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OLLAA SUPPORTS RIGHTS OF OROMO TO CELEBRATE IRREECHA HARVEST FESTIVAL FREE FROM AGRESSION BY ETHIOPIAN SECURITY FORCES: URGES CAUTION

*By
Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association*

Falls Church, Virginia – the Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association (OLLAA) supports the right of the Oromo people in their home state of Oromia to peacefully assemble and celebrate one of the most important Oromo cultural holidays, its harvest festival, Irreecha, on October 3-4, 2020. OLLAA strongly opposes efforts by Ethiopian security forces to limit participation and political expression, to expand its military style presence and to provoke citizens engaged in this longstanding peaceful celebration.

The Irreecha holiday has gone on for many years to celebrate the harvest season and for the Oromo people to celebrate their heritage, language, history and culture as a source of ethnic and regional pride. In the past, it has also been a forum for peaceful political protest and expression. Both types of peaceful demonstrations are fully legitimate and permissible in a democratic system. Any effort by the Ethiopian government or its security forces to stop such free speech should be considered a limit on freedom of speech and unacceptable.

What is perhaps most concerning is the increased military-style presence of security forces in Oromia and reports of a military parade this week, actions that seem to signal the intent of the Ethiopian government. This has occurred at the same time the United States has partnered with the Ethiopian Ministry of Defense to strengthen Ethiopian defense forces. OLLAA supports efforts to combat global and regional terrorists organizations such as Al-Shabaab and Al-Qaeda, but raises concerns about providing more capability to Ethiopia's forces at a time when it's been documented by human rights groups that security forces have abused their power by killing innocent civilians.

OLLAA urges caution by Ethiopian security forces and respect for citizen rights to avoid a repeat of 2016 when government forces violently clashed with citizens. The Oromo people have every right to peacefully voice their opposition to Prime Minister Abiy's policies and governance, in this forum or any other.

On the other hand, the recent resignation of a key member of Ethiopian's national election board further demonstrates the diminishing of democracy in Ethiopia and the need for an independent and natural election authority agreed to by all parties. We urge and call up to the Ethiopian government to return to a democratic path.

OLLAA is an umbrella organization that presents dozens of Oromo communities around the world including in Africa.

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