

Tokkummaa Humnoota Bilisummaa Oromiyaa (THBO)

**United Liberation
Forces Of Oromiyaa
(ULFO)**



القوات المتحدة لتحرير اورميا

The status of the Oromo National Liberation Struggle and The Prevailing Political Climate in Ethiopia (August 2, 2018)

The recent political development in Oromiyaa and generally in Ethiopia has taken many by surprise. Though the writing was on the wall for a kind of political upshot in due time, no one could have expected that the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led regime of Ethiopia would be suddenly pushed away from its long held political power in a relatively short period. From what we have been closely following, the unfolding development in terms of creating a level plain political space appears promising for now. Yet, given the political history of the empire state of Ethiopia, it should be disconcerting that the present political development could be arrested before it goes far enough to help resolve the underlying political issues that recurrently convulse the empire.

Political convulsions had rocked Ethiopia from time to time to the extent that left significant marks on its political, economic and social orders over the years. Merely taking stock of the revolutionary upheavals that uprooted the decadent and longstanding monarchy in 1974, the 17 years of relentless and bitter struggle headed by various national liberation fronts and the passive resistance of the populace at large against the military junta (*Dergue*) that culminated in the decimation of the *Dergue* in 1991, and the 27 years of reign of the TPLF oligarchy that crumpled early this year and supplanted with reformist elements within the Ethiopia People's Revolutionary Democratic Party (EPRDF) following the sweeping and intrinsically unique social movement that the Oromo youth (Qeerroo) has spearheaded for the last four years vividly demonstrate to what degree the recurring popular revolts had to force Ethiopia to undergo political and socio-economic transformations often at a colossal loss of human life and resource.

Given this trend that Ethiopia has recurrently experienced in the last half a century, the prospect of yet another popular revolt is probable unless its underlying cause is addressed fundamentally. For too long, all stripes of the ruling elites of Ethiopia have conveniently chosen not to seriously reckon with it. When at all they ventured to do so, their commitments by in large remained superficial and their approach lacked keenness. Consequently, Ethiopia has been left to face one tumultuous political situation after another.

At present, it is in the mist of another political quagmire. And what we witness now is a high-stakes endeavor for salvation of the heavily battered empire state of Ethiopia from its demise. However, it remains to be seen whether Ethiopia can capture this opportune moment and genuinely and pragmatically work to do away with its age old political problem or remain captive of its status quo approach and face yet another surge of revolt of unprecedented proportion.

The direction thus far envisioned to weather through the prevailing political climate and arrest the

potentially deepening crisis appears right and promising. There appears a determination, albeit in large part rhetorically, on the part of the EPRDF reformist elements headed by the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, to address the recurring political issues of the empire through democratic and peaceful means. To his credit, though, the practical measures he has so

far taken to create a more democratic political landscape are bold. The release of most political prisoners, the repeal of draconian press laws that muzzled and banned free and independent media, the call extended to all political organizations of any persuasions to officially operate in Ethiopia, the diplomatic moves made to promote peace and shared economic opportunities in the Horn of Africa region prone to cyclical conflicts and natural calamities are significant strides in the right direction.

ULFO commends the Prime Minister for the practical measures he has taken thus far. We hope that he will continue to boldly remove structural roadblocks and help pave the way for the creation of a democratic political order in which all nations and nationalities in Ethiopia can be able to exercise their rights to self-determination.

It is ULFO's political view that Ethiopia rides the wave of crisis owing to primarily two fundamental causative factors: First, its political elites deny the historic fact that the once independent nations and nationalities were forcibly incorporated into the present day Ethiopia through conquest, and they incessantly propagates the narrative that Ethiopia existed for millennia as a nation state; and consequently they refuse to acknowledge the claim of annexation of any one nation and by extension write off the right of nations to self-determination. Second, under its successive rulers, the gross violations of human rights and freedom have remained pervasive.

Unless these underlying issues are dealt with, ULFO believes strongly that the Oromo people as a nation will continue to experience the violation of their right to self-rule, to use their economic resource as they see fit, and to promote their language and cultural heritage freely. Equally, with respect to basic human rights and individual freedom, it won't be unlikely for them to incessantly face egregious abuse. Hence, ULFO is committed to struggle against the blatant violations of these two fundamental rights that the Oromo people continue to experience.

Towards this end, ULFO aspires to work with all Oromo political organizations to help galvanize the human, financial, and material resources necessary for a better coordinated Oromo national struggle that can make a major leap and expeditiously attain its objective - the establishment of the Independent Republic of Oromiyaa. ULFO feels strongly that the unity of purpose amongst all political organizations is critically important for the realization of this objective. If our nation is to emancipate itself once and for all from all forms of oppressions and exploitations, such unity is not an option but a necessity.

In the past, much to the chagrin of the Oromo public, the Oromo organizations failed to unite. Over the last 20 years, on their own initiatives, many of them have made numerous attempts to form unity. In several occasions, in response to mounting pressures from the growing demand of the Oromo public, most of them have also endeavored to unite. However, none has come to fruition for lack of seriousness on the part of some organizations or for unwarranted preconditions demanded or terms dictated by few to effect the aspired unity. Consequently, despite utter displeasure of the Oromo public, the state of unity among Oromo political organizations has remained still elusive.

The impact of this faction riddled state of Oromo political organizations on our national struggle is quite significant. It has stunted the struggle to the level of almost dormancy; so much so that it has frustrated the Oromo public and left them in a state of despair. With no change in sight in the state of affairs of the unity of the organizations, the public took the matter into their hands to resuscitate the struggle. It is this public move that brought about the birth of the Qeerroo movement.

The Qeerroo movement in just four years has put the Oromo national struggle in a breathtaking trajectory. Understanding full well that the Oromo unity is a cornerstone of the struggle, the Qeerroos mobilized the Oromo youth across Oromiyaa to rally behind the motto of *tokkummaa*. They galvanized the entire Oromo mass to act in unison in all matters of the Oromo national

concerns. Merely through peaceful demonstrations and echoing the demand for *abbaa biyyummaa* throughout Oromiyaa, they confronted the naked aggression, the exploitation, and the gross human rights violations perpetrated by the TPLF-led regime. For this, they paid the ultimate sacrifice. None the less, at the end, they brought the most brutal and parasitic regime down to its knee.

ULFO would like to take this opportunity to express its utmost admiration for the gallant sons and daughters of Oromiyaa who faced *Agazi*, the heavily armed TPLF squad, with such bravery to advance the cause of their nation. In the hands of this merciless force, many lost their lives and a staggering number were injured and/or thrown to concentration camps or underground prison cells. The Oromo nation will forever remember those Qeerroos who sacrificed their lives as its martyrs, and that it will one day put up a statue that glorifies their heroic sacrifice. Likewise, it is our hope that historians will studiously record this unique movement that marks a watershed in the history of the Oromo national liberation struggle.

In the end, this historic Qeerroo movement culminated in nudging the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO) to wake-up and stride along the tide of change. In due course, it is this tide that wrestled OPDO to be in line with the ensuing change. More importantly, it is this very tide that sieved out reformist elements from the ranks of the organization and brought them forward to amputate the political arm of the TPLF oligarchy and take over the political power of the empire.

This culmination breathed life into the stale political environment. It rendered a hope of change or departure from the grim past under the draconian rule of the TPLF. It evoked a sense of euphoria within the broad mass. This phenomenon of euphoric feeling is attributed primarily to the commitment that the new Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, has made to broaden the democratic space in order to allow the hitherto politically stifled populace to freely engage in any political process and any espoused political leaning of its choice.

While ULFO appreciates the commitment of the Prime Minister to democracy, it has a serious concern on how far he can go to address the root causes that throw Ethiopia into political convulsion from time to time. The basis of its concern is that he has not yet put forward a concrete policy document that clearly chart out the direction he wishes to pursue in addressing them.

ULFO is of the opinion that the role of this Prime Minister ought to be unique: That he should consider (1) establishing a transition period and (2) preparing an action plan for such period for the purpose of promoting a conducive political environment in which all nations and nationalities engage in a free and democratic discourse and decide on their respective political destiny. In effect, his role should focus on help setting a stage where annexed ethno-national communities, such as the Oromo, can openly express their wishes and aspirations through a referendum and seek a lasting panacea for the age old inherent problem of Ethiopia – the problem intrinsically linked to the nature of Ethiopia as an empire. Hence, as his primary role, the Prime Minister should capture this unique historic opportunity and let the peoples of Ethiopia have, for the first time, a say on their inalienable rights. Equally, all stakeholders of the prevailing political change, on their part, should play responsible and significant roles that advance the change to a state that can help unravel problems that has shackled the Ethiopian empire since its formation. In this respect, ULFO calls upon:

1. The Oromo people to maintain their unity; to remain vigilant of the unfolding change of events; to take an active and responsible part in shaping each course of political events in a way that suit their specific needs as a nation; to cooperatively work with all nations and nationalities in the empire on matters of mutual interest.
2. Qeerroo to remain on guard against the slippage of the revolutionary gains registered thus far; to keep promoting Oromummaa; to focus on engaging only on matters related to the Oromo national interest; to resist the temptation of advancing political agenda of certain political organizations or interest groups and to actually put pressure on such organizations to emulate the Qeerroo movement and form unity of purpose.
3. All Oromo political organizations to take collective responsibility for failing to unite and build one or two formidable national organization(s) until this day; to engage in discussion with a sense of urgency and responsibility and resolve issues or problems that hitherto

precluded the unity of their organizations; to understand well that the interest of our nation should override that of any one organization at this very moment and hence endeavour to close ranks immediately and embark on facing potential challenges that our national struggle could encounter down the road.

4. Oromo intellectuals to be mindful of the division of our intellectuals of particularly the early 1970s along different political persuasions/parties and the loss of traction of the Oromo liberation struggle sustained; to not repeat the same mistake of ideological wrangling that hugely undermined the Oromo national interest; to cease and desist from advancing ones individual or partisan interest at the expense of one of our nation.

Understanding full well that the campaign of marring the flicker of hope for change is on the rise, all concerned should prudently discharge their respective responsibilities of countering such campaign. So far, to derail the change, campaigns of all kinds have been/are still being launched. Some have already inflicted heavy loss of human life and resource. In this regard, ULFO condemns in the strongest terms possible:

1. The ongoing war that Abdi Mohamoud Omar (Abdi Iley), the Somali regional president, and his cohorts wage against our people in eastern Oromiyaa, southeastern Baale and Borana. This war has claimed thousands of lives and displaced tens of thousands from their ancestral land. It still continues unabated as a proxy war meant to resurrect the Woyane oligarchy on one hand and to fulfill the expansionist ambition of Abdi Iley and the like on the other.
2. The barbaric action of Abdi Iley that (a) uprooted over a million Oromo residents from their own land, (b) tortured, raped and killed countless innocent Oromos (c) confiscated their properties, and (d) displaced millions from their land.
3. TPLF desperate actions that instigated ethnic conflicts, for instance, between Oromos in Wollo and Afars, between Gujii Oromos and Geedios as well as Burjiis, and between Oromos in western Oromiyaa and the people of Benishangul that resulted in the death and displacement of many. Such actions were futile attempts meant to merely create chaos that can divert the current political change from its intended course.

In conclusion, ULFO warns that the nostalgia-stricken elements or political entities who drool for the return of pre-1991 Ethiopia *14 xeqilaygizat or kiflehager* should deeply ponder and refrain from advancing a political agenda along this line. Such an attempt would put the empire on fire and the consequence could be dire. The present federal system in Ethiopia, with all its flaws, is actually a bare minimum political arrangement that could potentially keep the different nations and nationalities together within the present empire state of Ethiopia. However, the Oromo people as a colonized nation, should exercise their inalienable right to freely express their collective aspiration for self-determination: the right to establish their own independent state of Oromiyaa or opt for a federation or confederation with nations and nationalities that they have had shared history for millennia. Therefore, it is critically important to respect the wish and aspiration of the Oromo people as a nation. The temptation of imposing any political system or arrangement on the Oromo is counterproductive and unjust. Equally, the fanning of the motto of *Itiyophiyawinet* to merely eclipse *Oromummaa* is politically regressive at a time when the identity politics is at its zenith.

Unity is strengths!
Oromiyaa shall be
free!

The Executive Committee of ULFO