

The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) Press Release On The Assassination Of Haacaaluu Hundeessaa And The Current Situation In Oromia, Ethiopia

July 15, 2020



The Oromo Studies Association (OSA) joins millions of Oromos and allies of Oromos in strongly condemning the senseless assassination of the famous artist and political activist Haacaaluu Hundeessaa. Through his music, oratory, and activism, Haacaaluu played a vital role in articulating and communicating the essence of *Oromummaa* and the objectives of Oromo struggle for liberation and social justice. Consequently, as an Oromo cultural hero, he has captured the hearts and minds of millions of Oromos as the demonstrations of Oromos in Oromia and in the different parts of the world revealed.

The Oromo Studies Association denounces the brutal killings, imprisoning of thousands of Oromos for protesting against the assassination and government policies of labelling, attacking, and destroying the Oromo movement for self-determination, freedom, and democracy. The Association finds the steps the Ethiopian government has taken to investigate Haacaaluu's death unsettling. OSA also finds the government's violent suppression of the peaceful protesters undemocratic and lacks legal credibility. Instead of carrying out a thorough investigation to find out the the killers of Haacaaluu, the investigating team is focusing on the political opponents of the regime and publizing unconfirmed conspiracy theories to dfect the attention from the real assassins. Furthermore, instead of addressing genuine Oromo demands, the regime of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed has collaborated with the forces that are subjugating the Oromo, and has taken ideological, political, and military measures that are intended to delegitimize, discredit and destroy democratic Oromo leadership and institutions. We believe that these anti-Oromo forces are after all responsible for the current violence and crisis in Oromia.

The day after Haacaaluu's assassination, the Ethiopian government blocked the Internet and telephone services, and independent Oromo media in the state of Oromia to restrict the flow of information. This was followed by a violent crackdown on thousands of civilians who wanted to give Haacaaluu a hero's send off. It is disheartening that

government security forces summarily executed members of Haacaaluu's family as if the assassination of the artist was not enough.

On the very same day, prominent political activists and opposition leaders like Jawar Mohammed, Bekele Gerba, Hamza Borana and thirty-five other Oromo leaders were arrested. Later Dr. Shigux Galata, Michael Booran, Kennesaa Ayaanaa and several others were arbitrarily arrested. These actions were the continuation of imprisoning prominent OLF leaders such as Yasoo Kabada, Lammii Beenyae, Kaayyo Fufaa, Professor Bayana Ruudaa, Gadaa Bulti, and Abdii Raggaasa. They also imprisoned several members of the Oromo Federalist Congress including Dajanee Taafaa. Interestingly, some of those detained hold foreign passports. For example, Dr. Shigux Galata is a citizen of Germany, while Redwaan Amaan, Yuusuf Bashir, and Micah Chiri are United States citizens. A Kenyan journalist, Yasin Juma was also arrested while covering the protests and government crackdown in Ethiopia. Trusting the prime minister's initial promise to lead the reform process, Jawar Mohammed renounced his US citizenship only to fall into the prime minister's trap and find himself in the notorious Ethiopian prison.

The Oromo Studies Association finds these arbitrary arrests and extra judicial killings extremely concerning. Such violent actions by the government illustrates a complete disregard for freedom of speech and human rights, which are the corner stone of a free and democratic society. It is a breach to the prime minister's promises to the nation in his inaugural speech. It is contrary to the core principles of the Nobel Peace Prize which was given to him in 2019.

OSA strongly and resoundingly condemns violence perpetuated by the state against political opposition and civilians alike. Therefore, we demand the government of Ethiopia to:

1. Establish without delay, an independent commission (including members from international forensic experts) to investigate the assassination of Haacaaluu Hundeessaa;
2. Refrain from acts of violence and release all political prisoners without precondition immediately;
3. End the illegal military Command Posts in Borana, Guji, Wallagga and Western Shewa immediately and return the army to its barracks, and stop the indiscriminate killing of Oromos;
4. Address the fundamental demands of the Oromo people for justice, equality and democracy that propelled the prime minister to power in 2018 promising that he would address the demands but turned against it once in power;
5. Stop harassing, jailing and killing Oromos and members of opposition parties, and immediately start making peace with all including with those who are engaged in armed struggle;

6. Compensate the Oromo people for the destructions caused by the violence and by the notorious Command Post; and
7. Ensure the democratic transition that was initiated by the Qerroo and Qarree movement within a few months in order to avoid further political crisis and bloodshed.

Finally, OSA expresses its utter disappointment with hostile media outlets who, in their broadcasts, portray the Oromo people as hatemongers and killers. We are particularly concerned by the way tax-payer funded and government-supported media outlets such as VOA, Deutsche Welle, and BBC Amharic programs are presenting news stories and analyses about the current violence in Oromia. We believe that the interviews are staged, the sources are unbalanced and unverified; and contrary to journalistic professional ethics their questions are leading to draw a desired conclusion. In so doing, the journalists at these media outlets are not only propagating baseless and hostile propaganda against the Oromo people, but they are also complicating Ethiopia's already too complicated problems. We demand that the journalists covering the Amharic program at of VOA, DW and BBC adhere to true professional principles of journalism by being fair and balanced. We plead to the respective boards of directors of these outlets to take all necessary measures to restrain their journalists from targeting the Oromo people.

The Oromo Studies Association