

# Waldaa Qorannoo Oromoo



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President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500  
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Tel: (202) 395-2020

**Subject: Oromo Studies Association's Appeal Letter to President Obama on the Current Harassment of Muslims by the Ethiopian Government**

Dear President Obama,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Oromo Studies Association (OSA)<sup>1</sup> to bring to your attention the current growing unrest among the Muslim community and the widespread, indiscriminate and brutal repression and harassment of peacefully protesting Muslims by the Ethiopian government. Over the past six months hundreds of thousands of Muslims have staged peaceful protests, almost every week, opposing what they call "government interference with their religion by seeking to impose the belief of a little-known sect of Islamic doctrine known as Al Ahbash". Although the Muslim community has been protesting peacefully inside their respective mosques, they were met by harsh and at times bloody response from the Ethiopian government police and security forces.

## Harsh measures against Peaceful and Unarmed Worshipers

According the Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa (HRLHA)<sup>2</sup>, a human right group whose researchers are also members of OSA, and many other sources, on April 6, 2012 alone, at least four people were confirmed to have been killed in the town of Asasa, Oromia regional state, when the government forces fired live ammunition on unarmed civilians coming out of the local mosque. The clash is reported to have occurred when the police attempted to arrest a well-known preacher as he was coming out of the mosque. Apart from those killed, several others were reportedly wounded and hundreds arrested. According to eyewitnesses who reported to the Voice of America Radio (VOA) Afan Oromo program aired on April 9, 2012, many of the wounded have also been arrested and were denied medical treatment. Although some of those arrested were released three days later, on May 11, 2012, an Oromo youth group<sup>3</sup> with connections to the Asasa area has published the names and ages of [224 Muslims who remained in jail](#) after nearly one month, and awaiting trial in Asasa town under what we certainly believe to be fabricated charges. The same youth group has [published](#)<sup>4</sup> the list of 67 Oromo Muslims arrested from the vicinity of Walisso, Western Shoa zone, Oromia regional state. The fate of these Muslims and several others are still unknown.

On July 13, 2012, the Ethiopian Federal Police forcefully entered the Awalia Mosque and Islamic school compound, in north-west of the capital Finfinne (Addis Ababa), and stormed thousands of worshipers who were reportedly gathered to discuss the planning and preparation for a Sadaqah (charity) event, scheduled to happen two days later and aimed at distributing food to the poor, accusing them of “planning further protests”. It is widely reported that the police used violent and excessive force against those present at the mosque, beating many men and women in the compound and arrested several people. That same evening, when the news of the violent actions of the police at Awalia spread throughout the city, a large number of panicked people headed to the mosque to rescue their relatives and also to protest the violent actions of the government and further violence and confrontation broke out between protesters and the police. Several sources reported<sup>5</sup> that police used live ammunition resulting in many serious injuries among the protesters.

While the government media confirmed that over 70 people have been arrested, witnesses and other sources say the number of those arrested on July 13 is probably in the thousands<sup>6</sup>. Many of those detained have reported widespread beating of detainees inside the police stations. Amnesty International reported that “one woman reported that she had been subjected to sexual violence by a police officer during the night of July 13”. Many of the detainees arrested at Awalia are reportedly being held in detention in unknown locations, without access to family members and legal representatives, which increases their risk of being subjected to torture or other forms of ill-treatment. Such practices used by the current Ethiopian regime have been widely reported by several human rights organizations.

Several sources, including Amnesty International<sup>7</sup> and the VOA Horn of Africa radio program, have reported that members of the committee of chosen representatives of the Muslim community were arrested between July 19 and July 21, 2012, including Chairman Abubakar Ahmed, Spokesperson Ahmedin Jebel and committee members Kamil Shemsu, Sultan Aman, Adem Kamil, Jemal Yasim and Meket Muhe. On July 21 thousands of Muslims gathered at the Anwar Mosque, the largest Mosque in the capital, to protest against the events at Awalia and the arrests of members of the committee. The event became violent as protesters clashed with the police resulting in the arrest of scores of peaceful protestors.

### **Harassment of Journalists, Hiding Protests and Misinformation**

On May 25, 2012, a veteran Voice of America reporter<sup>8</sup> Peter Heinlein and his translator Simegneh Yekoye were detained while seeking to interview protesters during a Muslim demonstration following Friday prayers at Awalia Mosque in the capital and were released the next day after the news of their arrest spread widely on international media. In the week of July 16, 2012, journalist Yusuf Getachew of the magazine “Ye’muslimoch Guday” (Muslim Affairs) was reportedly<sup>9</sup> detained in the notorious so called Maikelawi prison, and family members are denied access to visit him since then. On July 13, 2012, a journalist and blogger praised by international human rights groups for championing press freedom was sentenced<sup>10</sup> to 18 years in prison after his conviction in June on terrorism charges. The journalist, Eskinder Nega, and more than a dozen others — most

of whom had fled the country — were convicted under the regime's "Anti- Terrorism Law" of 2009. It is to be recalled that, on December 28, 2011, two Swedish journalists, Johan Persson and Martin Schibbye, were also charged and convicted to 11 years in prison for allegedly supporting “terrorism” for working on a story in the restive Ogaden region. These are just few and the most recent examples in a series of charges, arrests, convictions, and forcing in to exile of local and international journalists over the past twenty or so years.

The current regime has a well-established history of harassing and arresting journalists and in doing so, blocking all critics and information about any dissent or movement from its citizens. Over the years, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)<sup>11</sup>, and several international human rights organizations, including the U.S. State Department’s own annual report<sup>12</sup> on Ethiopia, have continuously reported arrests and harassment of journalists and attack on free press. The Ethiopian government is ruling the country by unlawfully suppressing all kinds of dissent and hiding the information by way of keeping all media in its monopoly, arresting and harassing all independent journalists, jamming all independent radio stations<sup>13</sup> broadcasting to the country, and blocking all opposition websites<sup>14</sup>. Currently, the Ethiopian government’s rubber stamp parliament went to the extreme and adopted a law that criminalizes anyone who uses Skype up to fifteen years<sup>15</sup> in jail. The government does all these to rule its citizens by keeping them in the dark. It is because of this fact that the current peaceful movement of the Ethiopian Muslims is not getting any national or international media attention.

Meanwhile, the government media is engaged in misinforming the public 24-7 and accusing the protesters of “fomenting violence” and spreading an “extremist ideology”. Such misinformation and brainwashing of the uninformed general public, which is deliberately left in the dark due to lack of any free media in the country, is done in many different ways: interviewing selected supporters<sup>16</sup> of the regime which tell false stories to the public, showing false and [concocted videos](#)<sup>17</sup> on the national television, preparing a forceful so called “counter protests” (of its supporters and other citizens who are forced to come out for the government for fear of reprisals) and giving a deafening media coverage, while at the same time brutally suppressing any attempt of protest of

dissenting voice and denying a media coverage when it happens at a great risk, and so on. It is from this reality that one current amateur video posted on YouTube show a large number of protesters in the biggest Anwar Mosque chanting “[\*ETV wushetam! ETV wushetam!\*](#)”, meaning “Ethiopian Television is liar!”<sup>18</sup>, and another YouTube video show protesters chanting “[\*kezeh behuwala, wushetam ETn anayem\*](#)”, meaning “hereafter, we won’t watch the liar ETV”<sup>19</sup>.

**Dear Mr. President,**

The Executive Committee of OSA is deeply concerned by these blatant harassments of the Ethiopian Muslims and the overall widespread human rights violations directed against the Oromo and other Ethiopians and the continued silence of major donor countries of the government, mainly the United States. It is troubling to OSA members, many of which are scholars and voting citizens of the United States teaching at various universities and colleges, that your administration, that gives a large financial support and with close cooperation in military and intelligence, continues its silence while the Ethiopian government brutally terrorizes its peaceful citizens. We are afraid, the attempt by your administration to “protect the interest of the U.S.” by supporting the dictatorial minority regime in Ethiopia is at the expense of alienating the vast majority of the Ethiopian peoples in general and the oppressed Oromo people in particular. We believe such a short-sighted policy is counterproductive as it works against the strategic interest of the United States in the long run.

We believe the real motive of the current harassment of the Muslim community is to suppress dissent mainly in Oromia, Ogadenia, and other regions which have larger number of Muslim population under the pretext of fighting Muslim fundamentalism and “terrorism”. This motive of the regime is revealed when Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, during a discussion with his parliament, pointed to Arsi and Bale zones of the Oromia regional state as the sources of what he called “Salafist” and “Wahbist” ideologies which he labeled as “extremists”. Knowledgeable scholars unanimously agree that there is no real threat of religious extremism of any kind in Ethiopia at large and in Oromia in particular. There is no such a threat today and there has never been a significant sign of threat along religious lines in the past. This consensus of scholars has

been demonstrated time and again during OSA's annual and midyear conferences, including the most recent annual conference, which was held<sup>20</sup> on the campus of University of Minnesota, July 14-15, 2012.

OSA members believe that the current demands of the Muslims in Ethiopia are legitimate: they want to freely elect their own leaders inside the mosque without interference from the government. Their protests continued peacefully for more than six months now. The Ethiopian government authorities characterize Muslim protestors as "terrorists". But they are peaceful protestors who are terrorized by the forces of the regime. Ethiopia is the land of Christians and Muslims<sup>21</sup>. An evenly divided society which developed a religious tolerance and lived together in peace and harmony for hundreds of years cannot suddenly be transformed into an extremist ideology of any religion. It is a bogus accusation created by the current regime.

**Mr. President,**

My immediate past Presidents of OSA have written appeal letters to your Excellency to bring to your attention the gross human right violations and the multidimensional sufferings of the Oromos and other Ethiopians under the current ruling Tigrean People Liberation Front (TPLF) minority regime in Ethiopia. To mention some of these letters:

- 1) On January 3, 2012, Dr. Hamza Abdurezak, President of OSA for the year 2011/2012, has sent you OSA's appeal letter "[on the growing repression and human rights violations by the Ethiopian government](#)"<sup>22</sup>.
- 2) On April 24, 2011, Dr. Begna Dudassa, President of OSA for the year 2010/2011, has sent you [OSA's appeal letter on Human rights violation of the Ethiopian regime on Oromo students](#)<sup>23</sup>.
- 3) On March 2, 2011, Dr. Begna Dudassa, President of OSA for the year 2010/2011, has sent [OSA's letter to UNHCR about Oromo refugees in Libya](#)<sup>24</sup> and a copy of this letter has been sent to the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.
- 4) On November 8, 2010, Dr. Begna Dugassa, President of OSA for the year 2010/2011, has sent [OSA's letter to Development Assistant Group \(DAG\) Members Defending the Report of Human Rights Watch on Oromia](#)<sup>25</sup> and a copy of this letter has been sent to the Embassy of the United States to Ethiopia.

- 5) On May 20, 2010, Dr Haile Hirpa, President of OSA for the year 2009/2010, has sent you [OSA's appeal letter about the unlawful conviction of Oromo political prisoners](#)<sup>26</sup>.
- 6) On March 21, 2010, Dr. Haile Hirpa, President of OSA for the year 2009/2010, has sent [OSA's letter to the U.S. Bureau of African Affairs regarding denial of Oromo scholar on conference on Ethiopia](#)<sup>27</sup>.
- 7) On March 03, 2010, Dr. Haile Hirpa, President of OSA for the year 2009/2010, has sent [OSA open letter to the UN Secretary General about the land grab and eviction of Oromo people by the TPLF led regime in Ethiopia](#)<sup>28</sup> and a copy of this letter has been sent to the U.S. State Department.
- 8) On December 9, 2009, Dr. Haile Hirpa, President of OSA for the year 2009/2010, has sent [OSA appeal on the repeated killings of Oromo immigrants in Bossaso, Puntland](#)<sup>29</sup> and a copy of this letter has been sent to the U.S. State Department.
- 9) On May 03, 2009, Dr. Abebe Adugna, President of OSA for the year 2008/2009, has sent a letter about [pollution of Koka Lake of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia](#)<sup>30</sup> and a copy of this letter has been sent to the U.S. State Department.

Having sent all these appeal letters to your administration, not considering the letters we have sent to the previous Bush administration, with little or no response at all from your office, and, to the contrary, witnessing more support and more friendship with the dictatorial Ethiopian regime, we feel that we have been completely ignored and the multifaceted sufferings of the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia have been neglected by your administration. Such neglect is contrary to your own guiding principles which you articulated during your 2008 inauguration speech<sup>31</sup>. At that time your moving words inspired all of our members as well as the peoples of Ethiopia.

*“To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history, but that we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist. (Applause.)”*

**Dear Mr. President:**

Our members are disappointed with your administration's full support for the minority regime in Ethiopia. Although the current Ethiopian regime is clearly “on the wrong side of history” and the regime has never “unclenched” its fist, your administration continues to “extend its hand” to the regime, abandoning your own cherished principle. I would like to stress that in the absence of a practicable pressure from the United States and Western donor nations, the Ethiopian regime will continue with its repressive and gross

human right violations, ultimately contributing to the overall instability in Ethiopia, which is not in the best interest of the United States.

Finally, the Oromo Studies Association (OSA) once again kindly requests your administration as well as other donor countries, all governmental, nongovernmental, and human right organizations to put pressure on the Ethiopian government to:

- Stop harassing the Ethiopian Muslims by interfering in their religious affairs.
- Release unconditionally or bring to speedy trial all arrested Muslims including all members of the committee of chosen representatives of the Muslims.
- Release all unlawfully detained students, civic leaders and professionals, journalists and other political prisoners.
- End extrajudicial killings, detention, disappearances, torture, and other forms of human rights violations.
- Urge the Ethiopian regime to repeal its "Anti-Terrorism Law" of 2009 together with its current law that prevents charitable organizations from freely moving in the country, and the most recent law that criminalizes the usage of Skype.
- Strongly urge the Ethiopian regime to respect and implement its own Constitution, which on paper, guarantees respect for human rights, promises freedom of religion, of expression, of peaceful protest and democratic governance, which the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia have never enjoyed in the past twenty-one years.

Respectfully,

Mosisa Aga, Ph.D.

OSA President

CC:

1. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton  
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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) is a not-for-profit scholarly organization registered in the United States of America to promote studies relating to the Oromo people in Ethiopia in particular and the Horn Africa in general to inform the public, governments and international community to foster peace, stability and positive social changes in that important region of Africa.

<sup>2</sup> <http://ayyaantuu.com/human-rights/violent-and-deadly-crackdowns-against-worshipers-in-ethiopia/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://qeerroo.net/2012/05/11/4-oromo-muslims-murdered-222-oromo-and-2-amhara-muslims-arrested-and-charged-in-asasa-town/222-oromo-and-2-amhara-muslims-arrested-and-charged-in-asasa-town/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://qeerroo.net/2012/05/11/67-oromos-detained-in-waliso-western-shoa-acused-of-terrorism-and-islamic-extremism/67-oromos-detained-in-waliso-2/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://ayyaantuu.com/horn-of-africa-news/ethiopia/document-ethiopia-widespread-violations-feared-in-clampdown-on-muslim-protests/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://ayyaantuu.com/horn-of-africa-news/ethiopia/document-ethiopia-widespread-violations-feared-in-clampdown-on-muslim-protests/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://ayyaantuu.com/horn-of-africa-news/ethiopia/document-ethiopia-widespread-violations-feared-in-clampdown-on-muslim-protests/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.tadias.com/05/25/2012/voa-reporter-peter-heinlein-detained-in-ethiopia/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://ayyaantuu.com/horn-of-africa-news/ethiopia/document-ethiopia-widespread-violations-feared-in-clampdown-on-muslim-protests/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/14/world/africa/ethiopia-eskinder-nega-dissident-journalist-sentenced.html>

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- <sup>11</sup> [http://newbusinessethiopia.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=760:cpj-condemns-heavy-prison-sentences-of-ethiopian-journalists-&catid=12:internal-politics&Itemid=5](http://newbusinessethiopia.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=760:cpj-condemns-heavy-prison-sentences-of-ethiopian-journalists-&catid=12:internal-politics&Itemid=5)
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.ginbot7.org/2012/06/09/u-s-department-of-state-report-on-human-rights-for-2011-ethiopia/>
- <sup>13</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8575749.stm>
- <sup>14</sup> [http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/2007/05/01/ethiopia\\_blocks\\_opposition\\_web\\_sites](http://nazret.com/blog/index.php/2007/05/01/ethiopia_blocks_opposition_web_sites)
- <sup>15</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/16/business/la-fi-tn-skype-ethiopia-15-years-jail-20120615>
- <sup>16</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM-sJiHIE1o&feature=related>
- <sup>17</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVKgqvBUoGs>
- <sup>18</sup> [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=vaDN9wkr3kU#t=126s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=vaDN9wkr3kU#t=126s)
- <sup>19</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWDsJ8245jA>
- <sup>20</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/2012%20Oromo%20Studies%20Association%20Annual%20Conference%20Program.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> 2007 Census [http://www.csa.gov.et/pdf/Cen2007\\_firstdraft.pdf](http://www.csa.gov.et/pdf/Cen2007_firstdraft.pdf)
- <sup>22</sup> [http://www.oromostudies.org/OSA\\_Appeal\\_Letter\\_to\\_President\\_Obama\\_and\\_Other\\_world\\_Leaders.pdf](http://www.oromostudies.org/OSA_Appeal_Letter_to_President_Obama_and_Other_world_Leaders.pdf)
- <sup>23</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/Appeal%20to%20president%20Obama.pdf>
- <sup>24</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/Dearrefugeesd.pdf>
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/Letter%20to%20DAG%20members.pdf>
- <sup>26</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/APPEAL%20LETTER%20TO%20PRESIDENT%20BARACK%20OBAMA.pdf>
- <sup>27</sup> <http://www.oromostudies.org/OSA%20Appeal%20on%20Prof.%20Asafa%20Jalata%27s%20rejection%20from%20Conference%20on%20Ethiopia.pdf>
- <sup>28</sup> [http://www.oromostudies.org/Open%20Letter%20to%20UN\\_1\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.oromostudies.org/Open%20Letter%20to%20UN_1_pdf.pdf)
- <sup>29</sup> [http://www.oromostudies.org/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20OROMO\\_MASSACRE\\_IN\\_PUNTLAND.pdf](http://www.oromostudies.org/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20OROMO_MASSACRE_IN_PUNTLAND.pdf)
- <sup>30</sup> [http://www.oromostudies.org/OSA\\_Lake\\_Koka\\_Letter.pdf](http://www.oromostudies.org/OSA_Lake_Koka_Letter.pdf)
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/inaugural-address>