



Oromo Studies Association

**Oromo Studies Association**  
OSA Newsletter

March, 2008

### A Message from the President

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Greetings!

This issue of our newsletter is published as we prepare for the mid year conference to be held on March 22<sup>nd</sup> at Howard University in Washington DC. It is therefore appropriate to provide you with an update about the conference. As mentioned in the last two issues of our newsletter, the theme of the mid year conference was to discuss some of the differences that are perceptible among the various Oromo political groups and subsequently to assess challenges and at the same time explore opportunities for improved future interactions.

Lately however, I have been informed from some of the invited speakers that they will be unable to join us at the conference due to work and other

commitments. As a result, we have modified the theme of the conference and presenting it in the form of a workshop titled "*Toward Understanding and Interpreting the Oromo Concept of Peace*". This workshop is designed to bring together prominent scholars who have studied the philosophical and social foundations of peace in the Oromo context to discuss some of their research findings on the topic. The workshop will attempt to focus on a topic that is long overdue for discussion and is expected to bring to light some of the foresight and values enshrined in traditional Oromo socio-political dynamics of peace. I hope those of you who live in and around the greater Washington DC area will attend the workshop. The details of the program are highlighted separately in this newsletter.

I also would like to assure you that OSA is committed to devoting a session to the earlier theme of the mid year conference at the upcoming annual conference in August. In this respect, we seek participants who would be willing to share perspectives on the theme.

In addition to the mid year conference, this issue of our newsletter also

provides information on the planning of the summer conference, research notes from a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and a financial grant offered to the Journal of Oromo Studies as well as a letter of appeal from a faculty member at Jimma University requesting instructional materials support. Last but not least, Professor Mohammed Hassen recently was in Australia and has

written an extensive account of the educational accomplishments of Oromo immigrants in the Country.

I hope you would find the newsletter interesting.

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

## **Toward Understanding and Interpreting the Oromo Concept of Peace**

A Workshop Organized by the Oromo Studies Association

Open to all

22 March 2008

Registration, 9:00 – 9:30

9:30 AM - 5:00 PM

Blackburn Auditorium, Howard University

Washington, DC

The theme of *nagaa* or peace pervades all aspects of Oromo life. Peace is expressed in greetings, songs, prayers, proverbs, blessings, folklore, and public speeches. There are also powerful mechanisms to restore peace with balance. Peace is central to Oromo ritual and ceremonial activities, to administrative and legal functions, to traditional religion, morality, and social life, and the conduct of politics. For the Oromo, *nagaa* is an essential key to an orderly universe and societal well-being that humans must pursue.

The workshop will be conducted in a round-table format and focuses on the works of scholars who have conducted research and written recently on the Oromo conception and mechanisms of peace. After exchanges among participants in the round-table, the forum will entertain questions from the audience.

This event is designed to generate discussions that will reveal the core concepts of Oromo peace. Both Oromo who are familiar with the language and culture and non-Oromo, for whom the concepts are unique, will benefit from this approach which demonstrates the philosophical foundations of *naga'a*. The papers also offer comparative perspectives from peace studies. The approach will also show the practical significance of Oromo concept of peace to political, economic and social problems among the Oromo, in the Horn of Africa and, perhaps on the global scene. OSA believes the Oromo concept of peace is a theme that needs to be studied with the same scholarly rigor and commitment that guided the research on *gadaa* in years past. The workshop is set up to launch this process.

## Annual Conference Planning

The planning of the summer conference is underway and I would like to share with you some of the developments that may be noteworthy for your travel plans.

As you know, the summer conference takes place alongside a number of activities planned to celebrate what has become known as the Oromo Mega Festival. This festival, among other events, will include: The North American Oromo Soccer Tournament, the Oromo Churches Annual Conference, The annual Oromo Studies Association Conference and the recently introduced marathon “Run for Oromia”. It therefore is incumbent on the various program coordinating teams to provide a well-thought-out flow of programs so that attendees of the Mega Fest will be able to make the most of their experiences.

In view of this, OSA is mindful of the challenges associated with the coordination of such major events and has made certain adjustments to its schedule in order to accommodate the needs of our compatriots traveling all the way to Minneapolis, Minnesota. As result our annual conference this summer will be held on Saturday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> and Sunday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008. This new adjusted schedule will leave more room for flexibility to attend most of the events planned for the Mega Fest.

The Conference theme this year will focus on “*Oromo and the Horn of Africa: The search for Freedom, Peace and Democracy*”. In terms of session format, we would like to dedicate more time for the presenters in order for them to elucidate their points as well as allocate adequate time for questions and answers. This means that, unlike in the past, OSA will have to screen presentation proposals and select papers that are most relevant to the theme or panel with an overall appeal to an audience with diverse scholarly backgrounds.

At this stage we have not fully finalized the layout of the various panels. However, the following areas or panels are under consideration to serve as the building blocks for the Conference. These are:

- Panel I. Developments and Current Events in the Horn of Africa: (The Ogaden, Oromia, Somalia, Kenya, etc.)
- Panel II. Human Rights and Democratic Processes
- Panel III. The Effects of Globalization
- Panel IV. The State of Oromo Refugees
- Panel V. Oromo Political Movements and Challenges
- Panel VI. Presentation by Oromo Youth Association
- Panel VII. Social and Economic Development Issues

The blueprint above is meant to serve as a guide to develop presentation proposals. Because of time limitations, OSA would like to encourage prospective presenters to send in their presentation abstracts by May 15<sup>th</sup> for consideration. Additional guidelines for

paper presentation will be made available on our website sometime in mid-March.

As announced earlier, Professor Ali Mazrui will deliver the key note address at the annual conference.

### Journal of Oromo Studies Grants

OSA is pleased to announce that OIqaa Foundation has provided a \$5,000 grant to defray the cost of the publication of the Journal of Oromo Studies (JOS). The 2008 winter issue of the Journal is in print as I write and will be available for distribution at the mid year Conference.

This generous financial support was made possible by Obbo Mike Abebe – founding President of the OIqaa Foundation. According to Oromo friends who have known Mike over a period of time, his generosity in support of the Oromo endeavors is not a new phenomenon. Among several of his contributions, Mike bought an aging

facility in Atlanta, renovated it, and transformed it to a state of the art community center before donating it to the Oromo Community Association of Georgia in December 2006. Mike has also provided the financial stimulus for the annual marathon race known as “Run for Oromia” held last year in Minneapolis during the Mega Fest.

On behalf of the Journal Editor, OSA Board and Executive Committee, I would like to express our sincere thanks to Obbo Mike and the OIqaa Foundation for their continued support to the Oromo cause.

### Research Corner

Sue Holmberg (a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst) went to Ethiopia in September 2007 to study the impacts of Fairtrade coffee certification\* on the Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (OCFCU) as her dissertation research. However, once in Addis Ababa, she realized that the true story in front of her was how this coffee union struggled to develop in the context of the Ethiopian coffee industry and Ethiopia’s

political and economic history. Meeting with many Ethiopian coffee researchers, she also realized that the coffee industry, although fundamental to both Ethiopia’s economy and to the global coffee market, was not well represented and analyzed by a solid body of research. Thus, she is shifting her research focus to study the political economy of the OCFCU in order to contribute to the knowledge base about Ethiopia’s important coffee industry,

and is expecting to finish her paper on this by May 2008.

\*Fairtrade coffee certification is an attempt to benefit poor coffee farmers by directly linking coffee producers in the global South with consumers of

coffee in the global North - by eliminating middlemen, ensuring a fair price, and providing education and funding for coffee communities. It has become a widespread movement in the US. If interested in more on Fairtrade, see [www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org).

### A Second Letter of Appeal from a Jimma University Faculty

*Hello*

*It is my pleasure to introduce my institution and -self to you. We are running the department of Oromo Folklore and Literature at Jimma University. The department currently has about 50 students and 3 staff members and is committed to collect, describe and preserve Oromo culture. It is initiated from observation of the vanishing of Oromo traditional cultures and institutions. Our aim is equipping the students with cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains so as to help them have adequate understanding about the genres, features and elements; skills to execute their research with full heart and commitment; particularly, we are focusing on equipping the students with the research methodology of folklore and oral literary materials. It is our belief that this will enable them in executing the objective the department. But we are running short of materials. These subjects as you know are not studied; we do not have adequate access to the*

*available research findings that would help us to achieve our goals. But our minds do not let see while these issues are vanishing.*

*You can also image what we feel when students joined the department and we do not have reference materials and sample research studies to recommend them to read. Think of the feelings of the learners. It is difficult to bear sometimes.*

*Therefore, this is to request you and your institution, OSA, to help us in whatever ways you can on these issues.*

*If you are interested to see it, I can send you the course catalogue of the department next time.*

*With best regards,  
(This letter is published without editing. Name and address of the faculty was withheld for privacy; please contact OSA if you are interested in coordinating assistance)*

## A Report on the most Wonderful Oromo Graduation Ceremony, December 16, 2007, Melbourne, Australia

By Mohammed Hassen and Toltu Tufa

This piece was intended for the January issue of OSA Newsletter. Toltu Tufa submitted her part of this report on time. However, owing to factors beyond my control, I was not able to write my section in time for the previous issue. Although that wonderful graduation ceremony took place several weeks ago, the information is still relevant and above all, it has educational value for those who want to learn from the experience of our youth in Melbourne, Australia. This report is divided in to two parts. Part one deals with my observation of that graduation ceremony. In part two Toltu Tufa explains why she took the initiative of organizing the beautiful graduation ceremony, which brought great deal of joy for those who were lucky enough to witness that historic event.

### Part One

Before I present my observation about the exhilarating graduation ceremony, I was blessed to have witnessed, it is important to provide a brief background information to that event.

On December 15 and 16, 2007, I had the good fortune of attending, together with Professor Hamdesa Tusso, an Oromo Conference that was held at a University in Victoria. The conference was organized by dedicated and concerned Oromo nationals, who wanted to discuss the problems facing

Oromo national liberation struggle and explore ways of bringing together the various Oromo organizations to work together for the common purpose- higher purpose- for the liberation of Oromia. The conference was well attended. It was informative and educational. I was most impressed with Oromo participants concern for the wellbeing of our people back home in Oromia, their desire to be the voice of their people in the diasporas, their commitment to the freedom of our nation, and their yearning for the day when the various Oromo organizations work together for the common purpose without ifs and buts. The discipline of conference participants was truly remarkable. Their maturity in terms of tolerating differences of opinion, handling contentious issues without shouting at each other, and listening respectfully to different views and opinions expressed by different political organizations was truly uplifting. That was the mark of maturity and the product of political experience by our nationals in Melbourne. I was deeply touched and moved, not only by what I experienced during the two day conference, but also because I was given a golden opportunity to meet with so many young men and women, adults and children in that conference hall.

I vividly remember when Drs. Hamdeso Tusso, Paul Baxter and I participated in a similar conference in March 1989, there were less than 30

Oromo nationals including children in Melbourne. Today, there are thousands of Oromo nationals in Melbourne. Probably more than half of them are young men, women and children. I believe children are our future. If they are educated, they will be useful for themselves, their families and their nation. I am glad to report that our young men and women in Melbourne are taking their education seriously. They are graduating from high schools, colleges and universities. I was blessed to have witnessed the 2007 Oromo graduation ceremony, which is the subject of what follows.

#### December 16, 2007 Graduation Ceremony

It was a lovely Sunday evening, after the end of the two-day conference that we attended the graduation ceremony. The graduation ceremony was organized by Toltu Tufa. She is a young, brilliant, dynamic, energetic and beautiful girl, whose wit, wisdom, maturity and understanding of Oromo issues, level of sophistication are beyond her young age. It took a tireless efforts and a lot of hard work organizing the very best graduation ceremony. All the hard work of the young organizer and those who helped her paid off splendidly that extraordinary evening. There were a larger number of adults, young men and women, who witnessed what turned out to be an historic event. Professor Hamdesa Tusso and I were truly lucky to have been part of that history making event. What was so great about that event was this. A very young girl was able to unite members of Oromo Community in Melbourne across,

regional, religious, political, gender and age differences and proved the power of one - what one person can do, if there is determination, perseverance and hard work. By doing so, Toltu Tufa shone a bright and up lifting light on the ability of dedicated Oromo youth in Melbourne. I sat there and looked at the glowing faces of the graduating students and for a moment I thought of the potential of the nation of Oromia. Imagine, if a million young men and women annually graduate from high schools, colleges and universities in Oromia, what our people will be able to do for themselves. Educated and politically conscious people will be the greatest asset for the future of Oromia.

I sat there mesmerized as the graduation ceremony started with eloquent welcoming address, followed by national anthem, then speech about history of Oromo Community in Australia, followed by performance: poem recital, followed by graduation presentation, then cultural dance, drama, cake cutting and ending by with heart warming blessings by sheikh Abdulwahab Tufa, the proud father of Toltu and other gifted children. From the beginning to the end the whole ceremony was truly exhilarating. It was a ceremony of joy, of recognition of achievements, display of the coming of age of the Oromo youth, when the well spring of Oromo yearning for prayer and blessing was over flown with happiness, kindness of heart and their goodness as human beings and beauty of character was on display. The flood of feeling which welled up through the hall transformed the ceremony from an ordinary graduation to an exhilarating

emotional time when the depths of Oromo patriotism overflowed with yearning for liberation of Oromia. I was carried on the wings of joy to the promised land of free Oromia, the time when our people are no longer subjected to daily massacre, imprisonment and torture; plunder of property, endless degradation, shameful abuses, dehumanizing humiliation, under the tyranny of the wretched of the earth. For a few moments, I tested the sweet and fresh air of free Oromia in my mind. When I returned from my mental journey, I realized that I was witnessing a true and earnest efforts of Oromo youth in Melbourne to be the voice of their nation in Australia. If other Oromo communities learn a lesson from the experience of our youth in Melbourne, and if their yearning to be the voice of their people is allowed to take root every where, we will soon be able to expose the crimes the enemy is committing against our people daily in Oromia. It is truly promising to know that our youth in Melbourne have the vision, the commitment and the determination to be the voice of their people in Australia. .

The graduation ceremony was conducted in afaan Oromoo from beginning to the end. Toltu Tufa, most likely was born in Melbourne. Her command of afaan Oromoo is impeccable. The beauty of her language, the richness of her vocabulary may reflect not only her love for our language but also her parents' commitment for teaching their children afaan Oromoo-the richest treasure of our cultural heritage. They have done their parental duty of preserving our

language in Australia. After the graduation ceremony, I had a good opportunity to talk with several Oromo students, who were born in Melbourne who have great command of our language. "There is much to be gained, learned, affirmed, and celebrated" about the Oromo Community members in Melbourne, who cultivated the love and respect for our afaan Oromoo, the core of Oromo identity.

During close to three hours graduation ceremony, I did not hear a single negative remark people made about each other. Instead all what I heard was wonderful things people were saying about each other. It was absolutely amazing experience for me. I witnessed Oromos lifting each other up rather than tearing each other down. The whole ceremony lifted my spirit and I longed for the day when this infectious spirit born in Melbourne, will reach our diaspora in North America. The graduation ceremony demonstrated the coming of age of our youth in Melbourne. The thing I loved most about our youth in Melbourne, especially about Toltu Tufa was her gift for looking at the strength of her colleagues, and her capacity to say good things about everyone. What truly amazed me about that young girl was her eagerness to see the very best in others. She was successful in organizing the finest graduation ceremony because she encouraged both the young and adults by seeing the best in them. Her goal was profound. Regardless of political, religious, regional and other differences members of the Oromo Community in Melbourne, Toltu believes, must all pull together to be

effective voice for their people in Australia. There is a big lesson for all of us to learn from Toltu Tufa's quality of appreciating the strength of every individual rather focusing on their weakness. I hope other Oromo community organizations will realize the benefit of organizing graduation ceremonies. It creates condition for appreciating achievements. Such recognition has a potential for inspiring our young students to achieve excellence in their education. Above all, graduation ceremony brings people together and creates a joyous moment for all.

Finally, I asked Toltu Tufa the following five questions. 1. The purpose for organizing that brilliant ceremony; 2) the names of the students who graduated in 2007; 3) the institutions from which they graduated; 4) the program of graduation ceremony; 5) those who helped her in organizing the great event. Her answers to my questions follow. Enjoy the beauty of her language, the depth of her ideas and her fascinating insight into the situation of Oromo youth in Melbourne.

Part two: by Toltu Tufa.

### 1. The purpose for organizing graduation ceremony.

Below, I have written the official purposes for organizing the graduation ceremony. However, I have deeper, personal reasons for why I wanted such an event to occur.

For me personally, I wanted to organize an event that would bring the Oromo community together to celebrate our identity in a contemporary, yet relevant way. My particular intention revolved around creating an event that would invite the youth. This is because I know, based on many discussions I have had with different young men and women, that there are many who want to relish in their Oromo identity in Australia but do not know anyways of doing so. At the other end of the spectrum there are also others who have no vested interest in their Oromo identity. Some are even cynical or critical about their Oromo. They want to be part of the mainstream Australian society.

To bridge these gaps (especially those of cynicism), I wanted the Oromo community to organize an event that would cater to all Oromo age and gender groups, by holding an event that would transcend common barriers of politics or religion. I believed education was the best way to do this since it is something that appears to be valued by all Oromos, regardless of background or creed, and also something that majority of Oromo youth are all working towards achieving.

Also, I wanted to provide an opportunity to bring the community together to concentrate on the often unrecognized achievement of individual Oromo, showcase the beauty of our culture and reward the hard work of individual Oromos in their educational struggle. Most importantly, I wanted to give something memorable to our people without expecting anything in return. I wanted our youth to feel special, and to

teach them that you can do whatever you want in life while being proudly Oromo.

This is why I worked towards organizing an Oromo Graduation ceremony, conducted in the Oromo language that showcased the beauty of Oromo culture.

The purpose behind organizing the Graduation ceremony for the community at large was:

- to celebrate and showcase the magnitude of cumulative educational achievement of Oromos in Australia
- to provide motivation for Oromo students already in schooling to continue and excel in their education
- to notify the government of the positive contribution of the Oromo community to Australia's educational economy
- to let Oromo graduates know that their efforts are appreciated by the community as a whole

For the student parents:

- to provide an opportunity of positive support - even though they may not have had the same opportunities for education as their children

For the graduates:

- To appreciate and acknowledge their educational achievement and effort.
- and most importantly, to build a positive association between secular success and their traditional identities

2. The names of all the students who graduated in 2007 and the types of

degrees and diplomas with which they graduated...

Year 12 graduates:

Arsse Abdulfatah – Ilim College  
Dula Adem – Roxborough Park  
Demeysa Ahmed -  
Aisha Ali – Ilijm College  
Nura Jemal – Broadmeadows Secondary College  
Mohammed Hussien – Maribynong Secondary College  
Arafat Mohammed – Brunswick Secondary College  
Farida Mohammed – Debney Park Secondary College  
Fatiha Mohammed – Debney Park Secondary College  
Mohammed – Footscray City College  
Musa Tola – Reservoir District Secondary College  
Abdul Sammaan

University Undergraduate Studies:

Karim Degal: Bachelor of Commerce/Marketing - Deakin University  
Biftu Jemal: Bachelor of Arts (Community work) - Victoria University

Abu Kader: Dip Nursing – UCM Australia  
Lensa Osman: Dip legal Studies - Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)

University Post Graduate Studies

Raees Degal: Hons. Telecommunication and Electrical Engineering - La Trobe University  
Masters Telecommunication and Electrical Engineering - La Trobe University

Awal Adem: Masters Business Systems - Monash University  
 Halakhe Ganyu: Masters Social work - La Trobe University  
 Wirtu Lamessa: Phd. Civil Engineering - University of Melbourne

4. The program of the graduation ceremony.

7pm	Open doors
7.30	Welcome MC: Gemedo Adem & Zulfiye Tufa President: Aliyye Galato
8.00pm	Ceremonial entry + National Anthem
8.15	Speech: Oromo community history in Australia Obboo Abdusalaam Ali
8.25	Performance: Poem Recital Ayyoub Ali & Mariyam Tola
8.30	Graduation Presentation: VCE Ceremony Presenters: Prof. Hamdesa Tuso Prof. Mohamed Hassan
9.00	Break
9.20	Graduation Presentation: Undergraduate Ceremony Presenters: Abdella Adem AaddeeJiloo

10.00	Performance: Cultural Dance  Presentations from the different regions of Oromia
10.15	Graduation presentation: Masters Ceremony Presenter: Amanda Walsh
10.30	Performance: Drama
10.45	Cake Cutting
11.00	Blessings and Close Sh. AbdulWahabTufa

5. Those that helped us in organizing the great event.

This event was made possible with the financial backing of the Australian Oromo Community of Victoria (AOCV) led by community president, Aliye Geleto. From the outset of my work with the AOCV, Aliye has shown encouraging conviction with regard to bettering the Oromo cause, in any way he deems possible. Without his continued accommodation and open mindedness towards trying such new ideas, I believe that the 2007 graduation ceremony would have remained simply, just an idea.

The organizing presenters on the night including Zulfiye Tufa, Gemedo Adem, Abdusalaam Ali, Ayyoub Ali, Mariyam Tola and the cultural dancers. Each person prepared presentations for the evening that required tireless rehearsal, commitment and patience with my

ongoing persistence beforehand. Their efforts were duly paid off, as seen by the smooth running of the evening's program. Also worth noting is that more than one third of the Year 12 and University graduates came early in the morning to help prepare and decorate the hall. Many appeared to be excited at the prospect of the Oromo community doing something especially for them, with no expectation in return except to wish them happiness in their successes. Many of them were under the impression that the discussion and events in Oromo community was something the elders were involved in, and not necessarily something the youth could own and integrate into their individual lifestyles.

My father and mother. My parents are people of few words, yet they are largely the underlying force that drives my passion in community work. Through their action, they supported

my organizing commitments in the days upcoming to this event in terms of accepting my lateness home, and the countless sacrifice of time that I could have spent with them. On the day of the event, my father stood behind me to offer prayers and blessing to the event and the students at large. For their support in freely allowing me to organize this event, I am grateful.

Finally, my greatest gratitude in the organization of this event lies with Allah (swt). Although He needs no thanks from me, I offer it anyway because it is through Him that people's hearts were drawn to our event which made it such a success. I use the word heart intentionally because it was the heart of the Oromo community that supported the success of our event, and I believe that it is positive changes in heart, combined with correct education that will lead our people to the ultimate success.