<sup>rd</sup> country, repatriation and deportation. As a result of such an extremely unstable nature of refugee life, we were forced to lose such enthusiastic, visionary and inspirational persons like Obbo Bedri Mohammed, the founder and former chairman of the Foundation who went for resettlement in Canada.

### **Challenges a head**

Few years ago, Saphalo Foundation has initiated a new income generating cyber cafe project which was aimed to mitigate the financial stresses Saphalo has been facing. The project was so helpful in giving all rounded services and help reducing the financial strains Saphalo has been experiencing in the past, especially recently we have furnished it with some instruments with the support we got from the UNHCR and our current chairman, Mr. Doti Halake, an eminent personality in the Humanitarian field, as a result the project starts giving us hope of fulfilling its objective of helping our schools rent expenses, in addition to this, it is an ideal place to attract and encourage Oromo youths of both sexes to come to the center and enjoy our internet service with subsidized reasonable charge in order to empower our community and make them familiar with the technology and its benefits.

The Saphalo cybercafé project has been vital for the reasons mentioned and its other good aspects, in addition to the regular computer training in the school, the project has enabled us to continue free computer literacy program (one of the popular program among our community) in a wider perspective. Generally the cyber café has had considerable positive impact on our community at large, thanks to Saphalo cybercafé and our

community school, our people are no stranger to the use of internet and modern technologies, even small children have learned to communicate through e-mail.

On our part we are trying our very best to help our refugees. We take this opportunity to call on OSA members, all Oromo nationalists and the rest of our supporters to share our burden and make contribution to support this noble idea and give a chance for Saphalo Foundation to continue serving our community. The small donations (even \$5) that an OSA member makes will go a long way in helping the foundation to empower our refugees to tackle their many daily problems in Kenya.

Saphalo Foundation has had many brilliant members and staff. The current management committee takes this opportunity to acknowledge those colleagues who have always supported us when we desperately needed their contribution by serving and supporting the cause for which Saphalo Foundation was established. Though those who supported the foundation were very many, we mention only the names of few individuals in this statement. They are:

1. Bedri k. Mohammed, senior Saphalo staff and the founder as well as the brain behind the inception of the foundation. He served the organization with exemplary dedication while in Kenya. of Saphalo when he was in Kenya. We deeply appreciate his sustained ambassadorial role on behalf of the foundation in the Diaspora.

2. Equally important is Mohammed Ali (Damsho) who has been the inspiring power that keeps Saphalo moving forward. He has never been far from Saphalo as he always keeps thinking and supporting Saphalo Foundation.

3. Among our many supporters we want to exceptionally thank on this occasion is Mr. Mohammed Abdella from Geneva whose contribution is a source of encouragement and strength for us to discharge our day to day responsibility of serving the cause of Saphalo

4. Our especial gratitude goes also to OSA members and OSG leaders, especially Dr. Trevor Trueman, whose support and contribution is priceless and becoming an engine in moving Saphalo forward.

5. Last but not least Oromo community of New Zealand who reached for us when we were in need of support, International Oromo Youth Association from USA who contacted us by their own effort and promised to give us sizable amount of money.

6. The UNHCR office, Nairobi branch and Mr.Halake, the Head of Mission IOM-Dadaab and our current chairman who has always provided his own funds to get us out of difficult situations. Among the others we take this opportunity to thank Ms.Noel Calhoun, the UNHCR community service officer who is exceptionally cooperative whenever we need her support. Even though we did not mention them by name, we would like to thank all Saphalo Foundation supporters from around the world. We hope they will continue supporting us in our noble task.

#### **Future plan**

We want to vigorously expand our activities to high level, and to make Saphalo Foundation strong and self sufficient organization. The new management has strong commitment and determination to make that a reality.

#### **In the area of school**

We want to provide our school with necessary man powers, materials and attract more students. We need to open additional classrooms and increase the number of subjects given in our

school. We want to increase level of education from the current form/grade 4 to 6.

#### **At our cyber café**

Our prime purpose is to focus on capacity building activities to generate enough revenue and make Saphalo financially viable and self dependent, to realize our aim, we need to stock our cyber with necessary materials and intensify our services quantitatively as well qualitatively. With small donations from OSA members we will be able to fully implement our future plans.

#### **The following are the legally registered Management committee members in Kenya**

1. Doti k. Halake: - Saphalo executive chair person
2. Abdullahi Ahmed: Saphalo executive vice chair person
- 3 .Murad Ali Abdi: Saphalo executive secretary
4. Gamachu Yadata: School Director
5. Jamal Amin: - School Vice Director
6. Munira Jundi: Saphalo executive Treasurer
7. Ahmed Abdulmalik: Saphalo executive member
- 8 .Sadiya Sora : " " "
- 9 .Walela Ahmed: - Saphalo " " "
10. Hawa Amman: Saphalo " " "

BY MANAGEMENT  
**JULY 2008**