



Oromo Studies Association

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May 3, 2009

Stephen Boyd
Chairman, Pittards PLC
Sherborne Road
Yeovil BA21 5BA
United Kingdom

Re: Pollution of Lake Koka of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia

Dear Mr. Boyd:

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA), a scholarly nonprofit organization, established to promote knowledge and understanding about the Oromo people and issues of interest to them and the wider Horn of Africa region. The Oromo are one of the major ethno-nationals found in East Africa, mainly in Ethiopia.

OSA and its members are appalled by the alarming reports of the destruction of Lake Koka and the death of thousands of Oromo farmers by toxic waste discharged into the lake by The Ethiopia Tannery, a company run by Pittards PLC since August 2005, and located near the lake. There are now scientific reports,¹ TV documentaries², and first hand testimonies that have firmly established that Lake Koka, once a source of clean and fresh water for the Oromo community living around it, has become a death chamber for the community. In a recent TV documentary, a mother who lost her six children and her husband testifies that the tannery has transformed the lake, once a source of fresh livelihood, into a major source of disease and death not only for her family but also for the cattle drinking water from the lake. Similarly, the testimony of health professionals who operate in the vicinity corroborates the disturbing environmental degradation and the loss of human lives caused by the pollution. Action Professionals Association for the People (APAP), a non-profit, non-partisan nongovernmental organization, has even taken the case to the court to seek compensations for the damages caused by this pollution.

¹ G. M. Zinabu and Nicholas J. G. Pearce, "Concentrations of heavy metals and related trace elements in some Ethiopian rift-valley lakes and their in-flows", *Hydrobiologia*, Volume 492, Numbers 1-3, February 2003.

² See Al Jazeera TV documentary at <http://www.mefedia.com/entry/the-destruction-of-ethiopia-lake-koka-part-1-of-2/14752000/>

We believe that both your company and the Ethiopian government have been aware of the destruction of the lake and the loss of human lives caused by the pollution but have deliberately failed to act to stop the loss of human lives and environmental damages for selfish business reasons. Your company, in collaboration with the current government in Ethiopia, is earning millions of dollars at the expense of the destruction of the lake, loss of livelihoods, and the death of thousands of Oromos residing around the lake.

We are very saddened that Pittards PLC continues to be a partner of the current minority-led, unaccountable Ethiopian regime, which has demonstrated, time and again, that it is capable of committing enormous crimes, particularly against the Oromo. You must realize that the Oromo hold Pittards PLC directly accountable for the pollution of Lake Koka and the associated loss of people's lives and assets. Needless to say, your actions are also contrary to good business practice and social responsibility.

Notwithstanding the damage to date, we believe your company can still do much good in limiting further losses of human lives as well as reversing some of the environmental damages. The Oromo Studies Association therefore strongly requests your company to:

1. Stop polluting lake Koka and the entire Awash river basin which provides drinking water to millions of Oromo nationals and other Ethiopians;
2. Pay compensation for damages to people who have already lost their family and cattle because of this pollution; and assess any further damages through an independent Koka community based committee supervised by donor agencies;
3. Help restore the fauna and flora of Lake Koka, including access to clean drinking water by the local community.

We hope that your company would act swiftly to end this humanitarian and environmental tragedy.

Yours Sincerely,

Abebe Adugna, Ph.D.
President, Oromo Studies Association

CC:

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