

OSA Newsletter 8

March 2006

The Oromo Studies Association *Two Decades of Service and Scholarship*

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A message from OSA president:

General Waaqoo Guutuu 1924-2006: a distinguished hero

Contributed by Dr. Mohammed Hassen

OSA members were deeply saddened with the passing away of General Waaqoo Guutuu in early February 2006. The death of this brave son of Oromia, the hero of heroes, was a terrible loss to his family members, his friends and comrades in the struggle and the entire Oromo nation. For half a century General Waaqoo Guutuu was the moving spirit and the symbol of Oromo resistance, and the living proof of Oromo determination to free themselves from over a century long colonial bondage. His death was a great loss for all freedom loving people around the world. OSA extends its deepest condolences to all his family members.

General Waaqoo Guutuu was born in 1924 in the region of Bale, southeastern Oromia. His father, Guutuu, likely was born in freedom and probably tasted the sweet fruit of liberty under Oromo Gada government before the region of Bale was conquered and annexed into the expanding Ethiopian colonial Empire during and after the 1880s. The life-long struggle of General Waaqoo Guutuu for freedom clearly indicates that he grew up listening to his father who told his young son about the time when his people were independent, proud, and respected people who were masters of their own destiny and makers of their history. With their conquest, the Oromo were transformed into brutalized and degraded colonial subjects. The yearning for freedom and human dignity that inspired and dominated General Waaqoo Guutuu's long life appears to have been planted in his mind while young. General Waaqoo Guutuu was greatly affected by the colonization of his people. As a young man, Waaqoo Guutuu may have witnessed so many of his people forced off

their lands by Abyssinian settlers. This gives us an intimate look into the environment in which Waaqoo Guutuu grew.

Reading the literature on the Bale Oromo resistance movement of the 1960s, it is very clear to me that General Waaqoo Guutuu felt more forcefully the shame of his people's loss of their freedom, their human dignity, and the shame of being landless and rightless subjects in the sacred land of their birth. He despised the humiliation of working for the arrogant and ignorant settlers who abused his people in all manners big and small, the degradation of paying taxes for the government that oppressed, exploited, brutalized and dehumanized them.

Waaqoo Guutuu tried by peaceful means to lessen the tax burden on his people and stop the continued confiscation of their land by the imperial regime. As an intelligent born-leader, he quickly realized that oppressors do not listen to the voice of reason. They listen only to the language of force. It was that realization which convinced him to launch an armed struggle together with his comrades in arms such as the late Obbo Adam Jilo. General Waaqoo Guutuu equated the armed struggle with salvation, since he saw it as the long road to liberty, freedom, independence and human dignity. He saw the struggle as balm for the oppressed Oromo soul. His plan was that the struggle will provide his people with skills, experience, political awareness, that will enable them to create an organization that will then mobilize their human and spiritual resources for the purpose of defeating the powerful enemy.

During the 1960s General Waaqoo Guutuu led the longest peasant rebellion in the history of the Ethiopian colonial empire up to the 1970s. His poorly armed peasant fighters time and again defeated the military force of Emperor Haile Sellassie's regime, which enjoyed the military support of the

American, the British and Israeli governments. It was in the course of that struggle that Waaqoo Guutuu earned the military title of a general. Indeed he was a capable general, a farsighted strategist, a resourceful man and an inspiring leader. It was because of his leadership and the determination of Oromo fighters that the powerful Ethiopian military force, which used fighter jets, tanks and heavy artillery, was unable to stop the advance of freedom fighters. It was tribute to his leadership that Oromo fighters were able to control three-fourth of the large province of Bale by 1966. Only few besieged towns including the provincial capital of Goba remained under Ethiopian control. By then the armed struggle had spread to the region of Sidamo, Arsi and western Hararghe. The armed struggle in Bale attracted Oromo nationalists such as Jarra Abba Gada and the martyred Mulis Abba Gada. Jarra Abba Gada, who started armed struggle in Hararghe in 1975, was trained under General Waaqoo Guutuu in 1967.

General Waaqoo Guutuu did not limit his activities only to the armed struggle. As early as 1965 he established secret contact with the leadership of the Macha and Tullama Association in Finfinnee (Addis Ababa). His goal was to broaden the base of the struggle, raise Oromo political awareness, and galvanize them for collective action against the brutal regime. Haile Sellassie's regime which was alarmed with the rise of Oromo political consciousness brutally destroyed the Macha and Tullama Association. The regime ended the struggle in the region of Bale through a negotiated settlement with General Waaqoo Guutuu. The famous general, who never bowed his head to the oppressors, refused to bow when he was greeted at his palace by Emperor Haile Selassie in 1970.

During the time of the military regime (1974-1991), General Waaqoo Guutuu led

sustained struggle against the brutal regime. I had the good fortune of meeting with him in Mogadishu in July 1980 when I attended the First Congress of International Somali Studies. Five things truly amazed me then about that remarkable general:

- i. His love for his people and the struggle to end their colonial oppression, economic exploitation, cultural dehumanization, and political subjugation was immense. In fact, love for freedom was in his blood, and it appeared to me that it was the core of his existence. Our nation has been blessed to have had the leader of his caliber, his intelligence, dedication and determination. He was a man of iron will, the bravest of the brave, a dignified proud man who defied and resisted Ethiopian tyranny, in all its changing forms for over half a century.
- ii. When I met with him in July 1980 was his confidence in himself and his ideas. Even if he had a difference of opinion with you, he always respectfully listened to what you have to say. And then he explained his rational with clarity, without insisting that his view is the only road to the promised land of freedom. That was the mark of maturity, intelligence, wisdom, and the product of long and hard experience. I hope we will learn from his experience.
- iii. While General Waaqoo Guutuu listened attentively to what you have to say, you immediately realize that what he was doing was what came from deep within the legacy of Gada tradition as listening to each other was both the art and the wisdom of Oromo democracy.
- iv. Through his speech General Waaqoo Guutuu portrays the Oromo "as a people with deep historic roots, incredible strength and amazing heart," who have been wronged by successive Ethiopian regimes. Amazingly his speech was always decorated with wit, proverbs and was lush with symbolism and

metaphoric meaning. This ability to communicate effectively, sometimes with deeply moving words, was what defined his dynamic leadership and magnetic personality.

- v. While talking to him, light always came from his eyes, light that confirmed to me that I was in the presence of a living history, an extraordinary human being, a hero and legend in his own life time, whose courage was respected and admired even by his worst enemies. His beautiful and penetrating eyes appeared to me to be the windows to his passionate heart and soul, his incredible passion and love for the freedom and human dignity of his people, and the difficulties of mobilizing them for their own of liberation.

The famous general also registered a proud heritage of resistance against the brutal TPLF regime (1992-2006), hopefully the last of the oppressive Ethiopian regimes to dehumanize the gallant Oromo nation and several others in that prison house of nations and nationalities. General Waaqoo Guutuu struggled against three successive Ethiopian regimes. May his soul rest in peace with the full knowledge that his people will travel along the road map that he charted since 1960! He was born for the struggle, lived through the struggle which defined his character, and the light of that struggle is today shining all over Oromia.

The death of General Waaqoo Guutuu coming less than eight months after the death of Obbo Sisai Ibssa, one of the founders of OSA in the 1980s, and Obbo Adam Jilo, who attended several OSA conferences for years, was a terrible loss for all OSA and our nation. What these heroes have in common is their dedication to the cause of their people. Through their struggle they charted the roadmap for independent Oromia. They died outside Oromia, but were buried in Oromia as great

heroes. It is for us the living to follow in their foot step, work hard as they did and shorten the journey to independent Oromia.

Finally, General Waaqoo Guutuu may have passed away physically. But he will live in the great hear of the Oromo nation. Heroes and legends do not die. They become the dynamic force of history, the source of inspiration for the living. May his spirit guide us to the promised land of free Oromia. May our Waaqaa rest his soul in peace and comfort us with the wisdom of creating organizational unity that will bring about better days for our people as well as other oppressed people in the Horn of Africa.



I thank Dr. Mohammed Hassen for this contribution.

Nagaan,

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OSA Mid-year Conference, a Great Success

OSA annual meeting was conducted on the Viability of the Economy of Oromia on Saturday, March 18. The meeting lasted all day and attracted the best minds on the economy of Oromia. It was hosted at the the Oromo Center in Washington, DC. OSA members recall that Adde Qabanne was tasked with creating and leading the Review Team to look into long and short term ways of increasing OSA's activities and improving its performance. The short term goal of this team included organizing a mid-year OSA seminar

which she co-organized with other OSA members.

The panels addressed the economy of Oromia - the nature of its resources, the availability of reliable data pertaining to Oromia, the current programs for resource utilization, the prospects for development of a viable economy for the land and people of Oromia in great depth. This seminar is in line with last year's resolution of OSA General Assembly to hold a mid-year seminar with a topical focus for the purpose of encouraging intellectual exchange among OSA members engaged in scholarly research of interest to the Association. A number of high quality papers were presented and discussed in detail by those in attendance. Papers benefiting from the seminar discussion will be revised and presented in final form as part of a panel on the Economy of Oromia at the July 2006 OSA conference. This Seminar, the first of its kind, was a great success. Attendance was limited in quantity to focus on scholarly quality, and it covered all seminar expenses.

Thank you to Bonnie (Qabbane) and all who participated in this productive seminar.



OSA 2006 Annual Conference - Update

Important: Please note that OSA panel list has been completed and no more proposals will be accepted. Papers can only be accepted tentatively as we already have over 50 speakers scheduled for this year's conference.

Hotels, conference address, and tentative list of panels will be posted in the near future.

Please, refer to our web site <http://www.oromostudies.org/> for further information on venues, logistics, and other related information



Ad-hoc Committee Updates

Fund-raising: Dr. Bahiru Dhuguma's fund-raising project is going well. We are now very close to collecting the full projected fund. **Please send your contribution to OSA treasurer** listed below under **Donations and membership dues.**

Membership: Dr. Misgana's new members recruiting project is also going well. So far, his team has recruited about 22 new members. This is a remarkable achievement. If you have new potential candidates, please contact Dr Misgana at mkmuleta@yahoo.com.

Unity Project: Dr. Asafa Jalata's unity project is nearing its final stage. Summaries of the findings of the group will be presented at OSA 2006 annual conference.

OSA in Oromia: As I stated in my previous report (OSA Newsletters 6 and 7), the "OSA in Oromia" project is also completing its task. As I am in charge of this project, I will submit a more detailed plan on expanding OSA in Oromia at OSA 2006 business meeting.



Update from other committees:

2005 Proceeding: Please send your manuscripts of 2005 OSA annual conference to Dr. Gobana Huluqa, hulukgo@auburn.edu. This is long overdue, and yet we still have some panelists who did not submit their papers.



Please email your views and opinions to OSA president:

abeyene@rohan.sdsu.edu

for inclusion in this section of the newsletter. Texts may be edited for space and format consistency.



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

Please note that all contributions are tax deductible.



Please, visit our web site:

<http://www.romostudies.org>

for further information on OSA 2006 conference venues, logistics, and other related information.

