

The Asmara Group lost the court battle it initiated against the OLF

We are very pleased that the senseless Asmara Group's lawsuit against the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is dismissed by the District Court of the Fourth Judicial District of the state of Minnesota, United States of America (USA), on 8th September 2008 (Court File No. 27 CV 07-20487).

The Asmara Group had claimed exclusive right to the name "Oromo Liberation Front" ("OLF") and logo and had brought lawsuit against the OLF for "violation of the deceptive trade practices act, interfering with prospective economic advantage, false statement in advertisement and declaratory judgement".

Pursuant to cross motions for summary judgement, Judge Deborah Hedlund ordered:

1. Plaintiff's (the Asmara Group's) motion for partial summary judgement is DENIED.
2. Defendants' (The OLF's) motion for summary judgement is GRANTED.
3. Defendants (The OLF) are awarded cost and disbursements.

We the OLF have endeavoured a great deal, right from the outset, to remind the Asmara Group that our dispute is political and as such should be resolved peacefully through dialogue and mediation. However, true to their Ethiopianist principle, the Asmara Group resorted to intimidation and malice in their futile attempt to eliminate the OLF.

We have also tried our best to stop the unwarranted expensive court battle that went on for the past 14 months without success due to the intransigent nature of the sectarian elements in the Asmara Group that have been spearheading the lawsuit. In fact, the court recommended settling the matter through arbitration, which was totally rejected out of hand by the Asmara Group. They insisted that the matter be tried by a judge. The case went for hearing before Judge Deborah Hedlund on 18th June 2008.

The District Judge noted, in the memorandum of law, that:

"The OLF began in Ethiopia in 1973 with the objective of establishing an independent [state of] Oromia for the Oromo people. Some individual Defendants have been members of the OLF since its inception in 1973. Beginning in 1999 and through approximately 2001, the OLF members began disputing the methods of accomplishing their mission. In 2001, the [Plaintiff or the Asmara Group] OLF began supporting the policy of recognizing the Ethiopian government. There were members who did not agree with this policy. The Plaintiffs continued operating under the name OLF in Minnesota ("Plaintiff OLF"). The Defendants rejected the authority of the [Plaintiff or the Asmara Group] OLF, but also continued operating under the name OLF in Minnesota ("Defendant OLF")."

This, in fact, confirms that the dispute is of a political nature and that the root cause of the schism remains the illegal alteration of the fundamental objective of the OLF by the defunct Asmara Group which culminated in its recognition of the Ethiopian government as a legitimate power over the Oromo people.

The OLF is pleased with the depth of the Judge's understanding of the matter of the dispute and entirely satisfied that justice has been done. In our opinion, the case should not have been brought to the court in the first place.

In our opinion, the verdict by the District Court Judge has clarified the matter sufficiently. The Judge also further stated:

“In or around the end of July 2007, both the Plaintiff [the Asmara group] OLF and Defendant OLF advertised and held conferences in same building on the same day. Both parties indicated that their conferences were under the auspices of the OLF. There is no evidence that either the Plaintiff OLF or Defendant OLF made statements damaging to the other. Plaintiff OLF did raise finds at the conference and sent these finds to the Washington D.C. office. It is unclear if defendant OLF raised finds. If any funds were collected by defendant OLF, it is undisputed that they would not be forwarded to Washington D.C. There is no evidence, however, that the defendant OLF misrepresented how any collections would be used.”

The Judge also concluded that based on the above, Plaintiff (the Asmara group) has no basis for claim against the OLF and any such claim is dismissed with prejudice.

This is the second time that the Asmara Group took the OLF to court. It is to be remembered that the same claims were filed by Plaintiffs against the OLF on 19th July 2007 (Court File No. 27 CV 07-14305) and the matter was dismissed when Plaintiffs failed to file an injunction bond.

At this point, regardless of the never ending intimidations and frivolous lawsuits intended to harass it, the OLF would like to remind all concerned that it will continue to reject defeatist views within the Oromo national struggle and to defend the fundamental rights of the Oromo people.

We would like to thank genuine Oromo nationals who supported us with much needed morale and material support in defending the OLF. We have been encouraged, in particular, by the support we have been given by our youth who rallied behind our organization through their self initiatives. We would also like to thank Oromo intellectuals for their advice and support.

Above all, we salute, once more, our members who resolutely fought the court battle. We acknowledge it has been a trying time both for individual members and their families. It defies our belief that a group that claims to stand for Oromo people targets Oromos who paid immense sacrifices and remain true to the just cause of the Oromo nation in such a way. Struggle for freedom requires sacrifices be it in Minnesota courts of law or in the jungles of Oromia. The sacrifice paid by some of our members in Minnesota is a continuation of the proud tradition of OLF members' selfless commitment be it in the mountains of Oromia or torture chambers of Ethiopia.

We would also like to express our gratitude to our attorney, legal experts and the legal affairs committee of the OLF for their indefatigable hard work and achievement in successfully defending the Oromo struggle for emancipation and freedom from Abyssinian colonization.

Finally, we would hope that the Asmara Group, itself now divided by power struggle from within and using Oromo regional differences as a tool, will come to its senses and bring this matter to an end.

Oromia shall be free!

OLF Executive Committee