

OSA newsletter 2

In memory of two great heroes: Sisay Ibsa and Adam Jilo

September 2005

The Oromo Studies Association

Two Decades of Service and Scholarship

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1. A message from OSA president

Adam Jilo and Sisay Ibsa, two fighters we lost

Sisay Ibsa, an OSA founding member and a friend of so many OSA members, who coauthored the “kindling point” for about 25 years, passed in a Washington DC hospital on the 20th of August, 2005. His corpus was sent to Oromia to rest by his father’s side. Two ceremonies were conducted in his honor on the 27th August. First, the traditional ceremony took place at the Collithea Farm, near Potomac amidst a forest similar to the one Sisay grew into, escorted by a few dozen horses, several close friends chanting and celebrating Sisay’s legacy as thousands of mourners cried and remembered the deceased hero.

The nontraditional ceremony started in the afternoon, at about 2 PM. Several tens of family members and friends spoke in honor of Sisay, and the farewell was heart wrenching. As the audience mourned the loss of Sisay, the passing of another hero, Adam Jilo, was announced at the gathering. So we took a pain on top of another pain; we lost two great champions of our time in just about a week.

Adam Jilo is one of the most eloquent communicators. His fluency in Oromo language, his unwritten but well organized thoughts, his powerful speech with brilliantly fitting makmaaksas (sayings), his thorough arguments often with electrifying emotions are testimony to a highly gifted hero. He exhibited a powerful attitude - no fear for any flesh, and yet with a caring and gentle love for his cause and his people. Adam Jilo is responsible for popularizing the use of the Oromo language at OSA conferences. He is an Oromo treasure whose memory should be cemented deep in our minds for ever and ever.

These losses and the honor we must attribute to these heroes impose a renewed determination for the ideals they dedicated their lives. It is therefore with great honor, that I dedicate this newsletter to their honor. As you read each and every line of the newsletter, and as you perform your OSA or Oromo obligations, as you support or object to ideas, let the ideals of these heroes guide your deeds, let them drive your will for a higher unity of our people, and let respect reign within and among our organizations.

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As OSA President, I was invited to speak at Sisiay’s nontraditional service. The following is the full text of the eulogy:

Dear family members and colleagues,

I say these many attendants from far away places are a measure of Sisay’s greatness. And I proudly represent the Oromo Studies Association, an organization that this year celebrates its 20 years of scholarship on behalf of the Oromo people. I am proud to call Sisay Ibsa one of OSA’s founding members, and I am also honored to call Sisay a friend.

Sisay’s untimely departure came to many of us as a shock, a reality we in our best wishes would prefer to deny as a convenient escape from our sadness, our loss.



I met Sisay in person some 15 years ago, years after I already knew his name. I met him in a crowded OSA hall in Minneapolis

where he sat a few rows behind me. As we walked out of the hall for a break, he stopped me for greetings. He knew my name because I had a presentation that morning. I asked for his name to which he quickly replied “ennaa... I am Sisay Ibsa”. I firmly replied “no you can’t be Sisay”. With a surprise mixed with smile, he murmured “maqaakoo narraa fudhaccu barbaaddemoo?” (Do you want to take my name away from me?) I told him, that for years now I have imagined Sisay to be a skinny, tall, and somewhat bold person.” So I said, you don’t fit the Sisay I have entertained for so long. He looked at me over his tilted glasses which he liked hanging on his nose - with a penetrating but subtle smile, and said “you should have seen me before I lost some 20 pounds”. So started our friendship that spanned over the years. And over those years I grew to admire his determination, his pride, his passion, and his positive outlook even when he strongly disagreed with me. This positive outlook may indeed be the single most important quality of Sisay’s personality, a beautiful legacy he left behind. No trace of hatred ran through Sisay’s blood, and if you hated him, I am sure he didn’t know about it. He respected his foes as he respected his friends, with confidence that placed him fully and permanently above the petty. He told something about someone only if it is something he could also repeat in front of the one. In all his objections he had a rare gift of depersonalizing his opposition, no matter how firmly he expressed them.

This integrity to his belief and to humanity at large marked Sisay’s personal quality, an eminence that lifted him and his spirit even during his darkest days. It afforded him love, respect, and wide spread recognition, a quality that also distinguished him as a leader who for years enjoyed the confidence of his peers and colleagues – be it in OSA,

UONO, in GUMI, or ULFO. He envisioned a higher Oromo unity though ULFO, and to this end he was not only an ULFO spokesperson, he was ULFO’s beloved and trusted son. He gave it his energy and soul even when many of us doubted the success of ULFO. I wish and hope that all Oromo political groups will realize the significance of Sisay’s vision, and revitalize this higher Oromo unity, so that Sisay will one day smile to us from his peaceful heaven, joyful that one *aluta is a-compli*.

Sisay also had a passion for Oromo centered knowledge, and in fact he called himself a Gada Fundamentalist. He believed that a revived and modernized Gada could serve us as a model system by which we can democratically govern ourselves. But he was concerned about the scarcity of knowledge about the Gada system, about the lack of access to information about Oromo history and culture. He had a dream to start Oromo Information Center here in DC, that may one day be expanded possibly even into Oromia. I was told, that he repeated this dream during his last ailing days. I am pleased to inform you, that OSA Ex.C. has decided to share this dream. I have asked Adde Qabanne and Obbo Abara Tefera to create and lead a committee that will work towards the creation of a politically unaffiliated Ibsa Oromo Center. As you note, Sisay’s last name, Ibsa (meaning light), would be a fitting addition to the suggested name of the Center.

OSA will also dedicate the upcoming OSA newsletter to Sisay Ibsa and Adam Jilo, and there will be a lecture on “ethnicity, nationality, statehood, and democracy” in their honor at OSA 2006.

No doubt, the passing of Sisay Ibsa is a great loss to Oromo scholarship, Oromo body politics, and many Oromos as their personal

friend. But death is natural, and in Oromo tradition mourning is a celebration of life. Yes indeed, Sisay has given us so much with which we can celebrate his life. As UONA founding member, as a staunch OLF supporter, as a Gumi Founder, as OSA founder, as an author, and as one who played a key role in acquiring the first Oromo community building in the heart of the US capital, we have a lot to thank him for. He leaves a beautiful legacy that should be cemented in our memories.

As we say farewell to a person that captured the respect and love of so many, it is also a good opportunity to reflect upon what possibly lies deep within the soul of this person that inspired him to dedicating his entire life to alleviating the suffrage of others, and suffer himself, as a consequence. Now in retrospect, I firmly believe Sisay despised injustice to a degree that he dedicated his entire life and self. That his patrons are the Oromos is simply a historic coincidence. He would have done the same for the oppressed in Asia, in South Africa, Latin America, Middle East, or East Europe. His heart knew no boundary, but his body was born Oromo. In this sense his deed is as holy as the teachings of any religion. He stood up to make a difference, and his relentlessness lasted his life time. He had a clear vision of affairs; he had a plan, a marathon plan where he saw light at the end of the journey. He shared his vision at any opportunity he came across, albeit in simple terms to map the road of a complex world. Having spent perhaps hundreds of hours with Sisay personally and over the phone, I came up with a conclusion that his mind performed like an engineer's, but he expressed his solutions in political terms. His engineer like thought calculated solutions to complex problems fast - but he calculated them faster than he expressed them. This perceptible mismatch was

Sisay's challenge – expressing a fast and accurately generated reflection in readable political terms. In this challenge one saw Sisay's inner strength. He walked and lived his life as if he owned his world and his fate, regardless of the power of his expression. For those who failed to conquer or corrupt his spirit, he was arrogant. But for his friends and his people, the confidence was a pride emanating from his liberated soul. The love of his role as a fighter, his liberating instinct provided him with a spirit so strong, that he was a happy man up until the last minute of his departure.

It is customary to praise the deceased, but this is not what I am doing. In fact, I have been honest to Sisay when we talked on the subject. I often told him he has a unique quality of persistent inner glory. I loved working with him in many committees. The now famous demonstration at the UN in New York, the fundraising for Oromo students expelled from AAU, a fundraising effort for Oromo veterans residing in Nairobi – we called on Sisay when we wanted a good name, his smart outlook, his open criticisms, his positive moral, and his genuine support. He never disappointed us.

Words never do justice to a life and a person so powerful, who gave up everything we consider priceless in favor of something he considered precious. Sisay's favorite food to eat, his drink, his lovely children to raise, his beautiful mansion to warm, his entire life and person was the freedom of his people. This was his deliberate and conscious choice. He comes from a large family, he is street smart, he is a scholar, he was physically strong, he was well connected, he spoke the language of the land – he could have opted for a wealthy middle class job that was easy to step into some decades ago when he arrived in the US. But he chose a different type of job – he became an investor

in the future of the Oromo – in freedom for his people. In return, he enjoyed what he did. In fact he spent his uncompensated time and energy passionately, as a free man who wanted to share his freedom with all people. He walked and lived like a full-time fighter he was, a fighter we lost, a fighter we should remember for ever and ever – Amen.

Asfaw Beyene, Ph.D.
OSA President
August 27, 2005
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Donations and membership dues: Those who want to pay OSA dues, join as new members, or want to donate to OSA, please send your pledge to:

OSA
P. O. Box 7508
Silver Spring, MD 20907.

If you have not paid your membership due for 2005/6, please do so as soon as possible so that it will not affect your eligibility to receive OSA newsletter and also membership to OSA list. Note that all contributions are tax deductible.

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2. 2005 OSA annual conference

One of the most important missions of OSA is the documentation and dissemination of timely and relevant publications about the Oromo people. We have asked all presenters of OSA 2005 to send their manuscripts for OSA Proceedings to Dr. Gobana Huluqa at hulukgo@auburn.edu. Please send in your paper/s as an attachment before September 30, 2005. Microsoft Word is the preferred software, but you may use whatever software at your disposal. Please make sure you include the version and name of the software you used and provide your email, telephone, and mailing addresses.

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3. 2006 OSA annual conference

The 2006 OSA annual conference will be held around end of July or beginning of August in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Preparations for this conference are already underway. An local organizing committee, consisting of the following, has been created in Minneapolis, Minnesota (listed in alphabetical order):

- Obbo Amano Duube
- Obbo Bulaa Atomsa
- Adde Hawwi Alemayehu
- Dr. Qannoo Baanja
- Obbo Redwan Hamza
- Obbo Teferi Fufa
- Obbo Zecharias Hailu

I would like to thank all the above individuals for volunteering to serve in OSA 2006 organizing committee.

Please visit OSA web site or see the next newsletter for more update.

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4. Update on ad hoc committee tasks (See also OSA Newsletter 1 for more details)

- **Scholarship team:** Dr. Bahiru G. (baarudee@comcast.net) has started creating the team. More update follows in the future.
- **Fund-raising team:** Dr Bahiru D. (bahiruduguma@aol.com) is finalizing his team members and started strategizing the fundraising process. I am pleased with the enthusiasm in which he has undertaken this task. All donors please drop him an email with your amount of contribution and then

mail your check or money order to the above OSA address.

- **By-law team**: Dr Guluma is in charge of this project. He has created a team and started reviewing the bylaw. If you have any comments or input regarding the bylaw, please contact Dr Guluma.
- **Membership team**: This is decisively the most successful team so far. With about 10 new members the team has already accomplished 1/3rd of the goal set for the year. Here, Dr. Misgana has proven the potentials of OSA members when and if mobilized and carried on with such enthusiastic determination. Keep up the good work Misgana. OSA members - please help him recruit more by forwarding potential candidates to him at his email: mkmuleta@yahoo.com.
- **External Activities team**: OSA at ASA and others: Dr. Getahun (benti@siu.edu) has also made a decisive and calculated move towards OSA participation in other conferences. He has contacted few authors and it seems that we will have OSA panels at ASA and perhaps more.
- **Unity team**: Dr. Asafa (ajalata@utk.edu) is finalizing the formation of his team. It is hoped that the team, once created, will offer a serious scholarly input that will lead the debate around Oromo unity and design a roadmap out of the current predicament. As stated earlier (OSA newsletter 1), OSA is a neutral research body, but it is not neutral on collective Oromo needs. As a collection of Oromo minds, OSA has a scholarly duty to play a leading role in addressing serious Oromo issues to facilitate a higher unity of purpose among the Oromo people without favoring any Oromo political

organization. Fear of partiality should not paralyze OSA's spirit to serve in this fashion, and it should take a calculated, careful, and scholarly measure to address current problems of the Oromo struggle. Dr. Asafa Jalata is tasked with creating a team of scholars to address this issue.

- **Review team**: If you recall, I asked Adde Qabanne (bkholcomb@aol.com) to create and lead this team to look into long and short term ways of increasing OSA's activities and improving its performance. As an example of a short term goal of this team I gave organizing a mid-year OSA seminar. She has been very busy organizing the ceremony following Sisay Ibsa's untimely passing. As you recall, she has also volunteered to be part of a team that helps the creation of "Ibsa Oromo Information Center" in Washington DC. Given what she and all the DC colleagues have gone through, I did not have the courage to call Qabanne and ask her about the progress of her task. But knowing her strength and years of resolve, I have no doubt the tasks are going just well.
- **Team Oromia**: This was my task, and I am pleased to inform you that it is going fine. I have a team almost in place and I have already collected three papers for JOS from our scholars at home - one delivered to the editor, and two undergoing final touches by the authors.

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4. NEWS and Miscellaneous

Oromo Medical Association – OSA subcommittee in North America: Our Secretary, Dr. Gudata is tasked with creating Oromo Medical Association in North America as OSA's subcommittee. He has

already contacted more than 30 healthcare professionals who are willing to join, this subcommittee. Dr. Gudata is also working with few professionals to formulate and define the committee's role within OSA. As you note, he has received this task with great enthusiasm, and we hope that OSA will have a medical subcommittee soon.

Publication fund team: One of OSA's challenges is funding, particularly covering the cost of JOS publications. Dr. Guluma, JOS editor has promised to create a team and look for funding to cover the publication of JOS. Similar funding support has been received from host Universities in the past through Profs Asafa, Bichaka, and Mohammed. Perhaps we can tap from this past experiences to get some support.

OSA list is running: Finally, OSA list (osa@oromostudies.org) is up and running. You can post all notes and messages pertaining to OSA at this email address which will distribute the message to over 100 OSA members. It should be noted that OSA list is a bulletin board, not a discussion forum, i.e., junk emails should not be posted

or forwarded, especially if they are not scholarly analyses or if they are offensive to any OSA member. A more in-depth guideline will be developed in the future.

OSA web updated: OSA web has been moved to a new host that also serves the email list. The transfer of the site does not impact viewers or OSA's existing web site. Visit us at <http://www.oromostudies.org>.

Call for JOS papers: Are you aware of a research work that you think is worthy of consideration for JOS? If yes please contact JOS editor – Dr. Guluma.

OSA 2006 Conference Organizing Committee established: For details see above.



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