

January 14, 2019

Your Excellency Dr. Abiy Ahmed Ali
Prime Minister
The Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Your Excellency Dr. Lamma Magarssa
President of the Oromia Regional State
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

RE: AN URGENT open appeal letter for ending war and the suffering of our people in different regions of OROMIA with focus on Wallaga, Borana, Gujji, Bale, western Shawa, and Hararghe areas of Oromia.

Your Excellencies Dr. Abiy Ahmed and President Lamma Magarssa:

We, Oromo civic organizations are writing this urgent open letter to urge both of you to do all in your power to end the daily suffering of the Oromo people. As we all remember, since the end of September 2018 over two hundred thousand people have been forcibly displaced from the Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State. The displaced people have been suffering from homelessness, hunger, abject poverty, and disease, and they did not receive adequate help from the regional and federal governments. Several schools have been closed in Wallaga, where education of thousands of students have been disrupted.

Additionally, we are truly alarmed at the intensifying war in Wallaga, which daily claims lives of civilian population, including three members of a single family. The federal army has killed women, children and elderly in Guliso, Najjo, Aira, Horo Guduru by firing machine guns. Firing machine guns against unarmed civilian population appears to be aimed at terrorizing the entire Oromo population in Wallaga. There is a documented report of beating and imprisoning hundreds of young people known as Qerro and Qarree in Wallaga. For instance, **The Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa** report, which was issued on January 11, 2019 (see attachment) reported that “on January 9, 2019 among hundreds of Oromos detained are Abba Gada Getachew Tefera in Begi and the previous prisoner of conscience, Chaltu Takele Abetu, Sanyii Takele Abetu, Merga Wirtu (Teacher), and Desta Leta (Businessman), in Shambu town have been arrested by the Federal military”. There is also report of Ethiopian Defense force members gang raping girls and women in Gara Abba Seena, Najjo, Horo Gudur. What is not in doubt is that beating, imprisoning and killing of people have continued in small towns and villages, such as Guliso, Chaliya, Begi, Kobor, Qashimando, Gidda Ayana, Naqamte Boji, Babo Gambel, Gimbi, Shambu, and Najjo. Similarly, Gujii in Southern Oromia, Jaldu in Central Oromia, and Buno Badale in Iluababor have been occupied by the Ethiopian Defense forces. Overall, within two weeks, after the declaration of war on the Oromo people in the region of Wallaga by the government, about 200 Oromo were killed and about 300 were imprisoned. Such cruel measures against unarmed civilian population reminds us that the Ethiopian defense forces are beginning to repeat the crimes committed by the TPLF dominated Ethiopian regime against our people in the past 27 years.

Additionally, most economic activities have been greatly reduced in Wallaga, where government services and education of most students have been disrupted. The first duty of any government is providing safety for the lives and property of its population. Consequently, at this moment no calling is more urgent and noble and no responsibility greater for the government of Oromia and that of federal government than stopping the killings of civilian population in Wallaga, in the regions of Gujii, Borana, Wallo, Bale and Hararghe in eastern Oromia.

We, are deeply shocked by the conflict that has developed between the Ethiopian government and the OLF, especially in the region of Wallaga. Conflict tends to feed on itself. The source of the conflict between these entities appears to us to be the product of historical mistrust. Solving mistrust that lasted for 28 years requires patience and dialogue between the two sides for restoring peace. The road leading to clear understanding and cooperation between the government and the OLF may not be easy, but it must be approached with matchless care for stopping war, which leads to death of our civilian population and destruction of their property. It is precisely for that reason that we urge the government of Oromia and the federal government of Ethiopia to suspend their current military activities in the region of Wallaga, Gujii, Bale, Borana and other places. We equally urge the OLF leaders to peacefully negotiate and settle their differences and do everything in their power to control the activities of their fighters in the region of Wallaga and other places. We believe that both sides should take measures that foster peace.

Before the above-mentioned displacement and the ongoing war in Wallaga irrupted in December 2018, our people in Borana, especially around the town of Moyale, have been victimized by the Ethiopian forces. For instance, In March 2018 several individuals were killed by the military-run Command Post, which oversaw the emergency decree. Almost 60,000 people fled from Moyale area to seek safety in Kenya. The commander who ordered the killings around Moyale and caused the flight of 60,000 people to Kenya is still in his command post in Moyale. In November 2018, there was a weeklong Somali militia attacks around Moyale, which led to displacement of 75,000 people, the killings of several children, women and men, the burning of hundreds of houses, and the closure of all schools in Moyale. The Somali militia attacks around Moyale have continued since November 2018. During the first week of January 2019, the heavily armed Somali militia attacked the Gujii, Borana, Bale region of southern Oromia, driving out the Oromo from the land their ancestors had occupied for centuries.

Between 2016 and 2017, the heavily armed Somali Liyu forces deliberately displaced a million Oromo nationals from the border areas between Oromia and the Somali regional state. The scope of displacement of population in 14 districts of Oromia were mind boggling. They include, Qumbi, Cinaksan, Midhaga Lola, Gursum, Mayu Muluqe and Babile in eastern Hararghe, Bordode in western Hararghe, Dawe Sarar, Sawena, Mada Walabu and Rayitu in Bale, Gumi Eldelo and Liban in Guji, Moyale in Borana". This tragedy was followed by the expulsion of over hundred fifty thousand Oromo women, children and men from their homes in the Somali Regional State alone during the months of September and October 2017. This outrage came after confiscation of all their fixed and moveable properties.

Since the beginning of 2018, there was not a single week when the Somali Liyu Police force did not attack some regions in eastern Oromia, including, Cinaksan, Gursum, and Babile in eastern Hararghe, and Bordode in western Hararghe. On April 15, 2018, the heavily armed Liyu Police force attacked the town of Roge, in eastern Hararghe where 42 children, women and men were killed, and thousands displaced. In fact, in eastern Oromia, the Liyu police forces appear to be involved in the process of expanding the frontiers of Greater Somalia. This may explain why the liyu Police forces have penetrated 200 kilometers into Oromo territory and fortified their positions. As if that was not enough, on November 27, 2018, twenty children, women and men were killed around Cinaksan in eastern Haraghe. Since December 2018, the Somali Liyu police attack around Cinaksan, Gursum, and Babile in eastern Hararghe, Bordode in western Hararghe have continued. We are truly puzzled why the displacement of the Oromo that started in 2016 in eastern and southern Oromia has continued into 2019, with no end in sight! We do not understand why the federal government of Ethiopia and the regional government of Oromia are incapable of protecting the Oromo people.

We are profoundly concerned about the Ethiopian air force bombing of civilian population in western Wallaga. Even the TPLF dominated regime did not rain bombs on the areas where the Oromo Liberation Army have been operating since 1992. And yet, the federal government never dared

bombing the Somali Liyu Police forces that have continued killing and displacing our people in eastern and southern Oromia. We urge the Prime Minister and the President of Oromia to stop bombing our population in Wallaga.

What all the above mentioned killing and displacements indicate is that the specter of continuous war in Wallaga, Moyale, Gujii, Bale, Borana, Hararghe, and other places profoundly worries us as it should worry all concerned Oromo nationals. In the light of what have been briefly stated above, which are drops in the ocean of continuous misery of our people, we Oromo civic organizations, request both the government of Oromia and the federal government to take the following practical measures for stopping the continuous war in Oromia immediately.

First, we urge the government of Oromia and the federal government to end the war in Wallaga without delay. A timely action will create peaceful atmosphere for jumpstarting economic activities, restoring governmental services, and for rehabilitating the disrupted educational system in the region.

Second, we urge both sides to implement the recommendations of the Abbaa Gadaas, religious leaders and elders for ending the war in Wallaga and other places, which has the support of the Oromo people.

Third, we request both Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and President Lamma Magarssa for doing everything in their power for stopping the continuous Somali Liyu Police forces' attacks in Borana and especially around Moyale, Gujii, Bale, and several areas in Hararghe.

Fourth, we strongly urge the Prime Minister of the federal government, the leaders of ODP and the OLF leaders to resume the negotiation they started in Asmara as well as in Finfinnee/Addis Ababa, last summer for settling contentions issues quietly without politicizing sensitive issues. We believe Oromo leaders are capable of handling sensitive issues without politicizing big and small issues. Continuous Dialogue between both sides will develop trust between ODP and OLF members. Dialogue among members of both organizations will give both sides valuable experience for solving challenging issues, which is bound to lead to fruitful cooperation between the two organizations.

Fifth, at this critical time in the struggle of our people, the leader of the federal government, both ODP and OLF leaders must double and triple their efforts at solving the current conflict jointly, instead of waging war against each other. The short- and long-term results of war among the Oromo will be a disaster for the future of our people. We urge both sides to do everything humanly possible for jointly ending the war as a supportive team. However, if temporarily they may not be able to be a supportive team, there is no reason why they do not work towards that goal. As the Chinese saying goes, "the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." We urge both sides by taking that first step of ending the war in Wallaga and other regions of Oromia.

Sixth, it appears to us that the massive propaganda campaign and the ongoing war in Wallaga is a pretext for destroying the OLF, which will be a great tragedy for our people and their leaders. What makes it classic historical blunder would be if the planned destruction will be carried out by the administrations of President Lamma Magarssa and Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the two young leaders, who have golden opportunity for building bridges of understanding among the members of both organizations, facilitating their cooperation and working together. If they work together, they will be able to handle sources of conflict, rise above petty recriminations, and be able to settle conflict through dialogue and open-minded discussion and constructive criticism.

Seventh, we suspect that the attempt at destroying the OLF is spearheaded by those who cannot control their hatred of the OLF, whose leaders returned to the country from Asmara. For us the OLF leaders who returned from Asmara are among other Oromo leaders. However, the organization they lead stands for freedom of our people. Destroying that organization would engulf the mind, the body,

and the soul of millions of our people with bitterness for years to come. All Oromo leaders must realize that bitterness is the cancer that kills the spirit of cooperation and turns brothers and sisters against one another as it had happened several times among many societies across the globe. We hope and pray that all Oromo leaders will rise above their hatred and cultivate the preservation of the generous human spirit among our people, thus saving their people from current war and future sufferings.

Eighth, we believe that the art of honest dialogue, reconciliation, and compromise must be explored widely by Dr. Abiy Ahmed, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, and both by ODP and OLF leaders and their members, for overcoming vindictiveness and the mentality of zero-sum winner take all, Ethiopian political culture. Through dialogue and compromise the leaders of ODP and the OLF have unique opportunity for creating a win, win situation for the Oromo thus creating conducive environment for protecting Oromo national interest while maintaining, peace, stability and prosperity in Ethiopia.

Ninth, we are delighted to learn what the Ethiopian Defense force Deputy Chief of Staff said about the people who were killed or wounded by the Ethiopian defense force soldiers in Western Gondar very recently. The Deputy Chief of Staff promised that they will apologize to the people of Western Gondar and pay compensation for those who were harmed by soldiers. This is the right and commendable thing to say for any government that cares for the safety of its civilian population. While admiring the promise of apology and compensation for those who were victimized by the Ethiopian soldiers in Western Gondar, we ask the Ethiopian Defense Force Deputy Chief of Staff two simple questions. Does Oromo life have less value than the people in Western Gondar? If Oromo life has the same value as the people in Western Gondar, does the Deputy Chief of Staff consider apologizing to the people in Wallaga, Guji, Bale, Borana and Hararghe as well as paying compensation for those who were harmed by the Ethiopian soldiers in Wallaga as well as other areas in Oromia?

Tenth, we suggest the formation of a neutral commission for investigating those who are responsible for killing civilian population in Wallaga and other parts of Oromia. This is because, the Ethiopian government blames the killings on the OLF fighters, while civilian population in Wallaga blames the killings on the Ethiopian defense forces. The purpose of a neutral commission will be to establish the truth about killings and explore ways of compensating those who were harmed in Wallaga.

Eleventh, we strongly urge Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and President Lamma Magarssa to do their level best for immediately ending the ongoing war in Wallaga. In their resolution on January 12, 2019, the Abba Gadaas unanimously urged both sides for ending the war in Wallaga.

Finally, both Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed and President Lamma Magarssa have special responsibility for providing protection for our people against the Somali Liyu Police forces 'continuous attack in Borana, Guji, Bale and several areas of Hararghe. We hope and pray that our appeal for ending the war in Wallaga will be heeded.

Signatories:

1. Oromo Studies Association
2. Oromia Support Group
3. Human Rights League for the Horn of Africa
4. International Queer Support Group
5. International Oromo Lawyers Association
6. International Oromo Women's Organization
7. Global Gumii Oromia
8. Oromo Communities Association in North America (OCA-NA)

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