

# By OLF Foreign Affairs Department

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## Executive Summary

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is ready to go an extra mile in search of peaceful resolution of the political crisis in Ethiopia. The OLF will contribute towards any meaningful peace effort, as it did in the past, to reach at a comprehensive settlement to achieve just peace for the Oromo and other peoples caught in the political conflict of the Ethiopian empire state. However, it should be understood, at the outset, that the current conflict and resultant crisis in the Horn of Africa has its roots in the colonization of the Oromo and other southern peoples by Abyssinians over 105 years ago. This colonial domination still persists.

And the current crisis in the Horn of Africa is, on the one hand, a struggle between oppressed people who are fighting for self-determination and, on the other hand, the regime of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that is trying to impose its rule by force. The regime has set loose war, hunger, poverty, and disease to ransack the country. In particular, the regime has been and is systematically violating human rights of the Oromo and other peoples. The enclosed brief:

- defines the geocultural settings of inhabitants of Ethiopia and the strategic significance of Oromia and its people, because of their huge land-mass with close proximity to all cultural groups, their democratic cultural heritage, abundant natural and human resources;
- describes Ethiopia's political landscape dominated by successive autocratic regimes promoted and maintained in power by external forces;

- explains how oppressors are currently destabilizing the Horn of Africa by promoting war with Eritrea, by incursions into Kenya and Somalia to intimidate governments and terrorize their citizens to perpetuate domination over the Oromo and other peoples;
- reveals that the ruling regime is committing gross and systematic violations of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms in order to remain in power in Ethiopia;
- exposes that abject poverty, hunger, and environmental degradation in Ethiopia are by-products of policy of domination and plunder pursued by successive minority regimes, particularly, the TPLF;
- shows that liberation of the Oromo people from oppression and exploitation is essential to secure stability, peace, and development in the Horn of Africa;
- outlines how multilateral and bilateral grants coordinated by the World Bank and IMF have created TPLF oligarchy that plunders resources without reducing the poverty level in the country; and,
- summarizes OLF's proposals to achieve just peace and prosperity for the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia through promotion of voluntary union among peoples to advance joint benefits .

The OLF believes in peace. As the main organ that is championing the right of self-determination of the Oromo people, it fully realizes the present day global reality. It affirms that the international community does have legitimate concern and interest in political stability and economic development of the Horn of Africa. Moreover, the OLF is cognizant of the fact that the day of carving spheres of influence and promoting clients in superpower rivalry has given way to globalization. Further, the OLF firmly believes in the immediate termination of the vicious cycle of political conflicts, economic backwardness, environmental degradation, natural and man-made disasters that today ravage the peoples of the Horn of Africa.

Conflicts and wars should come to an end. Destabilizing causes should be removed from the Horn of Africa. Peace should prevail. In order to pave the way for that, it is suggested that, among other significant issues for the Oromo people, the international community and its leadership:

- support a peacemaking initiative under the auspices of the UN to support and facilitate resolution of the political conflict in Ethiopia;
- oppose forcible denial of the right of self-determination and support the immediate cessation of deployment of the regime's armed forces against peoples resisting its domination;
- use its economic, political, and diplomatic clout for promotion of the cause of just peace and development for the Oromo and other peoples in Ethiopia;
- urge and support special investigation by the UN of illegal arrests, detention, politically motivated prosecutions, "disappearances", and extrajudicial killings of persons of Oromo origin and other oppressed peoples;
- refrain from assisting and cooperating with the TPLF regime to plunder Oromo natural resources; and,
- provide support for the Oromo and other oppressed peoples to develop their human, and material resources as well as their democratic institutions.

The OLF is certain of one thing—a lasting stability and development cannot be achieved in the region until and unless the tyranny of current Ethiopian regime is brought to an end. The OLF is ready for a dialogue to seek solutions for the foregoing issues and other matters highlighted in

the attached brief. Our dream and ultimate goal is to help usher peace, stability, basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, and democracy into the Horn of Africa.

Liberating the Oromo People For Stability, Peace, and Development In the Horn of Africa

## **I. Objective of the Brief**

The Horn Africa is currently being destabilized by the regime of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that has superimposed its tyrannical rule over Ethiopia during the last nine years. War, hunger, poverty, infectious diseases, and denial of human rights and fundamental freedoms are ransacking the life of the inhabitants of Ethiopia. The Oromo people are particularly the most abused victims of the tyranny. The objective of this brief is to:

- demonstrate that the Oromo people and their land, Oromia, are essential factors that impact the political stability, social well-being, and economic development of the Horn of Africa;
- expose how the oppressors of the Oromo people are destabilizing the Horn of Africa to perpetuate oppression of the Oromo and other peoples under their domination; and,
- show that liberation of the Oromo and other peoples from oppression and plunder is a key factor to secure stability and development in the Horn of Africa.

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fully realizes the present day global reality. It affirms that the international community does have legitimate concern and interest in political stability and economic development of the Horn of Africa as in any other parts of the world. Moreover, the OLF is cognizant of the fact that the day of carving spheres of influence and promoting clients in superpower rivalry is giving place to globalization. Further, the OLF firmly believes that the vicious cycle of political conflicts and the accompanying abject poverty and natural disaster that simultaneously ravage the peoples of the Ethiopian empire and the rest of the Horn of Africa should come to an end as soon as possible. However, this cannot be achieved without probing into the underlying causes of these problems and understanding the real issues. And the overall political problem of the empire, the denial of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms, the current Ethiopian-Eritrean conflict, the frequent incursions by the Ethiopian army into Kenya and Somalia, and similar regional problems emanate from the same underlying causes. This brief probes the underlying causes and exposes the core problems within the Ethiopian empire. It also highlights what the Oromo people want and their pivotal position for achieving stability, peace, and development in the Horn of Africa.

## **II. Geocultural Settings**

### **II.1 Geographic and Cultural Context**

The Horn of Africa comprises primarily the countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Djibouti, and the Sudan. The region is punctuated by diverse climatic zones ranging from arid to semi-arid and wetland, from shrubs to savannah woodland and lush forests. The region exudes variety and diversity of flora and fauna. The rainfall is variable and seasonal. Desertification has been making inroads into, and is currently threatening, parts of the region due to natural as well as man-induced environmental degradation. The arid and semi-arid zones where rainfall is too low and/or unreliable are often drought-prone exacerbating poverty and hunger.

The Horn of Africa is the primordial home of homo sapiens and an early outpost of human civilization as recent archeological findings attest. It is the ancestral home of the Cushites to which the Oromo belong. The Oromo people are the largest Cushitic group and the second largest nation in Africa. They have a distinct cultural and linguistic identity of their own. They have inhabited a separate and well-defined territory in the Horn of Africa throughout the millennia (see Map of Oromia next page). Today their population is approximately 30 million—a good half of the total population of the present Ethiopian empire. Oromia, the country of the Oromo people, is 375,000 sq miles (600,000 sq km). It is larger than France, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands combined.

The Oromo people who are a fiercely egalitarian people have lived under a remarkable and complex indigenous democratic system known as Gada before their colonization by Abyssinia. Asmarom Legessa, a leading African anthropologist, who has thoroughly studied the Oromo ways of life, has this to say in his book, *Oromo Democracy: An Indigenous African Political System*:

Oromo democracy is one of those remarkable creations of the human mind that evolved into a full-fledged system of government, as a result of five centuries of evolution and deliberate, rational, legislative transformation. (p. 95)

The Oromo egalitarian culture, their Gada democratic government, and other institutions have continuously endured the last 105 years of continuous open and clandestine war by foreign occupying forces. This remarkable endurance is a testimony to the deeply inculcated Oromo cultural identity and democratic heritage. The Oromo people follow three major religions: Islam, Christianity, and Waqefachaa—indigenous Oromo religion. Because of their democratic heritage, there is no religious extremism or intolerance among the people. True to their democratic heritage, independent Oromo political organizations are coordinating their liberation struggle under one umbrella organization.

The second cultural group in Ethiopia, the Habasha (Abyssinians), consisting of the Amhara (approximately 16% of the Ethiopian population) and the Tigreans (less than 5%) are of Semitic origin. The Abyssinians have a distinct culture and language of their own. Unlike the Oromo and other peoples of the south, their national ethos is characterized by hierarchic social stratification and authoritarian tradition.

The third and fourth groups, known as Omotic and Nilotic respectively, are indigenous inhabitants just like the Oromo. These groups who occupy southern Ethiopia constitute over 25% of today's Ethiopia.

## **II.2 Oromo's Wide Outreach**

Oromia shares borders with all cultural groups in Ethiopia and across the internationally recognized boundaries adjacent to its territory—Sudan in the west, Kenya in the south, and Somalia in the south-east. Consequently, the cultural tie and economic interaction that the Oromo people have with diverse peoples, living adjacent to Oromia's huge land-mass, give them a unique opportunity to cultivate peace, social harmony, and economic interdependence. This

geographic position of the Oromo is highly significant for mutual benefit of the peoples of the region as well as for the benefit of the international community having interest in the region.

### **II.3 Oromia's Huge Resources**

Oromia is a “water-tower” of a drought-prone region that is constantly threatened by desertification. It has 16 major rivers with a total length of about 4,700 km with approximately 366, 907 sq km of catchment area. It has also ten lakes with a total area of about 2,000 sq km. Oromia's average annual rain fall amounts to 1,101 millimeters.

Most of the arable land of the entire Horn of Africa is located in Oromia. Coffee, which generates about 60% of Ethiopia's foreign exchange earnings, grows mainly in Oromia. Oromia accounts for about 80% of the total coffee export of the country. Other major exportable agricultural products such as hides and skins, pulses and oil-seeds are also produced mainly in Oromia. If properly managed, Oromia can supply most of agricultural products needed for all the urban population, people in the arid areas, and drought-affected regions. From the estimated 27.2 million cattle population, about three-quarters of it is found in Oromia. Oromia also has the potential to provide hydroelectric power to the Horn of Africa. The total energy supply of Ethiopia is generated by Oromia river system. In addition, Oromia is a mother lode of geothermal power particularly in the Great Rift Valley section which passes through the heartland of Oromia. Most significantly, Oromia has large reserve of gold, platinum, nickel, tantalum, iron, marble, and other non-metallic and construction minerals. All the mineral exports of Ethiopia are produced in Oromia.

With a huge land-mass, the second largest population in Africa, long standing democratic cultural heritage, and enormous natural resources, it is evident that the Oromo people hold a pivotal position in the Horn of Africa. Yet, as colonized people they remain politically marginalized, economically deprived, and culturally oppressed in the land of their origin. We will next briefly explain why it is so.

## **III. The Political Landscape of Ethiopia**

### **III.1 Conquest and Subjugation by Absolute Monarchs (1889-1974)**

Ethiopia is an empire state. It consists of the core Abyssinian state, which was first founded by the Tigreans and then consolidated over centuries by the two ethnic groups of Abyssinia— Amhara and Tigreans. Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913) of the Amhara ethnic group is the creator of present day Ethiopia. First as a vassal king under emperor Yohannes IV (1871 - 1889) of Tigray, and later on as an emperor, Menelik conquered the Oromo and other non-Abyssinian peoples during the era of “scramble for Africa”. In conquering and incorporating these peoples' territories, he transformed the core state of his ancestors into an empire state increasing its size by two-thirds.

Menelik sought and obtained acceptance by European powers as the only black partner in the “scramble for Africa”. The Abyssinians denied their identity with any black people. They gave their empire the name “Ethiopia” to claim legitimacy based on antiquity and divine authority of biblical proportion. At the same time, the idea of Abyssinia/Ethiopia as a Christian outpost and

that the Abyssinians “have a much higher form of intelligence than do the purely Negro peoples of Africa” was strong among the colonial powers.

Menelik accomplished his colonial conquest by heavily investing in contemporary European weapons in a region where spear reigned. He also acquired advisers skilled in military science from European powers. He employed the strategy of divide-and-conquer to mobilize tribe against tribes, people against peoples.

Menelik and his successors, once defeated the Oromo people, targeted their national integrity by employing the strategy of divide and rule. Hereditary leaders were promoted from among the subjugated peoples to serve as intermediary between the myriad members of the colonial administration. The colonizers consisted of warlords, militias known as "naftenyas", and the clergy all of who were organized into decentralized feudal hierarchies subsisting on levies, slaves, and personal servitude of the subjugated peoples.

It is a historical fact that, on the one hand, the subjugated peoples suffered devastation of genocidal magnitude. On the other hand, slave trade, feudal levies and personal servitude of the peoples provided good life for the conquerors.

Sadly, European powers who were Menelik’s partners condoned the atrocities perpetrated against the Oromo and other victims of genocide. The major powers of the time were interested in opening up the region for trade and the Abyssinian emperor was considered as a partner in the “mission of civilizing pagans and barbarians.”

Emperor Haile Selassie (1930 - 36, 1941 - 1974) consolidated Menelik’s empire by utilizing the art of modern state machinery. With encouragement and technical assistance of foreign patrons, he introduced laws that institutionalized violence against the subject peoples. He ensured that state power was defined and differentiated. Military and civil administrations were rationalized. And he put them all for implementation under a central control to maintain absolute power mainly over the subjugated peoples of the empire. He abolished personal servitude and slavery; but he compensated the colonists for lost feudal rights and privileges—he gave them, by law, property rights over land originally confiscated by Menelik from the colonized peoples. He introduced modern educational system to produce man-power for the state apparatus as well as to serve as an instrument of cultural genocide against the subjugated peoples. He intensively and systematically promoted Abyssinian history, language, culture, and values to the detriment of the colonized peoples.

Unfortunately for the subjugated peoples, Haile Selassie regime’s cultural genocide disguised by the euphemism “social engineering,” was accorded all-round, enthusiastic support by the regime’s foreign allies. In the world then divided into western and eastern blocs, the western powers used the emperor’s regime to contain the expansion of communism in Africa. In return, the powers cooperated to give priority for his security concern, which was essentially the threat of resistance by oppressed peoples against his authority. They assisted him to organize a strong intelligence system as well as build and maintain the strongest military forces in sub-Saharan black Africa.

While members of the royal family, the nobility, and high ranking public officials and their cronies enjoyed life of luxury under Haile Selassie, the country suffered the evils of economic stagnation and natural disaster. Liberation struggles by the oppressed peoples, disillusion among the Abyssinian elites, disaffection by intellectuals in general about the performance of the empire, particularly poor development performance compared to those of newly independent African states, brought the downfall of the emperor's regime.

### **III.2 Socialist Regimentation (1974-1991)**

The Dergue, a military junta led by a group of Abyssinian inner core, came to power (1974-1991) after Emperor Haile Selassie's fall. Discouraged by lack of support from western powers, with intellectual pressure from members of the intelligentsia, the new regime adopted a radical ideology. Thus, to allay counter offensive from supporters of the deposed regime, in desperate effort to stave off liberation movements that were gathering momentum, and to save the empire from disintegration by general upheaval, the military junta joined the eastern bloc by embracing socialism.

At the behest of intellectuals as well as to avert uprising by peasant farmers, it inaugurated a fundamental land-reform program and promised to address the "national question" through a Leninist model. A program of "national democratic revolution" was introduced and the principle of national self-determination was declared. The program promised, in principle, the rights of each nation and nationality to develop its own language and culture. However, the Amhara military clique that formed the core of the Dergue gradually transformed itself into a tightly-controlled, repressive totalitarian party with the support of the Amhara elite. The party took monopoly of state-power and dictated socio-economic policies. It took ownership of enterprises in all economic sectors. It exercised absolute control of all social and political organizations. In short, the regime established its control over the empire's political, economic, and social life. As soon as it consolidated its power, the Dergue regime abrogated the "nationality question" declarations and began to label any advocacy of national rights as "narrow nationalism." It took unprecedented action against thousands of reform-minded intellectuals and eliminated them as "bourgeois elements." As an answer to the "national question", instead of adopting self-determination, it introduced a heinous scheme called "resettlement." Under this scheme over a million settlers were forcibly transferred from the north to the south. This action was underpinned by a political motive and security considerations to change the demographic composition of the non-Abyssinian oppressed peoples of the south. The program had no objective of improving the economic well-being of the multitudes of the destitute people of northern Ethiopia.

In another scheme, with similar objective, it uprooted some ten million people of the rural south and moved them into "strategic hamlets" under a policy of "villagization." This scheme had a double-pronged objective of resource control and surveillance of liberation forces.

The Dergue regime, like its predecessors, maintained huge military and security forces. It used these forces to suppress resistance by the Oromo and other oppressed peoples who were opposed to its continuation of national oppression under autocratic Amhara regimes. Political repression, wars of liberation, natural disaster, distorted economic policy, and mismanagement of resources

were malignant causes of human sufferings during the Leninist Dergue rule. The combination of these factors and the disintegration of the eastern bloc that maintained it in power ushered in its collapse.

### **III.3 TPLF as Successor to the Empire State (1991- present)**

The Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), also known as Wayanne, was promoted in 1991 by its foreign supporters to fill the power vacuum created by the fall of the Dergue regime. This led to the replacement of the Amhara regime by a Tigrean power as was evident to those familiar with the Ethiopian political landscape. With the full approval of the US government, the TPLF marched into the Ethiopian capital in May 1991 and exclusively formed an interim administration.

The TPLF needed a transitional period to consolidate its power. In faithful compliance with the political culture of its predecessors, the TPLF targeted the national integrity of the Oromo people by creating an Oromo surrogate party known as the Oromo People's Democratic Organization (OPDO). After usurping majority voice through appropriation of voting powers by its surrogates, it signed a transitional charter of July 1991 that recognized in its Article 2 that "nations, nationalities, and peoples" in Ethiopia have the right to self-determination including independence. The preamble of the charter used an oxymoron to describe the beginning of a Tigrean era of subjugation and oppression as "the end of an era of subjugation and oppression" in Ethiopia. The charter served as a camouflage for the TPLF hidden agenda of domination. The TPLF initially posed as having accepted the US condition: "No democracy, no assistance." However, that pose was a false posturing. In fact, it was simply a springboard to state power. The TPLF had no genuine desire to democratize the country. What it needed was a transitional period to consolidate its power.

Under the pretext of opening the country for world market as well as assist democratization and structural adjustment, traditional patrons of the Ethiopian empire used the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) to pump substantial amount of money into the coffer of the TPLF. Under the code name of rehabilitation and development, during the last nine years, the TPLF regime received billions of dollars in multilateral and bilateral assistance. The regime used this indispensable bilateral and multilateral assistance to dismantle Amhara-centric state-apparatus and replace it by a more tight Tigrean ethnic controlled institutions. To-day, there is no public institution, be it the military, the judiciary, the civil service, the regulatory agencies, and financial institutions outside the control of the TPLF and its surrogate parties.

The regime cannot claim democratic legitimacy under a situation where it has suppressed political competition and no meaningful participation in the political process exists. Professor Christopher Clapham of University of Lancaster wrote in a book titled *Ethiopian 2000 Elections*, published by Norwegian Institute of Human Rights:

To those accustomed to the uninflected authoritarianism that has been Ethiopia's fate in the past, it may well seem remarkable that [the Ethiopian 2000 elections] could have taken place at all ... . To those accustomed to states even in Africa, with better established traditions of electoral

democracy, they will fall so far short of the standard required as to amount to little more than a travesty.

The TPLF social base is the people of Tigray who are less than 5% of the total population of Ethiopia. That base is fractured by the serious rift that has surfaced within the rank of the leadership of the party. Surrogate parties created by the TPLF do not have legitimacy among the constituency they were supposed to rally for their master. With lack of democratic legitimacy, the TPLF regime is compelled to use force to perpetuate its political power. The following section describes this aspect of the current problems in the region.

#### **IV. Destabilization of the Horn to Perpetuate TPLF Domination**

##### **IV.1 TPLF Violence and Absence of Peace and Security**

The institution of violence built by the TPLF regime, through the assistance of unwitting major world powers and international financial institutions controlled by them, are mobilized to effectively destabilize the Horn of Africa.

Employing the political culture of divide and rule pursued by its progenitors, the TPLF regime is using its institutional capacity to incite people against peoples. The fact that Oromia shares borders with almost all peoples in Ethiopia makes the Oromo people vulnerable victims of the strategy. Constant attempts are being made by the regime, with some success, to create conflict between the Oromo and Amhara, Somali, Gedeo, Benishangul, Gambela, Afar, Gurage, Kambata and others. This act has denied the Oromo and other peoples the right to live together in peace and security.

In order to encircle and destroy Oromo liberation fighters, the TPLF regime has been trying to enlist the support of neighboring countries in addition to the conflicts that it has incited within Ethiopia. Those countries that do not cooperate are intimidated by false accusations of giving shelter to “rebel” forces. And frequently it carries out incursions into their territories under a pretext of “hot pursuit” of imaginary rebels. Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), which was established to promote development and security has also been used as a launching pad for the Ethiopian government’s security agenda. When IGAD mandated the Ethiopian prime minister to use his good offices to resolve the problems in Somalia, he went about to set-up a client regime. In fact, he flagrantly undertook invasion of part of that country under a guise of serving as a facilitator of peaceful resolution of the internal conflicts. This subversive act did not go un-noticed by the Arab League, which mandated Cairo to facilitate reconciliation of Somali forces to which the Meles regime was bitterly opposed.

The Ethio-Eritrean war demonstrates another international dimension of the problem of autocratic rule in Ethiopia. The TPLF regime has embarked upon external adventures to divert attention from its internal problems and to win legitimacy as a protector of Ethiopian sovereignty. Its absolute power over the affairs of the state is conducive to undertake adventures of war without any accountability. It is not only a matter of an evil intention by one faction or another within the TPLF, but it is a matter of absence of institutional mechanism to ensure accountability in the exercise of state power in the country.

## **IV.2 Violations of Human Rights**

The right of self-determination is a synthesis of individual rights that has been accepted by the international community. And it is protected by the International Bill of Human Rights which, in Article 1 (1) of both Covenants, which says:

All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development.

Hence, like any other people in the world, the Oromo and other oppressed peoples in Ethiopia are endowed with the right to self-determination. They are seeking and entitled to freely exercise the options inherent in the right which ultimately belongs to them, and to them alone. The TPLF regime has recognized this right in its own constitution. It has, however, failed to honor its own constitutional pledge as well as its international obligation. It has further resorted to forcible denial of peaceful exercise of the individual and collective rights.

Enjoyment of individual rights, which presupposes the realization of the collective right of self-determination of the people to which the individual belongs has been scuttled by the TPLF. Because of that reality, members of the oppressed people like the Oromo have not been really free to exercise their basic rights and freedom under the policy of the Ethiopian regime. In fact, the regime has unleashed acts of terror against the Oromo middle class in recent years. In one of its Leninist jargons, Hizbawi Adara, the inner strategy document of the TPLF, calls this systematic violence visited on the Oromo elite a move against "petty bourgeois narrow nationalists." Violations of human rights of persons of Oromo origin is part of the regime's policy to destroy the Oromo people's social fabrics in forcible denial of their right of self-determination.

Reports by credible human rights groups, including International Commission of Jurists, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch/Africa, confirm that there is no rule of law in Ethiopia today. According to the ICJP report of 1997, about 76 judges were purged by the TPLF regime. All members of the supreme court of Oromia were expelled in 2000. The regime is among the top five countries in the world for violation of judicial independence. Needless to add that an independent judiciary is an essential institution for the protection of human rights. The TPLF has amply demonstrated that it does not believe in judicial independence.

Extra-judicial killings, "disappearances", illegal arrests, torture, gang-rape, confiscation of property, detention for a long period are systematic and pervasive especially against persons of Oromo origin. The US Country Reports on Human Rights Practices released in February 2001 by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor for year 2000 confirms these inhuman acts. The introduction of the report on the situation in Ethiopia bluntly states:

The Government's human rights record remained poor; although there were some improvements in a few areas, serious problems remained. Security forces committed a number of extrajudicial killings and at times beat and mistreated detainees ... .

According to the Oromo Support Group (OSG), an independent human rights group, established in the UK by human rights activists interested in following violations of Oromo human rights, over 2,500 extra-judicial killings and 800 disappearances of civilians suspected of supporting the OLF were reported from 1992-99. According to Amnesty International's report on human rights in Ethiopia of June 2000, there are 10,000 persons detained, mostly on suspicion of support for Oromo and Somali armed resistance. This is a very conservative estimate and the true figure may be many times higher because human rights violations are more pervasive in rural area where liberation forces are more active. The regime itself has admitted that prisons in Oromia are unable to cope up with the flood of thousands of Oromo men and women detainees.

The TPLF regime is one of the top ten violators in the world and the number one in Africa in suppressing the freedom of expression.

Many hundreds of Oromo refugees have fled and are fleeing the country. The exact number of Oromo refugees in neighboring countries is difficult to know as the refugees do not want to be identified out of fear for the safety of their family and their own. Many refugees have been killed or kidnapped by murder-squads organized by the regime in Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, and South Africa. Others have been subjected to forced repatriation particularly by Djibouti.

### **IV.3 Hunger, Environmental Degradation, and Diseases**

While billions of dollars are poured into the country, the fundamental right to be free from hunger is not respected in Ethiopia. This is happening simply because of TPLF's commitment to only its own people, the Tigreans. Over eight million people who are non-Tigreans are currently suffering from starvation in Ethiopia. For example, in the Borana region of southern Oromia, where the means of livelihood is mainly pastoral, there have been three years of continuous drought-induced famine before 2000. Consequently as no support was forthcoming, 115,000 families lost their cattle and were forced to leave their area in search of food. Many children and adults died from hunger and related causes. When this tragedy was taking place the regime was heavily spending money and other resources on military ventures into its neighbors (Eritrea and Somalia) and liberation forces fighting it at home.

TPLF's cruelty is not limited to its heartless act against hunger victims of non-Tigrean origin. It herded tens of thousands of able-bodied persons, mostly youth in their teens, against their will. Most brutal of it all is that TPLF officers drove these indentured youth over minefields as mine-sweepers. This is a criminal disregard for the lives of the hapless victims. In some instances, semi-starving non-Tigrean people were forced to give contributions for the war from their meager resources desperately needed to buy food for their own survival.

Experts repeatedly point out that vulnerability to famine is rooted in both human and natural causes. In Ethiopia, while drought has been one factor for hampering food sufficiency, the mismanaged socio-political dimension is the major cause for it in recent years. The country's productivity of land decreases by 2% annually due to the absence of proper soil conservation policy; forests have been rapidly decreasing to 3% of the land area from 40% a few decades ago.

Systematically set fires, without regard for the environment, devoured virgin forests, coffee plantations, homes, and rare animals and plants in Oromia, Ogaden, and Sidama in April 2000. These fires were set off in territories where the regime fears presence of liberation forces. Added to the loss of unique flora and fauna, the destruction of the forests accelerates soil erosion and eventual desertification of an already fragile ecology of the region.

The TPLF regime has been pursuing environmentally harmful policies since it seized power in 1991. With total disregard for the long-term environmental consequences, the government has been awarding contracts to investors. These investors are undertaking unregulated mining and mechanized farming in ecologically sensitive and vulnerable areas. The regime has also adopted from its predecessor, the Dergue, the policy of massive resettlement of armed northerners on Oromo land. In addition to imposing their views on the local people as well as seizing and using local resources by force, the settlers have shown wanton disregard for the ecosystem. The “new settlers” have violated the Oromo people’s culture and tradition of high respect for nature. The sacred obligation the Oromo people have always had to protect the environment through balanced use of resources has been undermined.

The right to the enjoyment of an attainable standard of physical and mental health is not respected in today’s Ethiopia. The most crucial disaster facing the Oromo people today is the deadly disease, AIDS. Lack of concern by the regime is understandably frightful for the Oromo people. They vividly remember that Emperor Menelik used small pox as a weapon in his war of conquest against the Arsi Oromo in the 1880's. And today it appears that the TPLF regime is oblivious about it although it is confirmed that 8% of the total population of the country is infected by HIV virus and that every third person of residents of the capital city carries the virus. The bulk of the victims are evidently Oromos. Other prevalent diseases such as TB and malaria are also rampant. They are attacking the population over wider areas and no serious effort has been made by the regime to combat these debilitating and killer diseases.

It is abundantly clear that the current political situation in the Horn of Africa is at a dangerous crossroads. Manifest confrontations between forces struggling for basic rights and fundamental freedoms and a regime that is imposing its domination by a tyrannical rule has been described in the foregoing pages. It is evident that the current political situation in Ethiopia has its root in the political culture and history of the country where autocratic forces come to power and maintain themselves in power through violence. The way the TPLF runs its empire does not allow a democratic political process even among the ruling clique. The crisis that just surfaced among the TPLF leadership clearly shows their lack of capacity to democratically manage even their internal affairs. The tyranny of the group is going to further narrow down the circle of tyrants and their social base.

## **V. Economic Consequences of Policy of Domination**

### **V.1 Rampant Poverty: Policy of Domination and Stifled Development**

The root-cause of Ethiopia's instability today is the commitment of the ruling regime to perpetuate its domination by violence. Abject poverty of the country is the consequence of political instability and economic mismanagement. These dual scourges have been aggravated by

interventions of unwitting foreign powers that either maintain autocrats in power or purposefully manipulate vulnerable weaknesses of the society to promote their own interests. Foreign powers including the US need to reassess their relationship with the current dictatorial and corrupt Ethiopian regime.

The government bureaucracy is cynically corrupt. And under the present regime Ethiopia could not properly develop its human and material resources. The hallmark of the country is war, civil strife, hunger, poverty, wrong economic policy, etc. The political and economic status quo seriously disrupts not only production, but also the distribution of the meager commodities available. Food shortage and famine have become the common feature of the country.

The huge human and natural resources that can easily alleviate poverty is rendered useless by the oppressive political order in Ethiopia. Inability to use available resources reveals the extent of the seriousness of the problem. On the one hand, Oromia's large population and abundant natural resources are considered a political threat by successive minority regimes to be contained through manipulation of socio-economic policies. On the other hand, the Oromo people are engaged today in resistance against their oppressor. Under these circumstances, unfortunately there is no peace and security in Ethiopia to achieve sustainable development.

## **V.2 International Financial Institutions Promoting TPLF Oligarchy**

Regrettably, intervention by the international community has failed so far to positively impact political and economic development in Ethiopia. It has only strengthened the undemocratic TPLF regime. This may be illustrated by intervention, particularly, since the TPLF regime came to power in 1991. As soon as the TPLF came to power, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were mobilized to pump billions of dollars into the regime's coffer for "economic stabilization" and "structural adjustment". During the first four years of its rule, the regime received about US\$3 billion in bilateral and multilateral grants. Further, significant debt-cancellations and rescheduling have been granted by the Paris Club member countries, coordinated by the IMF and the World Bank. The US is one of the major bilateral donors to Ethiopia since the TPLF came to power. The bulk of the multilateral and bilateral assistance is directly channeled to Tigray without concern for regional equitable development. Despite all this assistance the country is still sinking into an economic nightmare.

As mentioned in Section III.3 above, the TPLF has used the generous Structural Adjustment Program as an instrument to make public institutions appendages of the ruling party.

The regime has also distorted the privatization program by converting most of government enterprises to party ownership indirectly. The so-called new "private" enterprises, almost all located in Tigray, are actually owned by the party. These enterprises are registered in the name of third persons to hide their true ownership. For example, the Endowment Fund For the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), Tigray Development Agency (TDA), Sur Construction SCo, Guna Trading House SCo, Dinsho, Tiret, etc., are some of the prime disguised property of the TPLF. Consequently, the party controls the market not only by wielding state power but also as a major supplier of goods and services. There is no distinction between the state and the ruling party. Party enterprises have replaced the Ethiopian public enterprises with the clear knowledge

of the World Bank and IMF. The creation of a free market economy will remain an illusion in Ethiopia for as long as the current regime remains in power. Unfortunately, international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, have turned deaf ear to appeals to carefully assess the negative impact of their economic aid. They have therefore immensely contributed to the creation of a Tigrean oligarchy. All the bilateral and multilateral assistance has not benefited the Ethiopian people, but has let loose on them an economic vampire.

Since the cessation of war with Eritrea, the TPLF regime has been granted by the World Bank more than US\$400 million for the rehabilitation of Tigray region. In addition, a balance of payments support credit of about US\$150 million has been negotiated between the Bank and the regime in March 2001. The IMF also has approved a credit facility of around US\$112 million very recently. Further, Ethiopia is lined up for a large debt-reduction grant under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.

What international donors really miss is proper evaluation of the impact of their money on the internal situation of Ethiopia. Statistics tell that external assistance has not reduced poverty level in Ethiopia. For example, the GDP per capita has fallen from US\$120 in 1973 to US\$100 in 2000. Money seldom creates reform but reform normally generates money. There can be no development unless peace and stability prevails.

## **VI. Prospect For Peace**

### **VI.1 Promotion of Voluntary Union Among Peoples**

The root-cause of political conflict in Ethiopia is the state's forcible denial of the right of oppressed peoples to self-determination. The OLF is committed to the fundamental democratic principle that the Oromo and other peoples, being tyrannized by the TPLF regime, are endowed with the right to decide their own political status and destiny.

To achieve stability and development in the region, national oppression and domination by the TPLF must be brought to an end. To realize this objective and solve the political conflict peacefully, the political will of concerned parties—and ultimately that of respective peoples in Ethiopia and that of the international community—is essential. The policy of evasion of the real issues must cease.

The current struggle of the Oromo people has its root in its opposition to political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural suppression by successive Abyssinian regimes. The fundamental objective of the Oromo liberation struggle, led by the OLF, is to exercise the Oromo people's inalienable right to national self-determination. Its goal is to terminate a century of oppression and exploitation and to form, where possible, a political union with other peoples based on equality, respect for mutual interests, and the principle of voluntary association. If the Oromo people cannot forge a voluntary union with others based on equality, respect for individual and collective rights, and promotion of mutual interest, then the people shall exercise their inalienable right to form their own independent state to promote peace and prosperity.

The struggle of the Oromo people is to regain their dignity, freedom, and human rights. It is not directed against any people but against the system of oppression. The protracted armed resistance under the leadership of the OLF is an act of self-defense. It is a continuation of the resistance undertaken by the Oromo people against successive Ethiopian governments, including the current regime, that have forcibly denied their right of self-determination. The subjugated peoples' armed resistance targets the government's coercive machinery, not innocent civilians.

The OLF recognizes, respects, and fosters the rights of minorities in Oromia. It is committed to their inalienable right to develop their own culture, administer their own affairs, and enjoy all other internationally recognized rights.

The empire state of Ethiopia was created by a strategy of divide and conquer and is currently maintained by divide and rule. This trend must be reversed. The OLF believes in the importance of solidarity and cooperation among peoples in Ethiopia. It also believes that the realization of all parties concerned of the common objectives of liberation of the subjugated peoples, led by their genuine representatives, is essential for eventually fostering fraternity among peoples. Peaceful coexistence is sine qua non for all inhabitants of the Horn of Africa.

## **VI.2 The Role of the International Community**

The conflict in Ethiopia definitely has international dimensions; so must its solution. Promotion of rights recognized by the "international bills of rights" is the duty and obligation of the international community. The right of peoples to self-determination is one of those basic human rights. Securing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is not any longer an exclusive internal affair of a state. This is particularly so since a close link exists between ensuring basic human rights and the maintenance of international peace and security. Under the prevailing global reality the international community can impact—and in fact does impact—the affairs of Ethiopia through:

- promotion of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- supporting the right of self-determination, including decolonization and the right to democratic governance;
- intervention on grounds of humanitarian imperatives;
- bilateral or multilateral exercise of economic leverage.

One or combinations of these mechanisms need to be used by the international community take peacemaking initiative in Ethiopia. Understandably, actions of foreign powers are influenced by calculations of what they consider their economic and security interests. The OLF does not object to expedient application of these mechanisms of intervention by powers to promote their foreign policy objectives. The OLF objects to what violates their duty under the international law, particularly condoning violations of human rights and supporting forcible denial of the right of self-determination of the Oromo and other oppressed peoples. It also objects to complicity with actions of the TPLF causing man-made human disasters such as burning of forests and villages or undertaking forced resettlements. The organization is also vehemently opposed to collusion of any power with the repressive regimes that manipulate the political will of the people for the purpose of negating the people's right of self-determination.

Regrettably, there is a marked trend among international players in Ethiopian politics to use the mechanisms of intervention to negatively impact the cause of just and lasting peace in the region. Appeals to the international community by the OLF, and other liberation forces to make international assistance to the regime conditional on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms of the peoples, has been ignored so far. In fact, logistic and technical supports are provided to forcibly suppress resistance against the repressive rule of the Ethiopian regime. As mentioned earlier, billions of bilateral and multilateral economic assistance is coordinated by international financial institutions to open up the country for international investment. This act is tantamount to facilitating the plunder of natural resources of the oppressed peoples for the exclusive benefit of the regime and its international partners.

The OLF has continuously reminded the World Bank and the IMF, though in vain so far, that the bilateral and multilateral aid they coordinate for the benefit of the TPLF regime has not served, cannot serve, and will not serve the cause of a lasting peace and sustainable development in Ethiopia. To the contrary, it is contributing toward aggravation of an unstable political climate that has been suppressing the release of the productive energy of the people. In the view of the Oromo and other subjugated peoples, this cooperation has helped to maximize the concentration of political and economic power in the hand of a corrupt and repressive minority regime.

The OLF fully appreciates that mutual benefits can be achieved when foreign investors provide investment funds and entrepreneurship in a country suffering from short supply of these essential engines of development. It is also equally aware of the havoc dictators cause to maintain their domination by blinding international donors and bilateral agencies to internal turmoil. The economic problems of the Ethiopian empire state cannot be solved by denying or ignoring the genuine and inherent political demands of the Oromo and other oppressed peoples of the empire.

It appears that the prevailing perception, among powers having interest in the affairs of the region, is that conflicts within the rank of the Abyssinian political forces does not in itself have a significant threat to the regional peace and security as long as one of them remains in control of the Ethiopian empire state. It seems that this policy is inspired by the mentality of maintaining a “sphere of influence” through a client state controlled by a friendly regime. This mentality has helped perpetuate the lack of stability in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. It would be high regret if the current conflict within the TPLF is viewed with similar mentality.

## **VII. What Needs to Be Done**

### **VII.1 Alliance of Political Forces to Terminate Tyranny**

The situation in the Horn of Africa today is pregnant with catastrophes. Therefore, there is an urgent need to abort these catastrophes facing the peoples in Ethiopia to maintain the regional security. There can be no lasting peace and sustainable development without freedom to exercise political, economic, social, and cultural rights. All categories of human rights are indivisible elements of human security and development. Peace and development should not remain hostage of those whose track records reveal consistent use of monopoly state-power. Autocratic regimes subvert stability and sustainable development to perpetuate themselves in power. The OLF is

convinced that the cause of stability and development can be served by promoting unity of struggle among peoples.

Liberation from national oppression and eventual termination of tyrannical rule would pave the way for peoples in Ethiopia—and even those beyond—to join hands to form a political union among themselves. Such a union formed on the basis of equality and voluntary association would usher in a process of negotiation of a constitutional order acceptable to free peoples seeking to establish political union among themselves. Such a political union can be achieved only when tyranny ends and the rule of law begins to take root. The OLF will play its part by joining an interim arrangement with a caretaker function to facilitate the process of forging a constitutional order based on the free will of peoples to be expressed in referendum and other free and fair elections.

As a primary step along this course, the OLF has already met with several political forces across the north-south divide and has arrived at a joint agreement to terminate tyrannical rule. There is a broad agreement to work toward lasting peace through the rule of law protecting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The agreement also calls on all democratic forces in Ethiopia, governments of the Horn of Africa, other members of the international community to support the peoples in Ethiopia to achieve this noble objective. It is only when all parties, both national and international, realize the significance of averting the disasters currently threatening the country in particular and the Horn at large that a peace dividend can be declared.

## **VII.2 An Appeal to the US and the International Community**

The OLF is deeply concerned that the present trend in Ethiopia is leading to more political strife, economic disaster and humanitarian tragedy. The crisis within the TPLF aggravates the situation by inviting further narrowing of the social basis of the minority regime. To achieve just peace and prosperity for the Oromo and other peoples of Ethiopia, the OLF proposes and appeals to the international community:

- to support the right of self-determination of the Oromo and other peoples suffering TPLF tyranny;
- to use their economic, political, and diplomatic clout for promotion of the cause of just peace and development for the Oromo and other peoples in Ethiopia;
- to support a peacemaking initiative under the auspices of the UN to study and recommend mechanisms for resolving the political conflict in Ethiopia;
- to support the release of Oromo and other political prisoners;
- to support UN special investigation of illegal arrests, detention, politically motivated prosecutions, "disappearances", and extrajudicial killings of persons of Oromo origin and other oppressed peoples;
- to refrain from assisting and cooperating with the TPLF regime to plunder Oromo natural resources;
- to oppose forcible denial of the right of self-determination and to support the immediate withdrawal of the regime's armed forces mobilized to impose the political will of the repressive regime on the Oromo and other the oppressed peoples;
- to provide the Oromo and other oppressed peoples to develop their human resources and democratic institutions;

- to counsel their own policy makers to broaden their sources of information before undertaking decisions directly or indirectly affecting the cause of peace and development in Ethiopia;
- to support engaging the OLF and other political representatives of the oppressed peoples in any peace making process; and,
- to investigate the regime's war crime whereby Oromo youths and others were cruelly led to perish in battles without reasonable concern for their lives.

The OLF is ready to go an extra mile in search of peaceful resolution of the political crisis in Ethiopia. The OLF will contribute towards any meaningful peace effort, as it did in the past, to reach at a comprehensive settlement to achieve just peace for the Oromo and other peoples caught in the political conflict of the Ethiopian empire state.

**Victory to the Oromo People !**

**Oromo Liberation Front**