



OSA

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May 07, 2013

Secretary of State John Kerry  
US Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

## **RE: OSA's Appeal Letter to US Secretary of State John Kerry in Advance of his Trip to Ethiopia**

Dear Honorable Mr. Kerry,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA), a scholarly organization established by Oromo and non-Oromo scholars to promote studies on and relevant to the Oromo people, the largest ethno-national group in the Horn of Africa constituting about 40% of the Ethiopian population. We have learned from the media outlets about your planned trip to Ethiopia to attend the AU summit in Addis Ababa (Finfinnee) from May 19 to 27, 2013. While we welcome your trip to Africa and appreciate the desire of the United States to actively engage in the continent, we are gravely concerned that your trip to Ethiopia and your contact with the Ethiopian authorities might be construed as your government's endorsement of the minority TPLF-led Ethiopian government's crimes against humanity and its continuous human rights violations against the Oromo and other peoples of the country. These crimes have been consistently and repeatedly well documented, among several other reliable sources, by the [US State Department annual reports](#)<sup>1</sup> on Ethiopia.

Your upcoming trip to Ethiopia comes at a time when the Ethiopian government authorities continue with their massive human rights violations under the cover of fighting terrorism by branding dissenters as "terrorists"; religious freedom is curtailed and thousands of Muslims are peacefully protesting every week demanding freedom of religion despite the fact that the government unlawfully prohibited any peaceful rally in the country; millions of Oromo farmers and other indigenous people are unlawfully and forcefully evicted from their ancestral villages and their fertile arable and grazing lands which have been their livelihood for centuries are given to transnational and Tigrayan investors; the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press have been suppressed.

<sup>1</sup>

See for example the 2012 annual report at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2011/af/186196.htm>

Dear Honourable Mr. Kerry:

Our scholarly association has continuously appealed to the different offices of your government, requesting that the United States stop supporting the Ethiopian regime until it stops its human rights abuses. Some examples our appeals are:

- On January 25, 2013, we have written a [joint letter](#)<sup>2</sup> to your predecessor, her Honourable Madam Hillary Clinton, for her to use her influence with the Ethiopian government and facilitate the release of all political prisoners and to take practical action to promote real democratic changes in Ethiopia. Furthermore, on the same day, we organized and held a protest rally of several hundreds of Oromo-Americans in front of the US State Department asking your government to stop supporting the minority ethnocratic regime in Ethiopia.
- In my position as the current OSA President, I have written four other appeal letters on the human rights violations by the Ethiopian government and a copy of each of these letters have been sent to your office or to the Office of President Obama. These letters can be found on the [publications](#)<sup>3</sup> page of OSA's website.
- My immediate past Presidents of OSA have also consistently written appeal letters to your government and to other international organizations (copied to your government) to bring to your attention the gross human rights violations and the multidimensional sufferings of the Oromos and other Ethiopians under the current ruling Tigrayan People Liberation Front (TPLF) minority regime in Ethiopia. These letters can also be found on the same [publications](#)<sup>4</sup> page of OSA's website.

The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) once again kindly ask you to use your trip to Ethiopia and to directly ask the Ethiopian authorities fulfill the following demands:

## Demand the Release of Political Prisoners in Ethiopia

1. Demand the release of Oromo opposition leaders such as **Mr. Bekele Gerba, Olbana Lelissa**, and seven other Oromo nationals, **Welbeka Lemi, Adem Busa, Hawa Wako, Mohamed Melu, Dereje Ketema, Addisu Mikre** and **Gelgelo Gufa**, who were convicted and later sentenced to long term imprisonment under the charge of “working



Oromo opposition politicians, Bekele Gerba and Olbana Lelisa, were arrested in August 2011 after speaking with Amnesty International officials. They were sentenced with seven other Oromos in November 2012 to long prison terms under fabricated charges.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.oromostudies.org/OSA\\_Protest\\_letter\\_for\\_Secretary\\_of\\_State2.pdf](http://www.oromostudies.org/OSA_Protest_letter_for_Secretary_of_State2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/default/publications.php>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/default/publications.php>

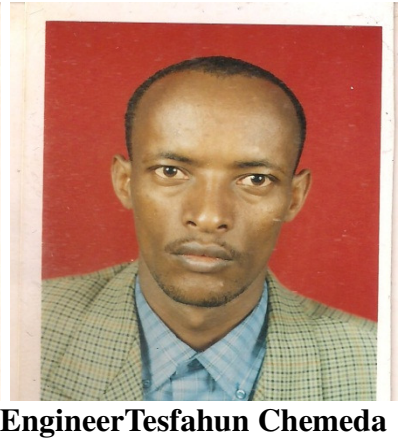
underground to secede Oromia from the federal government” and other concocted charges after being kept in jail for more than a year. The two opposition leaders were arrested in August 2011 after speaking with Amnesty International officials and convicted on November 1, 2012.

2. Demand the release of tens of thousands of Oromo and other political prisoners,

some of which have been sentenced to death. To mention a few among the tens of thousands of Oromo nationals languishing in jail for being Oromos include



Engineer Mesfin Abebe



Engineer Tesfahun Chemed

**Mesfin Abebe** (civil engineer, sentenced to death in March 2010), **Tesfahun Chemed** (civil engineer, sentenced to life in March 2010), **Eshetu Kitil** (Businessman and owner of the Hawi Hotel, sentenced to 12 years without parole in March 2010), **Aberash Yadeta** (female, sentenced to 12 years without parole in 2010), **Wabe Haji** (sentenced to 12 years without parole in 2010), and many, many others. Furthermore, about 200 Oromo youth were rounded up and arrested when they were peacefully celebrating the annual *Irreechaa* festival (Oromo thanksgiving) at Lake Arsadi, Bushoftu, Oromia. The pictures of some of the youth arrested on this festival pictures shown below.



3. Demand the unconditional release of 29 leaders of the Ethiopian Muslim community who were arrested between July 19 and July 21, 2012 and afterwards, including Chairman **Abubakar Ahmed**, Spokesperson **Ahmedin Jebel** and committee members **Kamil Shemsu**, **Sultan Aman**, **Adem Kamil**, **Jemal Yasim** and **Meket Muhe**, and others.



You may not be aware that hundreds of Ethiopian Muslims are protesting on a weekly basis, non-stop for over a year, asking the government to stop interfering in their religious affairs and demanding the release of their spiritual leaders who have been unlawfully thrown into jail.

4. Forcefully inform the Ethiopian government authorities that US aid to Ethiopia will be contingent on their respect of human rights of the Ethiopian citizens and on the unconditional release of all political prisoners. Don't let the Ethiopian authorities try to fool you by telling you the usual lie that "there are no political prisoners in Ethiopia." Bekele Gerba, Olbana Lelisa, Mesfin Abebe, Eshetu Kitil, Wabe Haji, and tens of thousands others are all political prisoners.

### **Demand that the Ethiopian Government Stop Forcefully Evicting Oromo Farmers and Leasing their Land to Foreign and Tigrayan Investors.**

Hundreds of thousands of farmers mainly from the regions of Oromia, Gambela, Benishangul, and the Southern Nations are forcefully evicted from their arable and grazing lands and their lands are leased to foreign investors. During your stay in Ethiopia and contact with the Ethiopian authorities, we kindly request you to:

- Demand that the Ethiopian government stop its land-grabbing and distribution policies with no delay;
- Request that the Ethiopian government return those evicted farmers to their villages and compensate all the victims of the land-grab;
- Demand that the Ethiopian government recognizes the indigenous people's ownership of their ancestral lands; and

## **Demand the Ethiopian Government to Respect the Freedom of the Press, Speech, Assembly, and to stop Jamming Radios including the Voice of America and Blocking Websites.**

Freedom of expression is curtailed in Ethiopia: citizens are jailed if they attempted to criticize the government in any shape or form; journalists are jailed or forced to flee the country; free media have been suppressed and the Ethiopian government controls all media outlets of the country; independent radio stations broadcasting to the country from abroad are constantly jammed; opposition websites are blocked. During your contact with the Ethiopian authorities, we kindly request that you demand the government respect the basic rights of its citizens and to:

- respect and implement its own constitution, which on paper guarantees respect for human rights, promises freedom of religion, of expression, of peaceful protest and democratic governance, which the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia have never enjoyed in the past twenty-one years;
- repeal all new laws that violate the fundamental freedom of citizens: particularly the so called Anti-terrorism Law, Press Law, the current law that prevents charitable organizations from freely moving in the country, and the most recent law that criminalizes the usage of Skype and other media tools;
- stop harassing journalists and jamming VOA and other free radio stations broadcasting to Ethiopia, and blocking opposition websites.

Thank you for promoting the rule of law, human rights, and social justice for the Oromo and other oppressed peoples in Ethiopia.

Sincerely,

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