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President Barack Obama
The White House
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Subject: Oromo Studies Association's Appeal Letter to President Obama on the Growing Repression and Human Rights Violations by the Ethiopian Government

Dear Mr. President Barack Obama:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) as its current President and as a US citizen and strong supporter of your administration starting from your candidacy for US President four years ago. As it has been brought to your attention by previous presidents of OSA, the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) is a not-for-profit scholarly organization registered in the United States of America to promote studies relating to the Oromo people in Ethiopia in particular and the Horn Africa in general to inform the public, governments and international community to foster peace, stability and positive social changes in that important region of Africa. The majorities of OSA members are voting US citizens and come from diverse academic and socio- economic backgrounds, many with institutions of international repute, myself a Harvard faculty and your fellow Harvard alumni. The rest of our members are from around the world covering all continents. Oromos are the single largest group in Ethiopia comprising over 40% of the Ethiopian population but politically disenfranchised by successive Ethiopian regimes. I would also like to draw your administration's attention to growing Oromos and the other Ethiopians here in the US as significant voting bloc as US citizens. The Oromo are estimated to be over 150, 000¹ in the United States alone and contribute to the various sectors of the U.S. economy. The Oromos also have close ties with and are actively participating in social & political activities of other members of the Ethiopian community in the United States.

My immediate past Presidents of OSA have written appeal letters to your Excellency to bring to your attention the gross human right violations and sufferings of the Oromos and other Ethiopians under the ruling Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia. This letter is a follow up of the previous appeal letters written by OSA Presidents Dr Haile Hirpa and Dr Begna Dugassa. In his letter of 2010 to

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oromo_people

your office, Dr Haile detailed how the ruling Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF), a rebel group which seized power militarily in 1991, pits ethnic groups against each other as a means of remaining in power in Ethiopia. He also wrote of how the TPLF/EPRDF run Ethiopian government is violating Oromo human rights through actions such as unjustly imprisoning Oromo civilians, coordinating abductions in third countries and evicting Oromo farmers. Dr Begna Dugassa wrote a letter dated April 24, 2010 expanding on Dr. Haile's letter by detailing how Ethiopia's regime is carrying out extrajudicial killings, arrest, torture and disappearance of the Oromo people. Each of these letters expresses the need for your administration to take a proactive action in restoring human rights in Ethiopia.

I would like to bring to your attention once again the growing repression and escalating human right violation by the Ethiopian ruling party since those appeal letters were written to your administration because the Ethiopian authorities are worried of mass uprisings inspired by the Arab Spring against the government's repressive de facto one party political system. According to a recent Amnesty International report, "The scale of arrests and prosecutions are indicative of a new level of repression and send a chilling message to opposition politicians and journalists in Ethiopia."² It is further documented in the same report that "at least 114 Ethiopian opposition politicians and journalists have been arrested in the course of their legitimate activities since March 2011"³ On December 16, 2011 Amnesty International released the report titled **Dismantling Dissent: Intensified crackdown on free speech in Ethiopia**, which provided a comprehensive analysis of the arrests, charges and pre-trial proceedings.

The Human Right Watch and Amnesty International documented that the Ethiopian Government uses anti-terror law to stifle peaceful dissent. According to Rona Peligal, deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch, "the anti-terror law itself is a huge problem. The international community, especially the European Union, United States, and United Kingdom, should ask the Ethiopian government hard questions about why it is using this law to crack down on peaceful independent voices."⁴

Ethiopia Targeting Western and African Journalist

Ethiopia's regime is waging a war against free press. A recent arrest of two Swedish journalists, Johan Persson and Martin Schibbye, indicates the Ethiopian regime's views on free journalism. According to CNN report, the two journalists were charged and convicted of supporting "Terrorism" for working on a story in the restive Ogaden region. The Ethiopian action is expanding on past actions against Oromo and Ethiopian journalists, many who end up in prisons for critically writing about any issues of public policy.

Mr. President:

We, at OSA, are heartened to learn that the Ethiopian regime disproportionately targets Oromo political dissidents and Oromo youth on a continuous basis due to the regime's fear of potential political power of the Oromo people in Ethiopia, the single largest politically unrepresented population group strategically placed in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. According to the Human Rights League Horn of Africa (HRLHA)⁵, the Ethiopian regime has intensified mass abductions and imprisonments on Oromo students and civic organization leaders. According to HRLHA's report of May 12, 2011, over 30 students have been detained from various universities and the trend continued unabated since then.

² *Claire Beston, Amnesty International's Ethiopia researcher*. Quoted in 15 December 2011

Amnesty International report on growing repression in Ethiopia

³ Amnesty International December 15, 2011

⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/11/21/ethiopia-stop-using-anti-terror-law-stifle-peaceful-dissent>

⁵ See series of reports from HRLHA at <http://www.humanrightsleague.com/>

A December 21, 2011 report by Qeerro, an Oromia youth media for the national Oromian non-violent youth movement, lists additional students in Southern Shoa region of Oromia who were arrested by Ethiopian security. Some of the students were as young as 11 years old. On December 30, 9 additional students are abducted from Adama University according to Qeerro reports. Many reports by Qeerro were corroborated by other humanitarian groups such as the Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA) and the Oromia Support Group (OSG).

Mass arrest of Oromo Civic Organizations and Leaders of Macha Tulama Self-Help Association (MTHA)

The Ethiopian regime has continued targeting of Oromo civic leaders and organizations. Mr. Laggasaa Deettii Dhaba, School Director and Board Member of MTSHA, and Mr. Mulugeta Riqitu were arrested by the Ethiopian government after celebrating a harmless religious festival (Gubaa Ceremony) on August 24th, 2011. Mr. Sisay Sarbesa, a Macha Tulama member and 3rd year university student was also arrested by the Ethiopian government. All three are currently at the Maikelawi federal torture prison. They were arrested for promoting Oromo culture and celebrating Oromo indigenous monotheistic African religion, Waaqeffannaa. The State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor reported in its 2010 country report for Ethiopia that the Ethiopian state has been cracking down on the religious freedoms of followers and leaders of Waaqeffannaa for alleged links of the group's leaders with the outlawed Oromo Liberation Front (OLF).⁶ Soon after the arrests, the Ethiopian government banned the Macha Tulama Self Help Association. A July 12th, 2011 Human Rights League Horn of Africa report provides names of Oromo professionals abducted by the Ethiopian government.

Targeting Oromos and other Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Third Countries

Ethiopia government security forces have been actively abducting refugees and Asylum seekers in third countries such as Djibouti, Somaliland and Kenya. The Ethiopian government has also actively pressed neighboring countries to abduct Oromo refugees on their behalf. According to the latest report by Oromia Support Group released on December 30th, 2011 "the government of Somaliland warned 90,000 immigrants that they had to leave several months ago and at least half had left when the government, responding to a request from the Ethiopian government at the beginning of September." According to the same report the following 20 refugees are believed to be handed over to the Ethiopia government security forces. Here are their names and some of their UNHCR identity numbers.

Abdurahman Yousuf Mohamed (758-08C00303), Abdulaziz Ahmed Ali (758-06C00349), Abdele Tefo (Tato/Tabso Nure) (REC/0355/08), Abdeta Saniyo (Sayo/Saliye Yuye) (758-08C00224), Abyot Abera Gebre-Selassie (75804C0027), Amina Mohamed Umar Amir Tamam Hassan (REC/0344/08), Araya Berhanu Rada(758-04C002), Fatuma Jibril Getachew Feyisa Sarda (758-08C00146), Hawa Mume, Junedin Ali Mergan (Barsisa) Kalif Hassen Ahmed (REC/0554/08), Mohamed Aliyi Haji, Mohamed Nure Ibrahim (Ali) REC/1238/08, Mohamed Yusuf Mustefa(758-06C00081 Nasir Usmael Muse(RF/SOMHA/07C002), Sada Mohamed Ali; Said Tumo (Tulu) Nure REC/0231/08, and Shito Aliyi.

In addition in early November, Oromo refugees were abducted and reportedly handed over to Ethiopia. The victims were Sheik Abdurrahman Qabattoo, Mr. Riyaad Kamal and Mr. Ali Dabbal. On November 10th, 2011, Mr. Abdushukuur Mahammad (RF/06/055), and Mr. Hassan-nuur Mahammad Suleeyman (REC /361/08) were also abducted and reportedly refouled to Ethiopia in violation of UN 1951 article 1 which states:

⁶ See the U.S. Department of State's report on religious freedom in Ethiopia. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148688.htm>

“No Contracting State shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers where his/her life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

There have been evidences that refugees who have been forcefully returned to Ethiopia from neighboring countries have been persecuted upon return. A human rights study showed extradited refugees had the history of facing torture, rape (women) and imprisonment on the basis of the imputed political views and membership in the Oromo nationality.⁷ The cases of the two extradited UNHCR-mandated Oromo refugees from Kenya—Engineers Mesfin Abebe and Tesfahun Chemedo—who were disappeared for a year in the Ethiopian prison system and later sentenced in 2010 to death and life imprisonment respectively under the Ethiopia’s 2009 overbroad terrorism law is a proof for the prevalence of refugee persecutions.⁸ The OSA believes that returning mandated and non-mandated refugees without trying them in a court of law in the country providing asylum and convicting them has posed credible dangers to the lives of those forcefully returned. The case of Engineers Abebe and Chemedo, and numerous other cases, is a testimony to the fact that such action of refouling and refugee-abductions are in violation of major regional and international human rights laws, treaties and refugee protocols.

Use of development and humanitarian aid for political repression:

Ethiopia is the largest recipient of both humanitarian and development aid in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the BBC Investigative journalist and many independent reports, the Ethiopian regime uses aid for political repression. “A joint undercover investigation by BBC Newsnight and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism has uncovered evidence that the Ethiopian government is using billions of dollars of development aid as a tool for political oppression.”⁹ Human Rights Watch’s 2010 reports titled “One Hundred Ways of Putting Pressure,” and “Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia”¹⁰ are best examples of how the Ethiopian state uses the development and humanitarian aid to bolster the ruling party and to weaken regions and populations groups (example, Oromo and Ogaden, inter alia) considered potentially threatening to the power monopoly by the ruling Tigrean elites. Because of the hostility of the Ethiopian regime toward the international media and human rights groups, it is increasingly becoming difficult to fully scrutinize and report on how the country is handling food and development aid. Ethiopia is furtively not transparent on the processes, management and distributions of aid.

Mr. President:

In your address to Ghanaian parliament in Accra on July 11, 2009 you emphatically put that “No person wants to live in a society where the rule of law gives way to the rule of brutality and bribery. (Applause.) That is not democracy that is tyranny, even if occasionally you sprinkle an election in there. And now is the time for that style of governance to end. (Applause). . . . In the 21st century, capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success -- strong parliaments; honest police forces; independent judges -- (Applause); an independent press; a vibrant private sector; a civil society. (Applause) Those are the things that give life to democracy, because that is what matters in people’s everyday lives.”

⁷ See Oromia Support 2010 Report on Human Rights in Ethiopia. http://www.oromo.org/osg/pr46_2.html

⁸ See reference in footnote number 6 above.

⁹ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/9556288.stm>

¹⁰ <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2010/03/24/one-hundred-ways-putting-pressure-0>
<http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia1010webwcover.pdf>

All of the accounts presented above are evidences of growing repression and human right violations and our series of appeal letters to your Excellency documented the brutality and tyranny of the Ethiopian government towards its peoples, the style of governance that you would like to end and replace by the rule of law, democracy, honest police force, independent judiciary, free press, vibrant private sector and civil society that you envisioned above all of which are miserably missing in Ethiopia. Unless there is a credible pressure from the United States and Western donor nation, the Ethiopian regime will continue its repressive and gross human right violations, ultimately contributing to local, regional and global instability. After we heard your policy stance in Africa during your uplifting speeches, we were and still we are hopeful that your administration will exert pressure on the Ethiopian government to live up to your vision and aspiration for Africa. Our country needs strong democratic institutions you alluded to in your famous Accra speech. We believe your administration has significant political and economic leverage to affect the conduct of governance in Ethiopia now. The current Ethiopian regime presents itself as a critical ally in that volatile region of Africa against global terrorism. We believe the sustainable and long term ally of the United States are the Ethiopian people and the government elected by all Ethiopians. A government that is terrorizing its own people rules by tyranny cannot be a long term strategic and dependable ally.

The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) once again calls on your administration & all branches of the United States government, western donor and democratic countries, all neighboring countries of Ethiopia including Kenya, Djibouti and Somaliland, all regional and international human rights organizations, and as well as diplomatic communities in Ethiopia use all their diplomatic and economic levers to end growing repression and escalating human rights violations in Ethiopia. I urge you to put pressure on the Ethiopian government to:

- End extrajudicial killings and arrests.
- End targeting Oromo culture and indigenous religions.
- Release unlawfully detained students, civic leaders and professionals.
- Release the Swedish journalists who were detained and prosecuted by the Ethiopian government's kangaroo court.
- Repeal their terrorism & press laws that stifle democracy. Current US laws on terrorism do not interfere with free speech of innocent Citizens and the Ethiopian government should not be allowed to terrorize its own people under the pretext of anti-terrorism.
- End abduction and threats of Oromos and other Ethiopians who are seeking refuge from the brutal Ethiopian regime in third countries.
- Commit to the respect of human rights and allow freedom of expression and assembly.
- Implement the Ethiopian constitution and allow all ethnic groups to freely exercise the right to determine on their affairs.

We greatly appreciate your attention to this very important matter.

Respectfully,

Hamza Abdurezak, PhD.

OSA President

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