



Open Letter to US, AU & EU Special Envoys on the situation in Oromia
24 November 2022

To:

His Excellency, Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and AU High Representative for the Horn of Africa

His Excellency, Uhuru Kenyatta, former President of Kenya and AU Peace Envoy for the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region,

Ambassador Mike Hammer, US Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa

Ambassador Annette Weber, EU Special Representative for the Horn of Africa

The international community

November 24, 2022

Your Excellencies,

We, the Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association (OLLAA), represent over 50 Oromo communities across the world.

On November 2, 2022, we welcomed the announcement that the Federal Government of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) had signed a peace agreement calling for the permanent cessation of hostilities between the two parties. We express our deep appreciation for the key roles played by the United States and African Union in negotiating this agreement during the AU-led peace talks in South Africa and view this as a crucial first step towards resolving the many conflicts in Ethiopia. However, the Oromo people, who make up more than half of Ethiopia's population, continue to be disappointed by the failure of the US, AU, EU, and the international community to condemn human rights abuses against civilians in Oromia and throughout southern Ethiopia.



Termed “Ethiopia’s *other* conflict” by international media sources, the ongoing conflict between the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), the Ethiopian government, and the Oromia regional government has received distressingly little attention from the media and international community, despite its deadly impact on civilians and long-standing nature. Reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and detentions, as well as government-conducted drone strikes, have been especially rampant. Reports of attacks against Oromo civilians, often due to purported - and tenuous - links to the OLA, have only escalated since the federal government announced a launch of a military operation inside Oromia to combat the OLA in April 2022, and again after the Pretoria peace agreement. Despite this, the AU, US, and EU continue to be hesitant in condemning these atrocities or publically discussing the human rights situation facing the Oromo in Ethiopia.

In the weeks following the Pretoria peace agreement, indiscriminate attacks across Oromia have drastically increased, with multiple drone strikes taking place in heavily-populated areas - killing several dozen civilians. As noted by the Ethiopian Peace Observatory, during the same week that the peace agreement was signed, “no political violence events were recorded in northern Ethiopia”- an incredible achievement - yet, in the same week hostilities “resumed with intensity” in the Oromia region. The Ethiopian government’s intensified attacks in the Oromia region immediately following the peace agreement suggests a lack of real commitment to genuine nationwide peace. Instead, in the south, the Abiy administration continues to choose conflict over inclusive dialogue.

It is important to remember that it was the Oromo youth protest movement that paved the way for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed’s accession to power in 2018 - paying a heavy price for their calls for democracy when the previous administration reacted with violence and suppression. It is devastating for the Oromo that even after that change, the Oromos remain one of the most targeted groups in Ethiopia. And yet, the Oromo, who make up the majority of Ethiopia’s population, represent an important force in the country and are key to achieving lasting peace throughout the Horn of Africa.



In August 2020, 20 US Representatives and four Senators wrote a letter to the former Secretary of State asking for an independent investigation into the June 2020 killing of the famed Oromo activist and singer, Hachalu Hundessa, and other atrocities in Oromia. However, after the outbreak of war in Tigray, the plight of the Oromo and other southerners experiencing human rights abuses seemed to fall by the wayside. OLLAA, as an Oromo advocacy organization that has worked consistently with the international community - in particular the US, EU, and UN, among others- emphasizes that selective justice is not only unjust but can never bring about lasting peace, and risks leading to further polarization and distrust.

Not only has the Oromia region been plagued by political violence since Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018 (well-predating the war in the north), it has also been experiencing extreme drought conditions since 2020. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network has described much of southern Ethiopia as in the “emergency” phase - experiencing extreme levels of food insecurity. Yet, so far, actions taken to resolve the conflict and dire humanitarian situation in Ethiopia have typically failed to include Oromia or much of the southern regions. While OLLAA remains bewildered by the thus-far failure of the international community to address the human rights abuses and conflicts occurring in Ethiopia’s most populous state (which remains central to Ethiopia’s ongoing peace and prosperity), we urge that there is still time to change this.

In the last few months, many individuals across the Oromia region have been victims of violent drone attacks, with children and vulnerable individuals losing their lives. It is essential for global and regional institutions and other peace-keeping stakeholders to work together and call into question the actions of the Ethiopian government, because the restoration of human and civil rights for the Oromo people, who represent an oppressed indigenous majority, will lead to lasting peace, prosperity and stability in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. Ultimately, the road to peace in Ethiopia goes through Oromia.



The Horn of Africa is particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change which is exacerbating existing pressures in the region, including poverty, reduced crop yields and food and water insecurity. Around 21 million people across Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya are already on the verge of starvation and urgently require aid. Countries around the world have been affected by the conflict in eastern Europe, however food insecurity in the Horn of Africa has been especially exacerbated by the drought. UNOCHA has [said](#) that more than 10 million people have been affected in Oromia, the Somali Region and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples (SNNP) regions. In a more specific figure, UNHCR has determined that over 5 million people in Oromia require urgent drought-related humanitarian assistance, with the eastern Oromia region being the most heavily impacted. As of May 2022, 103,000 people in Oromia regions have been displaced due to the drought as well as existing IDPs who have also been affected. This situation is further worsened by the fact the Ethiopian government is obstructing the delivery of vitally important humanitarian aid to affected regions. UNOCHA has also [reported](#) that there is a funding gap of \$177 million to provide humanitarian assistance to drought-affected communities in Oromia.

This, too, is a moral imperative that must be confronted.

In this crucial moment, the US, EU, AU, and the entire international community must not abandon their call for all-inclusive national dialogue. While we continue to believe peace, stability and prosperity *are* possible for Ethiopia and the entire Horn of Africa, this can only be achieved when dialogue is inclusive and genuine. Furthermore, OLLAA is extremely concerned that by continuing to turn a blind eye to these abuses at this critical time, the government will be emboldened to commit further atrocities with impunity. We believe if holistic approaches are not taken to address country-wide political conflicts, it could lead to the further destabilization of the Horn of Africa.



We join the calls of US Congressman Brad Sherman for the continued suspension of Ethiopia from AGOA eligibility until unrestricted food and medicine aid is allowed into all parts of Ethiopia in need, as well as the permanent cessation of ALL hostilities across the country. While the road towards peace has begun, we must continue to hold all parties - including ourselves - to account that it extends to all peoples of Ethiopia.

Yours sincerely,
