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Press Release

Abyssinian millennium celebration is an austere reminder of colonial devastation of Oromia

The arrogant dictatorial regime of Ethiopia has been busy drumming up a lavish celebration to be held on 12th September 2007 in the name of “Ethiopian Millennium”. Ethiopia is the only country to celebrate the millennium 8 years after the rest of the world, claiming to be a “unique country with its own calendar”. This is notwithstanding the fact that all other countries of the world that follow the Gregorian calendar or otherwise celebrated the new millennium in unison 8 years ago, an event which united the entire world except Ethiopia.

Like its predecessors, the current Ethiopian regime is also keeping the dying Empire and the people imprisoned in it in complete isolation from the rest of the world. The regime orchestrates this so called millennium celebration to divert attention from its appalling human rights abuses and take advantage of the occasion to commit further acts of violence and terror on innocent civilians in the name of safeguarding security. It is also reminiscent of Haileseilasie’s jubilee celebration during 1974 and Mengistu’s 10th year anniversary of victory in 1984, both being at the height of critical times of famine in the Empire.

This “Ethiopian Millennium” in particular has a painful symbolic meaning for the Oromo as well as other people colonized by Abyssinia. The Abyssinian calendar has brought nothing for the Oromo but isolation from progress the world has made since Oromia had lost her sovereignty.

There has been no meaningful positive change in the way people live in Oromia since the creation of the Ethiopian Empire at the end of the 19th century. For instance, it is to be recalled that Minilik and his bandits settled on Oromo land and reduced the Oromo people to servitude. Then, Haile Selasse continued the same policy and redistributed the rest of Oromo land among his family members and cliques. The military Derg regime also reversed the 1974 revolutionary gains of the Oromo people and passed a decree that made land the property of the Ethiopian state in 1984 and reduced the Oromo people to the status of landlessness once again.

What is more, now Meles Zenawi’s regime is busy uprooting the Oromo people from their ancestral land and selling it off to his cronies and the so called investors with a devastating effect on the welfare of the Oromo people. In doing so, the current Ethiopian regime has effectively cleansed the Oromo people from the entire central Oromia region under the pretext that “the land is required for investors”. The irony is that most of these so called investors, which in reality are looters, are the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) officials and members or their agents who have already fattened their coffers by looting the Oromo properties. In short, the actions that are taking place in central Oromia are the combinations of economic exploitation and ethnic cleansing in the 21st century by a brutal regime supported by the world’s richest countries.

Notwithstanding this, the land policy in Abyssinia proper, where the Tigre and Amhara people live, also remains unchanged and different from the rest. There, as always, land ownership remains to be a matter of citizenship right. Land ownership in the north has never changed since the time of Menilik. Families inherit land to their children and land is referred to as the family land whereas the colonizers refer to the land in Oromia and other nations in the south as property of the colonial settlers or the state.

Politically, the Oromo and the southern people are marginalized and isolated from the rest of the world by the Abyssinian colonizers. Those who raise their voices against these injustices face brutal punishment by the successive Abyssinian regimes. Today, tens of thousands of Oromo, ranging from the age of ten to ninety, are thrown into the Ethiopian prisons under the pretext of supporters of the OLF. These prisoners include human rights activists, leaders and members of civic-organisations, political activists and civil rights advocates. Most of them have been tortured both physically and mentally in the prisons. Others are killed or have been made to disappear by the government forces that are not held responsible for their brutalities.

Different human rights organisations have repeatedly reiterated their concerns about gross human rights abuses, particularly on extra judicial killings, tortures, and other inhuman treatments of the Oromo people in the hands of the government forces in different parts of Oromia. But neither the Ethiopian state nor the international community has paid due attention to the plights of the Oromo people.

On the contrary, some Western governments who claim to be champions of human rights and democracy have sponsored the Ethiopian government to expand its state terrorism and human rights violations beyond the Ethiopian borders. As a result its forces are indiscriminately killing Somali civilians and Oromo refugees that fled Ethiopia to escape persecutions by the Ethiopian state.

Emboldened by the US which has considered the Ethiopian regime as one of its major allies in the fight against terrorism in the Horn of Africa, Mr. Meles Zenawi's regime is committing untold atrocities against the peoples in Ethiopia in general and the Oromo people in particular, to assert its dictatorial power.

The current preparation to celebrate the so called "Ethiopian Millennium" in the midst of such human sufferings and tragedies, in the country engulfed by poverty, disease, and famine, has nothing to do with the majority of the peoples in the Empire in general and the Oromo people in particular. These people have already become the major targets for the TPLF led government's human rights abuses.

There is no wonder, however, if some groups who benefited from over a century long economic plunders of Oromia and the South under different Abyssinian governments would joyfully take part in this celebration believing that this is their victorious history over the rest of the people.

But we would like to remind them that, first, this celebration is not in reality about "Ethiopian Millennium," but it is a celebration to strengthen the grip of the TPLF to political power. Second, one has to know that the financial cost these celebrations would bring will severely affect the livelihood of all the peoples in the Empire, particularly the farmers. It does not come from the coffers of the TPLF officials or their cronies.

Again, it would not be surprising if some Western governments endorse this celebration which diverts the highly scarce resources of the country and foreign donations from basic needs of the population to finance this pompous celebration. But we would like to remind them that when they send their diplomats to Finfinne to raise a toast to Mr. Meles Zenawi's political and military successes the toast they drink is mixed with the bloods of thousands of Oromo and other peoples in Ethiopia who were killed by the regime for advocating respect for human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and justice for all. Their diplomats should also know that the beautiful chairs they are going to sit on are standing on the flesh and bones of the human rights activists, innocent school teenagers, political activists who had advocated the inherent democratic rights of their peoples, leaders of civic organisation whom Mr. Meles Zenawi have considered as threats to his monopoly of political power and eliminated as a result.

Therefore, the so called Ethiopian Millennium is a sham date in the midst of human sufferings, that has no value to the Oromo except a painful reminder of a century old economic exploitations and political suppressions that has already extended 8 years into the new millennium.

Finally, we would like to call upon the Oromo people and others concredned to ignore the "Ethiopian Millennium" celebration imposed on them, but instead promote their own authentic Oromo Gada Calendar, which is deeply rooted in Oromo culture and way of life and in need of revival from the century old neglect by the colonizers.

Oromia shall be free!

Oromo Liberation Front