

Waldaa Qoranoo Oromoo



Oromo Studies Association

P.O Box 32391, Fridley, MN 55432

www.oromosudies.org

Development Assistant Group (DAG) Secretariat
C/o Programme Coordinator, Victoria Chisala
Email: Victoria.Chisala@undp.org

Human Rights Watch
350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118-3299
USA
Email: hrwnyc@hrw.org

November 8, 2010

Dear DAG Secretariat & Human Rights Watch,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) to defend the latest report of the Human Rights Watch on Oromia and Ethiopia from the attack and mischaracterization by the Development Assistant Group (DAG). OSA is a scholarly, multi-disciplinary, non-profit international organization, established to promote studies on issues relevant to the Oromo people. This scholarly organization has studied and produced scholarly works on Oromo people for the last twenty-five years. It has conducted annual and bi-annual international scholarly conferences and produced its proceedings; semi-annual peer reviewed journal as well as books that you can be found in major university libraries in the world. Most of the OSA members are born and raised in Oromia, possess a unique privilege of accessing the collective memory of the Oromo people and understanding their present realities. They are privileged to collect data in the Oromo, Amharic, Somali, Arabic, English and many other languages and make sound intellectual and cultural judgement in interpreting them.

The Oromo people constitute the single largest national group in the Ethiopian Empire and the Greater Horn of Africa with a total of over 50 million people. The size of the Oromo population and the geographical location of their country, Oromia, make the Oromia regional state the heart of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Empire mainly survives on the economic and natural resources of Oromia although the Oromo people are one of the most impoverished and terrorized indigenous people of the world. Recognizing that Oromia is the richest and largest populous state, the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government has been using collective violence to dominate, control, and exploit Oromia, which is the key in controlling the Ethiopian political economy. Understanding the situation in Oromia helps in generalizing what is going on throughout Ethiopia. Hence, by these virtues OSA is in a position to speak on and about the Oromo people and realities in Oromia, by that extension about Ethiopia.

I have carefully read the Report of Human Rights Watch, *Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia* and the response of the Development Assistant Group (DAG). If

the Oromo people and others in the Ethiopia Empire were empowered on their affairs they would have given their assessment and verdict on whether or not the aid that the DAG donors give to the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government is used to build the people's capacity to solve poverty and famine problems or utilized to foster the capacity of the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front's (TPLF) security forces, the army, and the police to control, manipulate and repress the Oromo and others. Unfortunately, only human rights organizations such as the Human Rights Watch and scholarly organizations such OSA can expose the social, political and economic crimes in Oromia and Ethiopia at this historical moment. Consequently, the latest report of Human Rights Watch reflects the objective reality in Oromia and Ethiopia under the rule of the Tigrayan dictator, Meles Zenawi, and his henchmen and women. However, the report does not tell the whole story as we shall see below.

The ethnicized and racialized Ethiopian state with the collaboration of its Euro-American allies has effectively excluded the colonized peoples and the Ethiopian masses from decision-making positions. The TPLF regime is fully supported by the major Euro-American countries, China, and their institutions while it practices state terrorism and gross human right violations. The successive Ethiopian regimes have taken away the sovereignty of the people and denied them the opportunity to develop their own institutions and leadership and consequently conditioned them to absolute poverty, homelessness, malnutrition and preventable diseases. By denying the people, their fundamental human rights e.g. freedom of expression, assembly and equal rights, the regime eroded the safety and security of the people and gradually worn their human dignity. For over a century the Oromo and others have been denied their inalienable rights to self-determination and as a result they lost the opportunities and the means to build their social, economic, political, cultural and organizational infrastructures.

The Meles regime implements its political and economic objectives through a variety of strategies and tactics; it is highly militarized and repressive, and it tightly controls information and resources by manipulating and using foreign aid, domestic financial resources, and political appointments. It also directly controls all aspects of state power including security and military institutions, judiciary, financial institutions and other public bodies including religious institutions such as the Church and the Mosque. The Meles government uses the Tigrayan-dominated army, the police, security networks, and puppet organizations in destabilizing independent institutions intended to facilitate change in the social, economic, cultural, political and environmental conditions in Oromia and beyond. This was done to deny the Oromo people an independent leadership to incapacitate, silence and control them.

The TPLF government has been selling the lands and natural resources of non-Tigrayans in the name of privatization to satisfy the demand of structural adjustment of the control and profit oriented, biased and unjust international system. It is now completing the forced removal of Oromos from the areas surrounding Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). By evicting Oromo farmers from their homelands without or with little compensation, the Meles regime has already leased several millions of hectares of Oromo lands to foreign investors such as the Chinese, Arabs, Indians, Malaysians, and European business people and local capitalists. Today, when the Oromos are facing extreme poverty, hunger and easily preventable diseases, Tigrayan elites who depended on international food aid in the 1980s for their survival, are getting richer and powerful. That is the reason the TPLF led minority government is seen as an organized criminal agency rather than legitimate government. For example, in Finfinnee and in many places you see advertisement sponsored by the regime that says "fighting corruption starts from oneself" and in the response, people scratched the word oneself and replace it with Meles.

Clearly in the eyes of most of the people in Oromia and Ethiopia, the political and military leaders of the Meles government are not different from gangsters and robbers. The regime uses state power to expropriate state corporations and lands in the name of privatization—all with the blessing of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Although the Human Rights Watch because of its ideological limitation does not address these complex issues, it correctly explains how Western aid is used by the Meles regime for political repression rather than political, cultural, social, and economic development. So there is no wonder that DAG attempts to refute the report of this respected human rights organization.

In the past and present the fate of Oromo people are entirely determined by the Euro-Abyssinian guns and resources. For example, the Tigray Liberation Front (TPLF) of Meles Zenawi would not come to

power if the international donors did give the blank cheque to its sisterly organization, the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), and allowed them to divert the money to buy guns. The TPLF of Meles Zenawi with its puppet organizations are determined to stay on power by all means possible. Meles came to power by using a clandestine Marxist structure of organization known as *Gooti* and *Garee* at grassroots levels. After he came to power he has used of these organizational structures and repressive security networks in all sectors of the society. In *Gooti* all villagers and city dwellers are organized in smaller groups of households known as *Garee*. The members of *Garee* are forced to spy and report the activity of their family and community members. Fertilizers and food aid are distributed through these organizational channels. The Human Rights Watch report on *Gooti* and *Garee* is accurate.

Furthermore, court decisions are made not on the rule of law but on the consultation with *Gooti* and *Garee* leaders. The legal cases are judged based on the person's political opinions rather than the rule of law. Students are accepted to higher education not necessarily on their academic achievements but also upon the recommendations from *Gooti* and *Garee* leaders. Teachers and other government employees are promoted not on their skills and performance, but on their party membership and activities in *Gooti* and *Garee*. Patients get reference to hospitals on their party membership and their role in *Gooti* and *Garee*. Farmers who resist the *Gooti* and *Garee* decisions are denied access to fertilizers and selected seeds. It is on the *Gooti* and *Garee* meetings that individuals are intimidated and instructed to vote for the agents of Meles Zenawi during election days. For an Oromo language speaking researcher collecting such evidences does not require a sophisticated enquiry. If you talk to and listen to the conversations of Oromo farmers, you hear them saying "I have an elderly mother and several children to care for, hence, I do not want to miss the next *Gooti* meeting"; "my court case is sent back to *Gooti*"; "next year only good standing members of the party will get fertilizer and selected seeds"; "he was poor, but, after he became the head of *Gooti* he is doing well"; "I knew that my son or daughter would pass the exam but my worry was if the *Gooti* leader would write him or her a recommendation". The Human Rights Watch clearly understands these realities.

If OSA confirms that the report of the Human Rights Watch is accurate, how come that DAG failed to come up with the same conclusion? Western countries and their international organizations exactly know what is going in Oromia and Ethiopia. They also know that the report of the Human Rights Watch is correct. But they refuse to accept responsibility by rejecting this report since they have financed and supported this regime. These donors have misguided policies; instead of promoting the empowerment of people they play indifferent in the life of people whom they claim to help. It seems that their main concerns are not promoting the principles set by United Nations (UN) such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) intended to assure that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and destiny. In reality, these donors only promote their respective national interests at the cost of peoples who are suffering under the policies of the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government.

Although OSA substantiates the Human Rights Watch Report on Oromia and Ethiopia, I have concerns in the following areas. First, the Human Rights Watch Report has failed to mention the ways the TPLF government has evicted the Oromo farmers from their homes and sells their lands and other properties and conditioned them to extreme poverty. Second, Human Rights Watch is silent in reporting the deliberate and consistent TPLF actions intended to weaken the Oromo indigenous institutions such as *Gadaa* (Oromo democratic governance) and *Waqeffata* (indigenous Oromo religion). For that matter, all the donors that very often use the rhetoric of capacity building have failed to promote the need to support the development of Oromo civic, indigenous institutions, and organizations and to challenge the Ethiopian government policies that are intended to incapacitate them. Furthermore, these donors did not care when Oromo civic organizations such as the Macca-Tulama Associations, relief associations, e.g. the Oromo Relief Association (ORA), human right activists, e.g. the Human Rights League of the Horn, and Oromo political organizations such as the Oromo Liberation Front were violently suppressed. The Euro-American racist mindsets and modernist thinking, the ideologies driven by profit and control and national interests have blinded these donors and their agency, DAG. These donors and their agency, DAG, engage in "aidgame" politics to subordinate humanism and human rights principles to state interest regionally and

internationally and proved destructive for the Oromo and others who are suffering under the Tigrayan ethnocracy and racism and the corrupt and unjust international system.

I believe that if these international donors and their agency, DAG, are truly intended to build the capacity of the Oromo and other peoples and help them overcome their social, economic, political problems and empower individuals and groups on their affairs, they need to be guided by principles set by UN such as UDHR, ICESCR and others and challenge policies that are contrary to these core principles. I suggest to those donors who are truly committed to tackle poverty and preventable diseases to ask the following questions: What are the causes of instability, poverty, and malnutrition in Oromia and Ethiopia? How do decisions are made and policies are set in Oromia and Ethiopia? How does the TPLF, the minority group's organization, able to control Oromia and the rest of other regional states for two decades? What are the relationships between the Tigrayans and the Oromo and other peoples? Why are human rights violations widespread? What are the relationships between human rights violations and capacity building? What are the impacts of excluding the single largest national group in the Ethiopian Empire and the Horn Africa –the Oromo people from decisions making process? They also need to ask themselves why they choose to channel the aid through the TPLF institutions (administrations, state structures and religious institutions) rather than the civil and political organizations of other oppressed, exploited and dehumanized ethnonational groups. OSA is engaged in producing knowledge that promotes justice, individuals and collective rights (e.g. the rights of people to self-determination), make attempts to empower the people and create favourable conditions to foster capacity building and sustainable social and economic development. Therefore, it is ready to collaborate, and work with all organizations that are committed to those principles and frame their policies accordingly.

I believe that knowledge is a socially constructed phenomenon and through our dialogue we can construct knowledge that helps us better understand the core problems of the region and find culturally acceptable and economically viable solutions. Hence, if you have any concerns, questions, and comments, please do not hesitate from contacting me. Thank you for your concern and understanding.

Sincerely,

Begna Dugassa, PhD
OSA president

Copy to:

The World Bank
1818 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20433, USA
Email: afrex@worldbank.org OR
investigations_hotline@worldbank.org

International Monetary Fund
700 19th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20431, USA
publicaffairs@imf.org

France Embassy, Ethiopia
W.12, K.06, Quartier Kabana
PO Box 1464
Addis Ababa
Email: amba.france@telecom.net.et

Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to
Ethiopia
Old Airport Zone
Kifle Ketema Lideta
Addis Ababa
Email: add@minbuza.nl

Royal Danish Embassy to Ethiopia
Bole Ketema, Kebele 03
H. no. "New"
PO Box 12955
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Email: gkl.addis@telecom.net.et

Embassy of Norway to Ethiopia
Buna Board, Mekanissa
Addis Ababa
Email: emb.addisabeba@mfa.no

Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany to
Ethiopia:
Email: german.emb.addis@telecom.net.et

Embassy of Canada to Ethiopia
Wereda 23 Kebele 12, House # 122
PO Box 1130,
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Email: addis@international.gc.ca

Embassy of the United Kingdom to Ethiopia
Comoros Street
Addis Ababa
PO Box 858
Email: b.emb4@telecom.net.et

Embassy of Italy to Ethiopia
Email: ambasciata.addisabeba@esteri.it

Ireland Embassy , Ethiopia
House No.021, Kebele 40, Woreda 20, Debre
Zeit Road
PO Box 9585
Addis Ababa
Email: ireland.emb@telecom.net.et

Embassy of Sweden to Ethiopia
Lideta Sub-city
Kebele 07/14, House No. 891
P. O. Box 1142
Addis Ababa
Email: ambassaden.addis.abeba@sida.se

Embassy of Finland to Ethiopia
Embassy of Finland
P.O.Box 1017
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
Email: sanomat.add@formin.fi

Embassy of Spain to Ethiopia
Entoto Road, W11, K01, House No.036
PO Box 2312
Addis Ababa
Email: ethiopia@ethiopianembassy.org

Delegation of the European Commission to
Ethiopia
Email: DELEGATION-ETHIOPIA@ec.europa.eu

Embassy of the United States to Ethiopia
Entoto Road
Addis Ababa
Email: usemaddis@state.gov

Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:
Email: cdr@esteri.it

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische
Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)
Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5, 65760
Eschborn, Germany
Email: info@gtz.de

Netherlands Development Organization (SNV)
SNV HEAD OFFICE
Dr Kuiperstraat 5
2514 BA The Hague
Netherlands

SNV Ethiopia Country Office
P.O. Box 40675
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Email: Ethiopia@snvworld.org

European Commission
Directorate-General Development and Relations
with African, Caribbean and Pacific States
European Commission
SC-15 03/171
Rue de la Science, 15
B-1049 Brussels – Belgium
Email: dev-web@ec.europa.eu

Spanish Agency for International Development
(AECID)
Email: terravivagrants@gmail.com

Swedish International Development Cooperation
Agency (SIDA)
Valhallavägen 199
105 25 Stockholm
SWEDEN
Email: sida@sida.se

Canadian International Development Agency
(CIDA)
200 Promenade du Portage
Gatineau, Quebec
K1A 0G4
Email: info@acdi-cida.gc.ca

Norwegian Agency for Development
Cooperation (NORAD)
Ruseløkkveien 26, 0251 Oslo
E-mail: postmottak@norad.no

Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs-DANIDA
Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Asiatisk Plads 2
DK 1448 Copenhagen K
Email: um@um.dk

Irish Aid
Department of Foreign Affairs
Riverstone House, 23 - 27 Henry Street
Limerick
Email: addisababaembassy@dfa.ie

US Agency for International Development
(USAID)
U.S. Agency for International Development
Ronald Reagan Building
Washington, D.C. 20523-1000
Email: ig.hotline@usaid.gov

Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Ministry for Foreign Affairs
P.O.Box 176
FI-00023 Government
Finland
Email: kirjaamo.um@formin.fi

UK Department for International Development
(DFID)
1 Palace Street, London SW1E 5HE
Email: enquiry@dfid.gov.uk

Agence Française de Développement (AFD)
Email: site@afd.fr