

# Oromo Studies Association

## OSA Newsletter, October 2007

### A message from OSA President

Dear OSA Family,

On behalf of the Executive Committee and the Board of Directors, I would like to extend warm greetings.

This is the first newsletter that is published since the new Executive Committee was elected at the end of July. I regret the delay in publication and I hope that in the future we will make efforts to keep you posted on a timely basis with events, challenges, and opportunities facing OSA.

Before we provide you with some of the items that the EC is working on, I would like to recapitulate some of the highlights of the 2007 OSA Annual Conference. Here is a summary of the event.

### **2007 Annual Conference**

The OSA annual conference was held in Minneapolis, MN, on July 28 and 29, 2007, at the University of Minnesota- Twin Cities campus. The University has been gracious in providing us meeting spaces and has been supportive of OSA's effort throughout the years.

In addition to logistical support, the University of Minnesota Student Assembly has declared July 28 as Oromo Day and its representatives shared a resolution passed to this effect at the opening of the conference. It is indeed gratifying to reap the benefits of Oromo Youth Association efforts attending school at the University of Minnesota- Twin Cities, forging such a strong partnership with their peers. Our youth have shown great leadership in this regard and have left a remarkable foundation for many of our young adults to follow their footprints and network with their compatriots across several other campuses.

In addition to their outreach endeavors at the conference, Oromo youth have also presented papers and conducted panel discussions raising pertinent issues and holding difficult conversations often considered sensitive among most of us. The sessions sponsored by the youth gained the utmost attendance

and received positive reactions and outstanding recognition from the audience. The EC would like to extend its heartfelt appreciation to the Oromo Youth Association and we are pleased to see that they are living up to our highest expectations in becoming the bearers of the OSA torch. Bravo!

The keynote address was delivered by Obbo Zegeye Asfaw and his remarks were undoubtedly one of the best OSA ever had, taking us through historical prism of the recent past. A letter from Obbo Dirribii Demissie Bokku, President of Macca and Tulama, who was not able to be at the conference was read by then OSA President Dr. Gobena Huluka as part of the keynote speech. His optimism and a call for recommitment for the cause of the Oromo struggle was uplifting from a person who was released from prison just few months ago.

One of the invited guests, Obbo Firehiwot Samuel, the Chairman of the Inquiry Commission of the 2005 election fraud and the aftermath of the mass demonstrations that claimed the lives of 193 civilians, shared perspective and insight on the Report of Human Rights Violations by the Ethiopian Government. We are very grateful to Mr. Firehiwot for his willingness to share the outcome of the investigation.

There were also prominent Oromo leaders and intellectuals who presented papers on various topics. Dr. Negasso Gidada, the former Ethiopian President; Professor Marara Gadina, member of Parliament; Obbo Dima Nogo, former Cabinet Member; and Obbo Lencho Lata were among the presenters. Adde Bangu Qaweti on Siiqqee (Oromo women empowerment tool), Dr. Asmerom Legesse, Dr. Mohammed Mukhtar Hussein, and Adde Fowsia Abdulkadir conducted outstanding presentations on various topics.

Altogether, the conference had seventeen panels spanning over the two day period. OSA is thankful to all presenters for their remarkable contributions to the stock of Oromo knowledge. It is indeed encouraging to see the diversity of topics and issues discussed at the conference.

Because of the overwhelming number of presenters,

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this year OSA introduced a new format in its schedule – running concurrent sessions and providing the audience the choice of attending a topic of their preference as well as accommodating the large number of presenters over a short period of time. This format has gained the support of members and we are committed to improving some of the identified shortcomings of the approach encountered at the time.

At the conference, OSA gave out several awards. Dr. Asmerom Legesse was the recipient of the OSA Lifetime Award – the first of its kind in OSA history. Dr. Asmerom was recognized for his publications and anthropological studies of the Oromo. Obbo Abiyu Gelata was honored with an OSA award for his overall leadership and scholarly publications on the linguistics of Oromiffa and other related literature. Oromo Musicians also received an OSA award for their effort and creativity in enriching our cultural heritage and artistry. Elfneslu Kanno accepted the award on behalf of the group. Dr. Asfaw Beyene was the recipient of an OSA award for his distinguished leadership as OSA president. In addition, two individuals were recognized for their service to OSA: Dr. Beyan Asoba and Obbo Redwan were the recipients of the OSA President's Award.

Efforts were made at the conference to financially support deserving Oromo organizations. To this effect fundraising initiatives were launched and \$552 and \$715 was raised for Adde Bangu and the Oromo Support Group respectively.

### OSA Business

As you may recall, in the past, OSA business meetings used to be held at the end of the conference. Such a practice left very little time to hold meaningful discussions, carefully digest ideas, and fairly conduct elections. To this effect, various members have suggested that OSA business meetings take place on the first day of the conference, presumably when most attendees are present. The EC at the time took members' recommendation seriously and convened two general assembly meetings. At the first business meeting, held on the morning of Sunday, July 29, various

ad hoc committees presented their reports, which were reviewed and accepted. There was also a follow-up meeting held on Sunday evening that primarily focused on the elections of officers, presentation of the EC report, and the 2008 conference site selection; accordingly, Minneapolis was chosen.

Following the report, an election committee was nominated and the following members were chosen to serve on the various posts.

### Newly Elected Board Members

1. Ms. Bonnie Hollocomb
2. Dr. Bahiru Duguma
3. Dr. Gobena Huluka
4. Dr. Guluma Gameda

### Executive Committee Members

1. Dr. Melaku Mekonnen - President
2. Dr. Abebe Adugna – Vice President
3. Obbo Ibsa Ahmed - Secretary
4. Dr. Mosisa Aga – Public Relations Officer
5. Adde Dunne Silga – Treasurer (Returning)

Later on, a few weeks later, the outgoing EC team and the incoming officers jointly conducted an evaluation of the conference. It was the assessment of the joint team that the conference overall was perceived to be well coordinated and conducted. Areas that needed improvements were also identified.

### OSA Challenges

The Executive Committee has been assessing the challenges and opportunities facing the Association. Over the last month, we have received correspondence from students and women in Oromia expressing interest to participate in OSA activities and asking for support for overseas higher educational opportunities. Obviously, some of these issues appear to be beyond the scope of OSA. However, as most OSA members work in institutions of higher learning, there could be a chance to share financial aid, sponsorship opportunities, and the availability of short-term training funding information that crosses their desks. The EC is interested in compiling such information and disseminating it to those who are in contact with us

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and please let us know if there are opportunities at your institutions in this regard. .

One of the drawbacks facing OSA in fulfilling its mission is the lack of funding. As you know, the main source of OSA's budget is membership fees and funds collected from subscriptions to its publication, The Journal of Oromo Studies.

Obviously, these funds are limited and do not go beyond meeting the immediate needs of the annual conference and publication expenses of the Journal. The EC is therefore looking for fundraising ideas and subsequently for volunteers to assist in that respect. I encourage you to mail one of the EC if you have questions or suggestions in this regard.

The Executive Committee also has been planning the 2008 OSA midyear conference and Washington, D.C. has been selected as the site. We will share with you the conference theme and schedule as soon as we develop and finalize the plan. In closing, if you have information to share with members, the OSA Executive Committee is committed to publishing it in the newsletter and please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,  
Melaku Mekonnen, Ph.D.  
OSA President