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April 24, 2011

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

Subject: The attack on the Oromo and other people of Ethiopia

Dear President Obama,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) to bring to your attention the widespread imprisonment and indiscriminate shootings of Oromo students, men and women of different ages, religious backgrounds, and professions by the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) led Ethiopian government - motivated by fear and hate against the Oromo people. Members of OSA request your administration to use your enormous influence with the government of Ethiopia to stop the imprisonments and killings of innocent Oromo and other people of Ethiopia.

OSA is a scholarly, multi-disciplinary, non-profit organization. OSA was established 25 years ago by international scholars from around the globe to promote studies related and relevant to the Oromo and other peoples in the Horn of Africa. In its attempt to create academic forums where ideas and research findings about the Oromo and other people of Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa are freely discussed, OSA has periodic publications, semi-annual and annual conferences. The Journal of Oromo (JOS), published twice annually, is gaining reputation among scholars and institutions vested in the study of Indigenous societies. Several American university libraries and the Library of Congress subscribe to JOS. It has also drawn the attention of students interested in pursuing studies in the Horn of Africa. Last year OSA digitalized all the previous issues of JOS and made it freely available to all college, university libraries and students interested in Oromo studies and the Greater Horn of Africa.

Our scholars have recorded that in the Abyssinian culture hatred against the Oromo people is deeply rooted. Such a deeply rooted hatred was responsible for the colonization of the Oromo people and the mass killing against them, an event that is recorded in the collective memory of the Oromo people as “the Hand and Breast mutilation of Annolee” and “the year of human eater”. Several European travelers have recorded these horrendous events. Indeed, the written records that these travelers left suggest that the widespread killings, slavery, mutilation, famine and epidemic diseases introduced wittingly/deliberately wiped out two-thirds of the Oromo people. The colonization of Oromia led to the dispossession of its people from Oromo land, the denial of the Oromo language legal status, denial of the Oromo people leadership, and using young Oromo men as minesweepers.

This conditioned the Oromo people to live in extreme poverty, illiteracy and exposed them to easily preventable diseases.

The Oromo people constitute the single largest national group in the Ethiopian Empire and the Greater Horn of Africa. The size of the Oromo population and the geographical location of their country, Oromia, make the Oromia regional state in the heart of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Empire mainly depends on the human and natural resources of Oromia. However, the Oromo people are one of the most impoverished and terrorized indigenous African people. The Zenawi regime fears the Oromo numerical voting power. In fear of free and fair election, the regime has been systematically destroying all independent Oromo organizations and closed down their newspapers and magazines. Even the Macha and Tulama Association, a civic association, which was established in 1963 was banned, its leaders detained, and its property confiscated. The Oromo Relief Association, which was established in 1979, was also closed down by the Zenawi's regime and millions of its properties are confiscated without due process. Out of hate and fear the TPLF led government is currently perpetuating collective violence and indiscriminate shooting against the Oromo students.

Currently the Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is worried that the people's revolution that forced the Tunisian and Egyptian dictatorial regimes to depart from power is coming to Ethiopia. Driven by fear, the Zenawi security forces in a single event shot and wounded over one hundred Oromo students in Tepi-Mizan University and are massively imprisoning Oromo men and women throughout the Ethiopian empire. Among those who were shot, several of them have life-threatening wounds. According to the Human Rights Leagues of the Horn (HRLHA, April 11, 2011) and the Voice of America (VOA) on April 12 -13, 2011, the students who are the victims of the rampage shooting did nothing illegal but simply asked the administration of the University to discipline the Mr. Zenawi's agent and cadre who made blatant racist remarks against the Oromo people.

Since 2004, no less than 10,000 Oromo students and teachers have been detained, several hundred students suspended or expelled from their university studies in that country and many students have been extra-judicially executed. The Ethiopian Human Rights Council listed the names of 349 Oromo students who were detained from Addis Ababa University in February 2004 and in the prison they were physically tortured. On April 26, 2004 CNN reported that more than 400 Oromo students have fled from ethnic persecution in Ethiopia to Kenya. Since 2004 massive detention of Oromo students, teachers and intellectuals have continued in Oromia, the Oromo regional state in Ethiopia. The goal is to deliberately cripple the educational achievement of Oromia, thus depriving the Oromo people skilled human capital in the future. The May 2005 Human Rights Watch report established patterns of human rights abuses in Oromia, where innocent people are subjected to arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention without trial, confiscation of property without due process of law and without any compensation and extra-judicial executions. The multi-faceted attack on the Oromo political organizations, cultural institutions, educational establishments, the press and the killings of Oromo men and women, young and old, is truly reaching a very dangerous proportion. At this moment no calling is more urgent and no responsibility greater for the Prime Minister of Ethiopia than stopping the killing innocent people and detaining hundreds of students.

I am very worried about such rampage shootings, widespread imprisonings and the crimes with which the Zenawi regime is charging these innocent Oromo men and women. My worries are substantiated in literature. For example, literatures in Genocide Studies suggest that genocide has eight stages: Classification, Symbolization, Dehumanization, Organization, Polarization, Preparation, Extermination and Denial (Stanton, 1998). The Meles Zenawi regime has categorized the Oromo men and women who simply disagree with his policies as "terrorists". This has created not only fear and horror among the Oromo people but it has also allowed the military and security forces of the

regime to act irresponsibly. Historically the Abyssinian monks and other religious leaders categorized the Oromo people with the “devil”. The Oromo people were dehumanized and Abyssinian oral and written stories clearly tell us this (see, Aleqa Tayye, 1927 & Asma Giyorgis, 1989). Indeed, until recently the use of the Oromo language was prohibited in churches and mosques.

Racist attitudes toward the Oromo people are deeply rooted. For example, in 2006 at the University of Mekelle – Zenawi’s home region a history instructor named Kassaye developed a curriculum to teach racist discourse about the Oromo people. In this publicly funded University, the professor was allowed to spread malicious, dehumanizing and racist stories about the Oromo people. Not only that, this University denied graduation certificate to the Oromo students who protested against these degrading and dehumanizing language used in the teachings (see, OSA, 2006 Letter). Prime Minister Zenawi and his colleagues are raised in such a culture.

To emphasize his popularity, Mr. Zenawi officially claims that his party members number over five million. Members of Zenawi’s party are either bribed or brainwashed to be blind obedient rather than critical observers. The Human Rights Watch has clearly elaborated the ways in which prolonged meetings are used to indoctrinate and brainwash students, teachers and farmers into accepting the political agenda of the party. The party members are indoctrinated to categorize people as “us--friendly” and “others—the enemy—anti-peace, anti-development groups”. The party members are organized to keep Mr. Zenawi in power by all means possible.

Although Mr. Zenawi claims double digit economic success, in the Ethiopian empire poverty and illiteracy levels remain extremely high. Using poverty and illiteracy as tools, the regime has been polarizing the people along the Ethno-national groups, clans and religious groups. For example, until recently in Oromia there were no religious conflicts; however, recently the regime has created such conflicts.

The literature on Genocide studies also suggest that the states or the regimes that at one point have perpetuated genocide and not been held accountable, would most likely commit another. Although the renowned international organization Genocide Watch has charged Mr. Zenawi for crimes against humanity in Oromia, Gambella, Ogden and other places, he has not been held accountable. In an act of genocide in 1999/2000, the regime deliberately burned the natural forests of Oromia and caused ecological disaster to the region. Recently, the Zenawi regime has been arresting Oromo teachers, students, lawyers and intellectuals including former parliamentarians (Human Rights Watch, April 6, 2011). According to a New York Times report (Apr 7, 2011), defying the call of Human Rights Watch to release these prisoners, the regime charged in a kangaroo court 121 men and women as “terrorists”.

Mr. President:

The Ethiopian prime Minister Meles Zenawi is from Tigray-- a minority ethno/national group that probably constitutes no more than 5 million people. He is extensively using Tigray nationals as secret agents, security forces, police officers, military, courts and other key decision making positions. This has created resentment against Tigray nationals. To counter- balance the Zenawi’s divide and rule policy, the people of the three largest ethno-national groups (Oromo, Amahara and Ogden) are talking about the need to forge an alliance between them. On the other hand, those Tigray nationals who are wittingly or knowingly choose to associate with Zenawi regime are simply creating fear. Fear, real or not, can be very dangerous. The recent shooting of Oromo students, where over a hundred students were wounded and hundreds imprisoned, result from such fear and hate. As Mr. Zenawi has predicted, if the uprising of the people starts fear, hate and the resentment factors can play into it and might lead to extreme violence.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethiopia is the country that receives the largest financial aid from the Western world and enjoys diplomatic and military support. Those security forces involved in the rampage shooting and mass arrest are trained by the Western military, security and police forces and their salary is paid from the financial aid given to the Ethiopian government. This makes the Western countries (USA, Germany, Britain, France, Italia, Japan, Canada and Russia) who trained Zenawi`s police and security forces and provided aid to pay their salary a complaisant to the rampage shootings and imprisonments.

The Oromo who constitute the single largest national group in Ethiopia have become the target of attack by the minority TPLF regime. The multi-faceted attack on the Oromo political organizations, cultural institutions, educational establishments, the press and the killings of Oromo men and women, young and old, is truly reaching a very dangerous proportion. At this moment no calling is more urgent and no responsibility greater for the Prime Minister of Ethiopia than stopping the killing innocent people, detaining hundreds of students and charging people for the crime they did not commit.

In the light of what has been stated above, which is a tip of an iceberg, I request you to take the following practical measures, which will reduce human misery and promote democracy in Ethiopia.

Advise the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to respects its own constitution, and stop its extra-judicial killings, rampage shootings and arbitrary arrests of innocent people and prolonged detention without trial.

We request you to suspend all U.S. economic assistance to the Ethiopian government, other than relief materials to save lives, until such a time that the government of Meles Zenawi shows its commitment to the rule of law.

Exert pressure on the Zenawi regime to bring individuals who have committed the killings and woundings to justice

Advise Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to bring to speedy trial or unconditional release of hundreds of Oromo students who have been detained without due process of law.

Advise the government of Meles Zenawi to allow all Oromo students to continue with their education freely, legally and peacefully without fear of harassment, detention and loss of life.

Finally, on behalf of OSA members, I request you to exert the energy and the power of your administration to create conducive political environment for establishment of the rule of law in Ethiopia. As the President of the most powerful country in the world, you have an extraordinary opportunity to alleviate the incredible human sufferings of the Oromo and other people in Ethiopia. OSA members thank you for your interest in the peace, stability and wellbeing of the Oromo and other people in the Horn of Africa.

Sincerely

Begna Dugassa., PhD
OSA President

This letter is copied to:**Secretary of State Hillary Clinton**

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