

Mr. Johnnie Carson
Assistant Secretary for African Affairs
U. S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing this letter to express the concerns of Oromo-American National Foundation (OANAF) members. The Oromo- American National Foundation is a community based civic organization whose members are American born Oromos and naturalized Oromo-American citizens of the United States. We are active in our community mitigating social and communal issues among our people here in America. We are compelled to urge you to reconsider your office's decision to exclude Oromo-American scholars from the upcoming Department of State colloquium on Ethiopia.

We've heard that there is a concerted effort by some bureaucrats at the Africa Desk to confine the Oromo views by relegating it to the outer edges of Ethiopian predicament. We have heard also from Oromo-American scholars that after the initial invitation reached them, some one within the Bureau of African Affairs, objected to the presence of Oromo-American scholars and subsequently, they were disinvited.

This is very troubling considering the fact that Oromos are the single largest nationality in Ethiopia and any sensible attempt to comprehend the quandaries of that dysfunctional region will benefit to listen to the views of Oromo-American scholars who have special knowledge and professional authority about Oromo people as well as the history and politics of the region.

We understand that the Department of State is charged with promoting American national interest, bilateral issues, peace and stability in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa in general. Yet, primarily due to the tacit diplomatic support and a considerable economic assistance by the United States, the regime in Ethiopia continues to violate basic and democratic rights of its citizens. The unwillingness of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to hold a fair and free election has dampened democratic culture and effective governance of the country. We believe that continued US support will reinforce the political and social inequalities of the Oromo people and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

Oromo-American scholars have been following all the developments in Ethiopia very closely and would have made an immense contribution to the scheduled colloquium on issues of human rights violations, arbitrary arrests, extra-judicial killings, disappearances of ordinary citizens with out a trace after being picked up by the regime's security forces, etc. The Africa Bureau should embrace diverse views on Ethiopia instead of selectively inviting those whom it believes will deliver views uncritical of the Tigre Liberation Front (TPLF) regime.

In Ethiopia today, a political and social struggle is underway to bring about a new political and social order. The Oromo people, who were forcefully incorporated into the Ethiopian Empire by Emperor Minelek the II during the colonial scramble for African territories by the Abyssinians and Europeans, are engaged to bring about a fundamental political and social change to resolve the country's continuing societal crisis.

History shows that stability based upon political legitimacy and consensus is a precondition for sustainable political as well as social stability. A sound strategy to combat terrorism in the region must take into account Ethiopia's historical and current political realities. The present conditions in Ethiopia for the Oromo people are hideous: arbitrary arrest, random round-up of large community members, disappearances of prominent leaders, extra-judicial killings of suspected members of Oromo resistance movements and so on..!

As is well known, underlying the litany of instability in the Horn of Africa is a crisis of governance. United States' unconditional support to Mr. Meles' regime can not yield significant stability unless the issues of political legitimacy in Ethiopia are established. United States' economic and diplomatic support to Meles' regime will greatly expand the opportunities to suppress the legitimate democratic aspirations of all Ethiopians. We believe, and all indicators suggest that under the current conditions, American assistance will exacerbate the internal conflict in favor of the undemocratic and corrupt regime of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) which governs Ethiopia under the cover of a surrogate party called the Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF) represents a minority ethnic group from the far north part of Ethiopia (about 6% of total population of 82 million). It is a single party of former Stalinists dictatorship and it controls Ethiopia by military force.

Meles Zenawi's regime is exceedingly repressive and abusive of Oromo citizens of the country and with the support it receives from the United States; it will proceed to consolidate its dictatorial power with intransigence. On March 26, 2010, Barry Malone of the Reuters news service reported from Addis Ababa/Finfinnee the regime's crackdown of the Oromo ahead of the scheduled election. Obbo Bulcha Demeksa who is an Oromo national is willing to participate in the May 23rd election. However, he stated that his party candidates were beaten and tortured by the regime's thugs to scare them to leave the party. Birtukan Midhakssa, the chairwoman of the Unity for Democracy and Justice (UDJ) party, is perhaps the best known political prisoner of an Oromo heritage in the Ethiopia. She has been confined to a solitary isolation for almost two years and according to recently released Human Rights watch and Department of State annual rights reports, her health is deteriorating and the prison authorities refused to allow independent physicians to visit her.

The root cause of social and political instability in the Horn of Africa is and has been the failure of public institutions such as labor unions, independent political parties, professional associations, judicial system that is independent and reliable, and civil societies that are accountable to the public. None of these exists in Ethiopia today.

In his seminal speech on Africa, President Obama outlined four basic themes as the foundation of America's partnership with Africa: democracy, opportunity, health, and peaceful resolution of conflict". He expounded more by stating that "we must support strong and sustainable democratic government...governments that respects the will of their own people,.....no person wants to live in a society where the rule of law gives way to the rule of brutality and bribery, that is not democracy, that is tyranny, and now is the time for it to end" By all measures, Meles' regime miserably fails all of the above.

The preponderance view by the US policy makers to refer to Ethiopia as "front line state" and the present Ethiopian government of Meles Zenawi as the "corner stone for American policy in the region" is a big mistake. What should be encouraged is a firm American views against all the violations of citizens rights in Ethiopia by Meles and his Tigre coteries. The continued political conflict in the country undermines United States effort to stabilize the region and prolonged and uncritical support of Mr. Meles' regime by the United States will undoubtedly will ensue a large scale resistance by the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia beyond the capacity of the United States to control the events!

To avert what may otherwise deteriorate into a very tragic regional situation, the United States must withhold any economic and military support to the regime until legitimately established authorities take power through fair and free elections. This failing, the region will sink deeper into an anarchy and an intensified multi-front civil conflict.

Finally, sir, allow us to reiterate that owing in part to the uncritical support lent to it by the United States, Meles' regime continues to terrorize the Oromo nation and other nationalities in the country. The Oromo people in the Ethiopian Empire and Oromo-American community in the US are totally opposed to any economic and military assistance to Mr. Zenawi's regime. The atrocities committed by Meles on the Oromo, on the Anyuaks in Gambella, on the Sidamas in Hwassa, on the Somalis in the Ogeden and the river of bloods that is flooding the Great Rift Valley of the Horn of Africa will be an indelible stain on the United States hand if it continues to supply military and economic assistances Meles needs to oppress Oromo people who are 45% of the total Ethiopian population.

Our quest is compelling, our roots are firmly bound in the region and we have no doubt that in the long run, our struggle against tyranny will prevail. The alternative for the United States should be to side with the just causes of the majority of Ethiopian people, not with yesteryear Stalinists who today masquerade like a Jacksonian democrat! To quote President Obama's African speech once more, "Make no mistake: history is on the side of these brave Africans, and not with those who use coups or change constitution to stay in power. Africa does not need strongmen, it needs strong institution.

Sincerely,
For: Oromo-American Foundation Board members
Jim T.
Chairman

CC to:

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