

Waldaa Qorannoo Oromoo



Oromo Studies Association

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Message from the President

This past summer OSA celebrated its 25th year of scholarship on Oromo history, culture, politics & economic development and areas that affect the Oromo people. I am sure looking back on what has been achieved over the last 25 years makes the OSA founding fathers & mothers very proud. However, given the daunting challenges that the Oromo people face today much is expected & needs to be done, not only from OSA scholars & members, but also from all sections of the Oromo people.

Our people back home in Oromia are languishing under the brutal regime that has taken away their basic individual human rights of all Ethiopian people and collective rights of Oromos and other nations in the Ethiopian Empire. From the reports that we are reading, the minority TPLF regime is frightened by the inevitable public uprising similar to the Arab Spring spreading to Ethiopia, it is labelling any dissenting voice as terrorist. We at OSA know that the Oromos have long been used to this label and what is interesting to observe over the past year is that this label is levelled against anyone who dares to be critical to any government policy. Its actions reminds us an old but pertinent cliché “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” in the Ethiopian context today

OSA continuing its tradition of scholarship on relevant & timely issues, we have selected our mid- year conference to address the dynamics & interplay of human rights, democracy and foreign interventions. In this newsletter you will find a call for people that we already circulated around and posted on the OSA website. I once again call upon all to come to our mid-year conference at Harvard University and participate, present papers and network with other participants in the conference.

This year’s OSA annual conference will be held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on July 14th and 15th, 2012. The theme of our 2012 OSA annual conference is “**The State of the Oromo Struggle: Critical Investigations on the Challenges & Opportunities on How to Move Forward**”. I have included in this newsletter a call for papers on this theme.

Finally, as you all know OSA is financially a member support organization. We are facing financial challenges to conduct OSA business and we call upon members and friends of OSA to financial support OSA as much as you can in addition to your membership fees. If you would like to donate please contact OSA treasurer, Addee Tsehay Wodajo at 612-724-2096 and/or twdf2a@yahoo.com.

Thank you!

Hamza Abdurezak, PhD

OSA President

CALL FOR PAPERS FOR THE OSA 2012 MID YEAR CONFERENCE

Conference Theme:

“The Challenges of Human Rights, Democracy and the Role of International Community in the Horn of Africa”

Date: April 7-8, 2012

Venue: Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA

The Oromo Studies Association (OSA), continuing its tradition of a multi-disciplinary scholarship, the current Executive Committee of OSA has selected the theme for our mid- year conference to investigate the interplay of human rights, democracy and the role of international community in Ethiopia and in the Horn of Africa. In past OSA conferences, scholars have studied and presented papers separately dealing with the issues of human rights or lack thereof, they presented papers highlighting the challenges of democratization process in Ethiopia and the

Horn of Africa in general. This year in our mid-year conference, we invite all scholars with expertise in the dynamics and interplay of human rights, democracy and the role of both western and eastern powers in promoting human rights and democracy or subsidizing and/or enabling the oppressive regimes that have continuously violated the most basic human rights of peoples and their aspiration for democratic rights in Ethiopia in particular and in the Horn of Africa in general.

We have observed developments over the last 20 years, in Ethiopia and in the Horn Africa in these tri-polar interrelated issues of human rights, democracy and foreign interventions due to the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa in the fight against global terrorism.

We, at OSA, developed a tradition of scholarship for over 25 years now and would like to invite and engage scholars and experts in a scholarly setting to inform the academics, public and policy makers concerned with the issues of human rights and democratization process in that volatile and yet very important region of Africa. It is in the spirit of our scholarly organization whose members are engaged in scholarly studies and producing knowledge that promotes social justice, individual and collective rights (e.g. the rights of people to self-determination), and democracy, that we selected this theme for our conference to be held here at Harvard University on April 7-8, 2012

We are encouraging potential presenters of papers to address the following pointed issues, but not in any ways limited to these issues, while remaining within the theme of the conference

- A. *Analysis of the interplay and dynamics of human rights and democratization process: Analytical and methodologies issues and lessons from successful and unsuccessful countries, regions etc are encouraged;*
- B. *The state and trend of human right violations in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa: The magnitude, the trend and its relations to democratization process and the response or lack thereof of international community. What is the threshold of human right violations that trigger mass uprisings and response of international community? What is the threshold of human right violation record that can be considered as Genocide? Do the accumulation of state power in all its forms; economic, political, institutional, security and military in the hands of minority elite groups provide no incentive for compromise for political pluralism? Does this 'winner takes all' mentality eventually lead to gross human right violation or even genocide when other sections of society engage in mass uprisings as we have seen in the Arab Spring?*

- C. *Legalizing human right violations by the State: Analysis of Anti-terrorism laws, press laws and other regulations to “legally” suppress human rights and curtail democratization process. Relevance of an old but pertinent cliché “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” in the Ethiopian context;*
- D. *Are foreign aid (economic and military) subsidizing repressive institutions and sustain human right violations in Ethiopia? There are many who believe that the government of Ethiopia and others have exploited the strategic position of the Horn Africa in the fight against global terrorism to amass external support to subsidize their own repressive institutions and label all political descents and opposition parties as “terrorists”. We invite scholars to objectively present appraisal of the magnitude of actual foreign aid (economic and military) in subsidizing repressive state institutions by foreign powers in the name of strategic partnership against the global war on terrorism;*
- E. *The use and abuse of development and humanitarian aid for political repression and human right violations and their impact on democratization process;*
- F. *The trend and lack of or narrowing of democratic political space and human right violation implications for future peace and stability in the Horn of African Region;*
- G. *Is the gross human right record of these governments a challenge and/or an opportunity for opposition forces that attempt to replace these governments? An appraisal of experiences of other countries’ successful opposition parties that replaced repressive governments that grossly violated their citizen’s human rights: Lessons for opposition parties in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa;*
- H. *The challenges and opportunities for unifying opposition political forces to reverse human right violations;*
- I. *The role of the Diaspora in bringing the human right violation records to the international community to inform the western public to put pressure on western governments to stop subsidizing repressive institutions in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa;*

Paper submissions:

You can send your abstracts by January 15th, 2012 to Dr. Hamza Abdurezak at abdurez@fas.harvard.edu,

First draft by February 28, 2012,

Final papers are expected by April 1, 2012.

We accept individual, group and panel papers.

Thank you,

Hamza Abdurezak, PhD

OSA President

Call For Papers for the 2012 OSA Annual Conference

Theme:

“The State of the Oromo Struggle: Critical Investigations on the Challenges & Opportunities on How to Move Forward”.

Date: July 14 and 15, 2012

Venue: University of Minnesota

Objective

Most observers of the state of the Oromo struggle agree that there is a confusion and dissatisfaction in its progress, lack of unity of Oromo political organizations. We are observing the perils and potential consequences of lack of Oromo unity. There seems to be a consensus, that achievements have not matched expectations, and that internal conflicts have captured the primary focus if not actions. Although there are a few scholarly attempts to lend vision and solution to these problems, by and large, the topic has not been addressed as an OSA-theme, perhaps for fear of clash of ideas that may result from opening such a topic for a theme. While such a risk may indeed exist, the topic is too important to be completely avoided for fear of debates. It defeats the purpose of OSA if we indeed avoid discussing such critical issues and chose to remain in our comfort zone. OSA has risen to a stature both in quality and quantity

where such apparently controversial issues can be discussed and assessed for the better of the society it serves. In fact, many very controversial topics have been presented at OSA in recent years, and the manner in which OSA audience debated is proof, that OSA has matured in its scholarly discourse, and that we have no more reason to be afraid of emotional and irrational outbursts. This proposed theme motivates OSA and its members to share their views on the state of the Oromo struggle, the challenges of lack of unity, a very important and timely agenda that needs to be discussed in a scholarly setting.

We expect a sober assessment of how far we come, where we are relative to our goals and critical investigations of the challenges and opportunities on how to move forward to achieve the right for self determination of the Oromo people.

Thank you,

Hamza Abdurezak, PhD

OSA President

Waldaa Qorannoo Oromoo



Oromo Studies Association

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January 3, 2012

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
www.whitehouse.gov

Tel: (202) 395-2020

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 and 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 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

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

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>

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 disheartened 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.

A December 21, 2011 report by Qerroo, 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.

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

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>

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 Qabato, 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:

“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 Chemeda—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 Chemeda, 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

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>

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.”

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 and 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

This letter is copied to:

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Ethiopia today: What priorities for the Oromo leadership?

By Marco Bassi

Keynote speech

Annual Conference of the Oromo Studies Association

on the theme

Building Transformative and Dynamic Leadership and Facilitating the Empowerment of People in Oromia and the Greater Horn of Africa

22-24 July 2011

Introduction

As a scholar I am well acquainted with the journal of Oromo Studies and the excellent job made by its board in the different phases, but in the past I had no chance to attend this conference, despite the fact that the *Oromo Studies Association* has been the most important independent forum on Oromo studies for so long. I have been very interested in the debate promoted, among others, by Asmarom Legesse on *gadaa* as an African Democracy, a debate that had a follow up in 2008 and 2009 at the London International Oromo culture & History Workshops of. It was easier for me to participate in this recently established European forum. All of us, organisers and participants, were keeping a constant thought on the inspiring role of OSA, the mother, historical, association of the Oromo.

And this is the reason why today I feel so honoured to be here with you. I feel like having reached an holy ground, like my first time, as a young anthropologist, I was in the *ya'aa* of the *qaalluu* of the Borana. My special thanks to the President Dr. Begna Dugassa, as representative of the members of the association.

Today the Oromo have gone a long way. They have been key actors for the achievement of a radical change in the foundations of the Ethiopian State. Today the Oromo have been recognised as a people with their own, compact, administrative territory, Oromya, with Oromiffa as official language. Oromiffa is also accepted as a national language at the Ethiopian scale. In other words, the Oromo are fully acknowledged as a nation in true, modern sense.

Despite this change, it is legitimate to ask ourselves how far Ethiopia has reached on the path of democracy and on the possibility for its peoples to be empowered and effectively exercise the right of self-determination proclaimed in the new Federal Constitution. The Oromo today are still in an ambivalent position. Differently from the early nationalistic phase, they are not only in antagonism, but are also simultaneously participating in the government. This condition has far reaching implications for the leadership.

What type of leadership is required? One that can efficiently operate within the federal and national institutions, or should the Oromo promote a leadership capable to mobilise the mass for confrontation? And again what form of confrontation may be expected for the future?

My presentation is based on reflexions stimulated by the London International Oromo Culture & History Workshop, as well on research that I have recently implemented in pastoral southern of Ethiopia.

In my speech I will briefly consider the international dimension, trying to convey an internationally oriented perspective on the issues under discussion.

The Constitution and Ethnic Federalism

Most of you are well acquainted with the process that led to the adoption of the constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in 1994. In his book *The Ethiopian State at a Crossroads* Lencoo Lataa has clearly explained how crucial the initial phase of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was for the radical change in the conception of the Ethiopian State. The Oromo political organisations that had previously engaged in insurgency against the Derg were key actors of this process.

The Transitional Period Charter proclaims the fundamental political freedoms, including the right to organise political parties without restrictions. For the first time the multi-party system has formally been introduced in Ethiopia. The Transitional Charter also transforms the unitary conception of a State dominated by a single cultural or national group. It establishes the rights of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia to self-determination, in terms of administrative autonomy, protection of the cultural rights and participation in the central government. The right to self-determination includes the right of secession. A last important point is that the Charter stresses adherence to international law on human rights.

Despite the expulsion of important political components from the Transitional Government, all these principles were fully confirmed and further elaborated in the 1994 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. We all know how the Transitional Period led to the definition of new regions based on ethnicity, with their own legislative and executive bodies, an institutional setting internationally known as 'ethnic federalism'. In the regions inhabited by heterogeneous ethnic groups self-determination was achieved at lower administrative level. The process of definition of the relevant administrative spaces is still on-going, a process that was not free from ethnic violence for the definition of the borders of the region and the *woredes*. This is indeed a major source of international criticism against ethnic federalism.

In theory, the introduction of democracy and ethnic federalism could have led to the solution of the problems that motivated the national struggles. The assumption is that a large degree of political autonomy might have made secession less necessary. Anyway the Constitution allows for the possibility of secession as a matter of self-determination. Quebec in Canada can be considered a comparable case illustrating this theory.

This is a key point, one on which I need to spend a few more words. The issue of recognition of a new independent state is inherently an international matter. In certain circumstances political autonomy can be achieved on the ground; independence can unilaterally be proclaimed, but under international law secession can only be recognised when achieved according the legal mechanisms of the country involved. Somaliland is a good example of de facto secession without international recognition. Eritrea is the opposite case, having achieved independence according to the procedure established by the Transitional Charter, hence according to the law of the entire Ethiopian country. The FDRE Constitution under article 39 establishes a procedure by which a two/third majority of the members of the Legislative Council of the Nation concerned can approve a demand for secession.

The Federal Government keeps a coordinating role, but the final decision is made by a simple majority vote in a referendum. That means that secession can legally be achieved by the decision of a federal state alone, without a vote by the Federal Parliament or a referendum held in the entire Ethiopia.

Theory versus praxis

Despite the re-foundation of the State under new institutional and constitutional settings, Ethiopia doesn't seem to have entirely overcome the old problems. Ethiopian scholars like Assefa Fiseha, and international scholars like David Turton and Kjetil Tronvoll have highlighted the mismatch between the constitutional theory and political practice. In *Ethiopia since the Derg*, Siegfried Pausewand, Tronvoll and Lovise Aalen speak about the adoption of 'a dual administrative structure' by the EPRDF, the ruling party. In his book *Ethiopia*, Merera Gudina expresses this in terms of a specific *modus operandi* in the new democratic constitutional setting while continuing with the old authoritarian culture. Especially after the 2005 electoral crisis, it is more and more acknowledged that Ethiopia has become a de-facto single party system.

The *modus operandi* of the EPRDF can be better understood with reference to the working ideology of the EPRDF, Revolutionary Democracy, analysed in some detail by Theodore Vestal in *Ethiopia. A Post-Cold War African State*. Referring to official EPRDF documents, Vestal discloses the strategy of the EPRDF of building a party structure parallel to formal one, encompassing all the State institutions and also the major civil society organisations. It is like a party-state within the State, taking a centralized control of all the formally democratic and decentralised institutions. Vestal is echoing several other Ethiopian and international scholars that have identified continuity between Revolutionary Democracy and Lenin's 'Democratic Centralism'. In addition to Leninism, Leenco Laata in his *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads* clearly shows the Stalinist and Maoist influence on the ideology of the EPRDF, rooted in the student's movement and shared by most insurgent organisations of the 80s. The notion of 'Nation, nationality and people', central to current ethnic federalism, is shaped on Stalin's writings on the 'national question' within the Soviet Union.

This is what Clapham, a fine analyst of Ethiopian politics since the Imperial time, writes about Stalin's thinking on the matter:

In order to cope with ethnic diversity of the former Russian Empire, [...] Stalin (who himself came from a peripheral region, Georgia) developed a system in which nationalities would enjoy cultural rights and a limited amount of administrative autonomy within their own home areas, subject to the overall control of a communist party. (Clapham, 'Controlling Space', 21.)

In the same way the EPRDF implemented ethnic federalism under the rigid grid of Democratic Centralism. As you all know well, the TPLF, the Tigrean core of the EPRDF, formed its own peripheral national organisations. By the EPRDF Statute, such organisations and their leaders are bound to adhere to Revolutionary Democracy in order to remain within the EPRDF.

Human Rights

We are faced with the question:

“how can an ideology designed to work in a single-party, communist and authoritarian system operate in a western-type democratic and pluralistic environment as the one defined by the new constitution?”

Indeed it can't. In order to retain its institutional control, the EPRDF needs to rule out all the challenging organisations and discordant voices. All the political organisations that had given a crucial contribution to the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and to the Transitional Charter have one by one pushed out of the competitive electoral arena as they became challenging either at the electoral level or by pursuing setting objectives that contrasted the policy of the EPRDF. Their underground activity was also contrasted with systematic violation of human rights.

The international community has been slow to understand what was happening, at least until the 2005 electoral crisis. All the elements were there since 1992, as shown by the fact that all the academic sources I have mentioned so far are based on research made before 2005. Several alerting reports were released by diaspora human rights organisation such as the Oromia Support Group and confirmed by international organizations such as Human Rights Watch. As well express by Pausewang, S., K. Tronvoll, and L. Aalen, the international diplomacy has been, to say the least, reluctant to raise criticism, and underplayed the actual problems under the cover of 'democratization', a process that in their view would justify some shortcomings occurring along the path.

We need to consider why the international community has so strongly sustained, and still sustains, the Ethiopian government despite evidence of violation of human rights. This attitude responded to an international political era dominated by the realpolitik, in a context of war on terror, in one word the Bush era. In Ethiopia there is an additional strategic factor, the threat of disintegration of the State along ethnic lines, on the tail of what has happened in Somalia. Ethiopia is internationally regarded as a key State in the region, located between the disintegrated Somalia and the threatening Sudan. For strategic reasons the ruling group is anyhow sustained, assuming that in this way the strength and the unity of the Ethiopian State will also be secured, with the objective to keep stability in the region. The strategic objective prevailed over ethical considerations and with it over concern for democracy and human rights.

If the international diplomacy was blind about the violation of human rights, this is not possible after 2005. Today there is a growing body of reports not only delivered by NGOs and the US Department of State, but also by the United Nations themselves.

We see in this slide reference to 4 reports produced by different Committees of the United Nations system, from which the alarming condition of systematic violation of human rights is emerging.

Gadaa governance

I will now turn to a second, inspiring, topic, gadaa governance.

The *gadaa* system is a generation class system capable to provide the framework for the governance of a territorial unit by integrating the different groups distributed within the same territory.

I do not wish to raise here the discussion if the Oromo were in the past unified under a single *gadaa* centre. This is still an open historical issue and I am sure soon we will see new interesting studies. But we know that by the time of modern anthropological research there were several *gadaa* centres among the Oromo, each with competence on a territorial portion. Few of these *gadaa* centres were fully operational, in southern Ethiopia, mainly the Borana and the Gabra, and to a lesser extent of the pastoral sections of the Guji. From historical sources we know that before the expansion of modern Abyssinian the *gadaa* centres in the highlands, *chaffe*, were also fully operational in political terms. We also know that the Derg openly repressed the ritual life of the *gadaa* system in most of Ethiopia, but excluding Borana.

Whatever the case, it is important to stress that *gadaa* was a governance system operating in a pre-modern society. By pre-modern we mean a society that has not gone through the processes of differentiation, urbanisation and stratification imposed by the industrial transformation of society. In order to function, *gadaa* requires intensive face-to-face relations between the people and the groups involved, something difficult to achieve over the large Oromo territory in absence of modern means of communication. Direct participation is indeed the key to Oromo democracy, as opposite to delegated representation.

Even if developed by a pre-modern society, the *gadaa* system is still strongly effective in parts of Oromia, and in full revival in the highlands and among the Gujji. It is therefore relevant to question the modalities by which *gadaa* can today be integrated into modern governance. The different modes are summarised in the slide.

Scenario 1 is what is prevalent today from the perspective of the Ethiopian government. The government is fully aware of the influence that elders can have on their community. They systematically involve them, officially for the purpose of peace making, but they are also used for electoral mobilisation in favour of the EPRDF. The study made by Thomas Hagmann in Ogaden shows that elders are also used for counter-insurgency activity. I have done a study of the interface of customary institutions with modern politics in Borana. The most relevant aspect of co-optation is that the elders are approached as individuals, maximising on the prestige they enjoy as *gadaa* officers. The rules implicit in the *gadaa* institution, however, are left out, despite the fact that the crucial function of *gadaa* as practised today by the pastoral Oromo is exactly the coordination for an equitable exploitation of the natural resources. At a time when Elinor Ostrom received the Nobel

Prize for stressing the importance of common property systems, this seems to me the most destructive and blind approach to *gadaa*, although I can see its opportunistic motivation.

Scenario 2 corresponds to the Oromo Democracy, the fascinating proposal elaborated in systematic way by Asmarom Legesse. It consists in extrapolating the principles of the traditional *gadaa* and applying them to an innovative Constitution.

Scenario 3 corresponds to the international approach as defined by international law on indigenous peoples, recently strengthened by the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Those rights mainly consist in the recognition of customary law, the indigenous institutions and tenure systems. It introduces the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent in development, to assure that the community independently assess the impact of any project that may affect their livelihoods and identity. Indigenous rights are referred to localised communities having their own sub-identity, such as Borana, Guji... This is the main road to immediately valorise *gadaa* as practised on the ground today. Unfortunately the Ethiopian government does not acknowledge the existence of indigenous peoples into its territory and does not recognise indigenous rights.

Scenario 4 refers to the development of new practices that may spontaneously arise at Oromo national scale, something that is for instance appearing with the Erecha ritual, mainly in the religious sphere.

Leadership (conclusion)

I am concluding my speech considering the implications for the Oromo leadership. The changes that are taking place in Ethiopia do obviously favour both the opening of a debate on the current priorities and the emergence of a degree of disagreement. Let me briefly re-consider strengths and weaknesses of the current situation.

The Federal Constitution is probably the greatest achievement in decades of national struggle. The three outstanding features are

- a. the recognition of the Oromo nation,
- b. the introduction of electoral democracy and
- c. the adoption of the fundamental political freedoms and human rights.

However, the country is locked in a de-facto single party system sustained by systematic violations of human rights.

Today the global environment has also changed. Under the Obama administration very important steps have been taken to mitigate the realpolitik that dominated the past decades. This opens up the possibility for the Oromo to revise the priorities of the struggle.

It is first consider the two main long term objectives of the movement, democracy and secession. The Oromo are the largest nation in Ethiopia. Accordingly, was Ethiopia a real democracy, the Oromo would be the national group with the strongest potential influence at federal level. It seems to me that in this context the struggle for democracy should be considered the priority, an objective that needs to be strategically achieved in order to exercise a free choice on secession. Secession is legally feasible, but in order to exercise the right to self-determination it is first necessary that the Constitution will be enforced in political practice.

The practice of *gadaa* among the Oromo is a second strength, in terms of presence of a customary leadership and a tradition of political democracy. But in the dialectic between standard (Western) democracy, reflected in the Federal Constitution, and an innovative African, or Oromo, Democracy, I see a strategic priority on the former. Again, this is not an expression of preference in absolute terms. I perfectly see the potential implicit in the mechanisms of distribution of power, balance and counter-balance of the *gadaa* system. I simply see the danger of opening now a discussion on changing the current FDRE Constitution. The Oromo are still part of the Ethiopian Federation and nothing, not even the Federal Constitution, can be considered achieved forever. There are influential opponents to the process of national recognition and self-determination opened by the Federal Constitution. Criticism towards ethnic federalism and the current FDRE Constitution is not only openly raised in Ethiopian politics, it is also academically articulated by some international scholars. At community level the Oromo Democracy could immediately be valorised exactly as it is today, based on the minority and indigenous rights recognised under international law.

Then, what type of leadership is required? Was the Constitution implemented, a leadership trained in the context of a western democracy to take up governmental roles and jobs in the free media would be the most appropriate. However, it would be blindness not to see the reality of lack of democratic competition, and the serious restrictions on freedom of opinion, right of association, free press and civil society. It is therefore important to simultaneously work on different sides and levels, from the inside as well as at the international level, developing specialised and differentiated leadership roles and functions.

The space of the formal administrative structure in Ethiopia is a crucial one, despite the difficulty of working under the centralistic control exercised in name of Revolutionary Democracy. Keeping an open dialogue with officers of the Ethiopian institutions is important for possible electoral openings that may occur at any time.

At the same the leadership must be able to mobilise the mass for electoral purposes, should electoral politics have a chance, or otherwise for peaceful demonstrations for the establishment of democracy and the enforcement of the Federal Constitution, on the model of the success stories of the Arab Spring.

I see a major role to be played in the field of human rights. Appropriate training in this field would allow the Oromo to monitor the situation on the ground and to establish a link with the relevant organisations in the United Nation system and with the democratic governments.

The fact that the Arab Spring is having different outcomes and evolutions, pacific or violent depending on the reaction of the regimes, should also not be underestimated. But even in case of

large scale insurgency as in Libya, the armed struggle needs to take place in a transparent manner in name of the positive values that can be shared by the international community.

Although not properly part of the leadership, there is an important role to be played by scholars of Oromo studies. They need to raise the international awareness of the existence of the Oromo nation and to re-contextualise the Oromo in the broader international context.

What I see ahead is a real challenge, today like yesterday, but a challenge that can be afforded if the fundamental unity of the Oromo and of their leadership is achieved, in name of values that can be shared by the international community at large.

The Oromo have the potential to bring about the much needed democratic change in Ethiopia and they are most appropriate national group to assure the stability of the Horn of Africa.

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