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OROMO LIBERATION FRONT

جبهة تحرير اورومو

Date: 25 October 2011

N0. 057/OLF/11

STATEMENT OF THE OLF NATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING, 14-18 OCTOBER 2011

The National Council of the Oromo Liberation Front has conducted a general meeting on October 14-18, 2011 and has passed decisions that will strengthen the on-going struggle for national liberation. The Council has heard a progress report which was prepared by its Executive Committee under the leadership of the OLF Chairman Dhugaasaa Bakakkoo, and a document compiled by a preparatory committee (Ad-Hoc Committee hereafter) appointed by the Executive Committee to study the state of the Oromo struggle and present its findings to the meeting. The Council has discussed a number of issues and made policy recommendations and has passed resolutions to be translated into action by the different organs and branches of the OLF.

1. Summary of the situation of the Oromo People under the TPLF/EPRDF Regime

The OLF National Council observed that the situation of the Oromo and that of the other peoples in Ethiopia is rapidly deteriorating from year to year under the TPLF regime. The report presented to the OLF National Council by the Ad-Hoc Committee confirms that Oromo people are facing an enemy which is growing vicious from day to day using coercive methods to control them and their resources. It is common knowledge that the TPLF military build-up is endorsed by external powers and that international relief and development aid is being used for the same purpose. Secret service sources including the CIA indicate the TPLF regime has for example received \$4.7 billion in aid from the US between 1999 and 2009 and that much of the money was used for military purposes. The sources also indicate the Ethiopian regime's defense budget is \$450 million per annum, and that the regime commands one of the largest armies in Africa with over 200,000 men equipped with several hundred aircrafts and over 350 tanks. This makes Ethiopia one of the three biggest military powers in Africa. Ironically, at the same time, Ethiopia is the second poorest state of the 54 countries on the continent. On top of this, it is also striking that the Ethiopian army is almost entirely manned by Tigrayans. For example, 58 of 60 (97%) of the top-ranking military commanders are from that ethnic background. Consequently, the mono-ethnic TPLF army is essentially an army of occupation in Oromia and the other regional states of the so-called Federal State of Ethiopia. As being witnessed all over Oromia today and seen on the occasion of the 2005 Ethiopian parliament elections, when hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were wounded and killed in the streets of the capital city, the main purpose of the TPLF army is to suppress opposition and keep the regime in power at any cost.

The Ad-Hoc Committee report stresses the fact that, assisted by external powers and international development aid, the TPLF has turned into vicious enemy the like of which the Oromo people have not seen before. The suffering of the Oromo people has reached the most intolerable point in their history: decomposing corpses pierced by TPLF bullets spread in the bushes for wild animals to prey on are not unusual scene in Oromia. Those are the corpses of Oromo victims of extra-judicial killings and disappearance reported by human rights organizations.

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Prisons in Ethiopia are “Oromo-speaking”; the TPLF killing-fields straddle international borders and Oromo refugees are being hunted down and killed in Kenya and Somalia; flight across the seas in rickety boats and becoming shark fodders has become the fate of thousands of Oromo refugees. Being forcibly displaced from their farmlands which is auctioned to foreign enterprises by Meles Zenawi’s regime and ending as street beggars, and the destruction of their natural environment and source of life are also part of the deplorable experience of the Oromo people under the Meles Zenawi regime. In short, the regime is denying the Oromo people the right to Life. The irony is that this regime calls its victims terrorists to cow them to abandon their struggle for national self-determination. The Oromo find themselves in a new and pernicious phase of Abyssinian oppression.

The Ad-Hoc Committee report confirms that instead of coercing the Oromo people to abandon the struggle for freedom, the military might and violence of the TPLF regime is creating a ground for stronger Oromo unity and mounting resistance against the TPLF’s occupation army. Rather than acquiescence to a brutal minority rule our people have become more defiant than ever before. Their defiance is reflected by the sacrifices they are making while resisting the TPLF rule; their songs and the omnipresent use of banned OLF banners and symbols at every Oromo gathering express not only their desire for freedom but also their determination to achieve independence. Above all the Oromo youth have become the strongest arm of our national liberation movement today. This is what makes the OLF an organization of the masses and its political program a popular ideology for Oromo liberation.

The damage done to Oromo humanity and property by the present regime is difficult to estimate. Officially categorized as “narrow nationalists”, Oromo intellectuals, and the political and business elite are being demonized, harassed, imprisoned, tortured and killed. The regime uses poverty and man-made famine as weapon to demoralize the Oromo people. However, the TPLF regime can never win multifaceted war it is waging against our people. For now it survives on the back of its repressive security force and the legitimacy foreign powers have accorded it. As it is persistently being rejected by the entire Oromo people and others it is violating human rights on daily basis digging at the same time its own grave. The Ad-Hoc Committee has in its report advised the OLF to prepare the Oromo people for the eventuality of the regime’s demise in order to prevent the repetition of the 1991 situation.

2. Clarifications concerning the genesis and objectives of the OLF

Alerted by the continued acts of internal and external forces who will distort the fundamental objectives of the OLF, the National Council meeting has reflected on the program of the OLF, discussed distortions being waged against it and issued the following clarifications. The Council regrets that the recent sources of such a distortion include an ex-member of the OLF leadership. The Council will reiterate that the Oromo people have never accepted Abyssinian hegemony and that the OLF and its political program are the clearest manifestation of collective Oromo aspiration to regain their dignity and freedom. The objective of the OLF was and is not to compete with Ethiopian organizations to rule the Ethiopian state and its peoples. It was and is to liberate Oromia and empower the Oromo people. We will also stress that Oromo nationalism and its vanguard the OLF are the results of a long process of popular struggle and not an invention or creation of few individuals. Those who laid down its political program in the early 1970s articulated the desire of the Oromo people which was collectively expressed among others in uprisings such as the Bale Oromo rebellion and in social movements such as the Macca-Tuulama Association prior to the birth of the OLF.

What the OLF National Council wants to stress here is that the OLF program reflects the aspirations of the Oromo people, and that its ‘authors’ are the Oromo people and not the individual actors who have committed it to paper. Therefore, it denounces those who distort the history and purpose of the OLF and the sources of Oromo nationalism for personal gains. The Council reiterates that the declared objective of the struggle, or *kaayyoo* in Oromo parlance, for which tens of thousands of Oromo men and women gave their life and many are languishing in countless known and secret torture chambers and detention camps run by Meles Zenawi’s regime, was and remains to be the establishment of an independent state of Oromia.

3. A Call on the Oromo diaspora

The OLF has worked hard and reorganized itself within and outside of Oromia during the last ten years repairing the damages caused by the OLF split into factions in 2001 due to an attempt made by a group to sidetrack its fundamental objective. The progress report presented to the OLF National Council by its Executive Committee noted that, the efforts of reorganization has paid dividends, and OLF influence and membership outside and inside Oromia has increased steadily over the recent years. The Council is encouraged with the achievements that have been made and issued policy decisions that will strengthen the struggle and take it to the next level.

The Council has reviewed the financial health of the organization and discussed different methods of resource mobilization and has made important decision to that effect. It has also taken the opportunity to thank all those organizations and individuals who have made financial support to being carried by the OLF. We will stress that it is the moral duty of every Oromo to support the struggle for the liberation of his/her homeland. The Council will remind the Oromo in the diaspora of their moral obligations to make contributions to the liberation goal and calls upon the Oromo people at home to snatch their resources from the thieving hands of the enemy and use it to build its own liberation army.

The National Council will, as indicated above, remind the Oromo diaspora and others that the suffering of our people has reached the most intolerable point in our history. The task in front of us is to change the situation by all means necessary for the Oromo nation to survive; it is nobody but we who bear the responsibility of bringing about the change of the status quo and of what is happening to our people under the regime. Needless to emphasize here that freedom demands sacrifice and that the Oromo people must be ready to do that.

4. Call to Strengthen the Oromo National Liberation Movement

Over the past one and half decade, we pursued the strategy of defending the OLF and keeping its *kaayyoo* alive at any cost. Our organization has paid heavy sacrifice, in terms of resources and human life. However, we are happy to tell our Oromo compatriots, the friends and enemies of the Oromo people that the sacrifice that is being made has not been and will not be in vain; we have laid down a solid foundation for the independence resolve to succeed.

The call we made in December 2008 to the OLF factions and others with the aim of re-strengthening of the national liberation is yet to bear fruit. The National Council has resolved that our doors are and will remain open to all those who will join hands with us to end the oppressive alien domination over Oromia. Notwithstanding the lack of success in our call to the OLF factions who have abandoned the goal of independence for the illusory project of the 'democratization of Ethiopia', the meeting noted with satisfaction that the unity among forces for the liberation of Oromia is strengthening and extend its call to all individuals and organization struggling for the independence of the Oromo nation. We will continue to work to reunite the OLF factions through dialogues and negotiations. The Ad-Hoc Committee's report stresses that the Oromo national liberation struggle led by the OLF is at a crossroads and that there is a pressing need for a strong push forward for unity and the liberation of Oromia. We are determined to carry forward the struggle for national liberation and therefore demand the co-operation of all Oromos who wish to see the birth of an independent state of Oromia.

5. Message to our Neighbors

The OLF is willing and ready to enter into political cooperation with the oppressed nations, nationalities and peoples who are sharing with the Oromo people the brutal history of Abyssinian colonial subjugation. The OLF will not impose its will on any people or nationality big or small but is ready to enter into economic, political and future deeper cooperation that will result in mutual benefit.

6. Appeal to the International Community

As mentioned above, the TPLF/EPDRF regime's violence against the Oromo people is abetted by military, political and economic assistance from external powers. The OLF National Council appeals to governments, both in the West and East to strike a balance between their national interests and their international obligation of protecting human rights and stop giving military support to a regime that kills civilians on a daily basis particularly in Oromia and the Ogaden region. We deplore the UN's, the African Union's, the EU's silence on the genocidal killings perpetrated against our people. It is sad that international development aid is financing an army that occupies our homeland and suppresses our people. The OLF National Council asks international organization such as the World Bank, the IMF and others to stop aid that the underwrites the ongoing genocidal killing of the Oromo and other peoples in the Horn of Africa by the Meles Zenawi's regime. We appeal to the UNHCR to protect Oromo refugees in the Horn of Africa, Yemen and elsewhere.

Once again OLF takes this opportunity to reassure the African Union, the UN and the international community at large that the struggle of the Oromo people is for freedom, and that it respects the universal declaration of human rights. Our struggle is not based on hate against any people but on love for freedom from an oppressive rule. Our aim is to achieve the goal we have set ourselves and inscribed in the OLF political program four decades ago - the establishment of the independent state of Oromia. We believe that the policy that led the independence of Eritrea in 1993 and the South Sudan in 2011 should also apply to Oromia. What we are asking is the recognition of the legitimate right of our people to self-determination and decent and dignified life worthy of human beings in their own state; a right that all other colonized peoples in Africa and elsewhere were able to exercise with the consent of the UN and the international community.

Oromia shall be free!

The OLF National Council