

JOINT STATEMENT BY OROMO ADVOCACY & HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS: ON PRESIDENT BIDEN'S EXECUTIVE ORDER ON ETHIOPIA

As a coalition of Oromo advocacy and human rights groups, we applaud President Biden's September 17 Executive Order which indicates urgency in taking steps to usher in peace and security in the midst of the worsening crisis in Ethiopia and the region. The first steps are 1) to use new tools to force a ceasefire to end the brutal war in northern Ethiopia and 2) to provide humanitarian assistance to avert widespread famine and deprivation among the innocent victims of that conflict. We endorse an immediate and inclusive ceasefire (see August 18 Press Release). With regard to sanctions, we join our voices with the vast majority of Oromo and other Southern nations who vehemently oppose the war and welcome pro-active measures to halt the suffering and destruction carried out in northern Ethiopia.

However, the Executive Order reveals glaring blind spots. It leaves out of its framing the voices of the Oromo and other southern peoples who have shown themselves to be politically and culturally committed to democratic principles. These populations are looking to the United States to support the flourishing of democratic values in the country. The youth cohort drawn from throughout the country sustained nonviolent pro-democratic demonstrations from 2014-2018 that led to the celebrated political opening in early 2018. While this Executive Order is a step forward, sending a clear signal that the current devastation of war in the north cannot be tolerated, it is important to note that the northern conflict itself is a microcosm of what is transpiring in the South. The Order recognizes only northern belligerents as participants in potential negotiations. Other critical stakeholders such as the Oromo and southern peoples affected by the deteriorating political crisis in the country are not considered.

The Executive Order focuses on the critical issues and challenges that have arisen from this conflict in the Northern regions. To build on this promising start, we recommend that an essential next move would be to acknowledge that the war in the north is a continuation of the suppression of demands for federalism that began in the South and that the northern regional and subregional conflicts have exacerbated misery country-wide, leading to the internal displacement of millions of people, shrinking resource flows, widespread coerced conscription, famine and loss of many innocent lives.

The young people who led as vanguards of democracy and nonviolently and successfully protested for peace and stability are now forcibly conscripted to join the Ethiopian National Defense Forces and sent to the battlefield with little training to face well-armed TPLF units where they become casualties in a war they do not support.

This coalition calls on the US and its allies to assess the position of Ethiopia in its regional and global context to ensure an equitable, balanced, and consistent treatment of nations and regions of both northern and southern Ethiopia. It is also essential to signal a comprehensive understanding of the far-reaching consequences instability can bring to the region and the continent.

The coalition also stands ready 1) to support the "relentless diplomacy" that President Biden called for in his September speech at the UN, 2) to endorse a call to action for an inclusive effort to bring key players, including opposition forces representing Oromia and wider southern Ethiopia, to the table for deliberation on restorative and pragmatic solutions, 3) to provide data, insights, and perspectives on the current state of affairs, and 4) to work collaboratively to achieve the resilient forms of democracy sought by the majority of the population in Ethiopia, breaking the old mold to make way for a new era.

For inquiries contact; info@ollaa.org

Coalition of Advocacy and Human Rights Groups – Signatories

Advocacy 4 Oromia

Melbourne, Australia

Jabdu: Oromo American Women’s Council

Minneapolis, MN

Macha Tulama Association

Washington, DC

Oromia Support Group

Malvern, UK, and Melbourne, Australia

Oromo Advocacy Alliance

Washington DC

Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association

Falls Church, VA

Oromo Human Rights and Relief Organization – OMRHO

Oromo Menschenrechts und Hilfsorganisation

Hanover, Germany

Oromo Professionals Group

Washington, DC

Team Free Oromia and #OromoProtests

Washington, DC

Union of Oromo Communities in Canada

Ontario, Canada

West Wallega Human Rights Defenders

Minneapolis, MN