



Lessons from the Ongoing Oromo Revolution and the Way Forward

15 July 2016

1. Introduction

The Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) is established to struggle for the liberation of Oromia and the establishment of democratic republic of Oromia as specified in its political programme and its members and the Oromo nation at large have paid immense sacrifices for this sacred objective. The current Oromia-wide revolutionary protest against the occupying Ethiopian regime is a continuation of the struggle that has been promoted by the OLF for nearly half a century.

For the last 130 years, the Oromo and the other peoples in southern Ethiopia have been caught in a vicious circle of tyranny that is deeply rooted in a colonial conquest at the end of the 19th century. Ethiopian rulers of Abyssinian (Amhara-Tigray) origin have been ruling over them supported with the use of armed violence.

Armed settlers called *naftanya* (riflemen), who owned land which was confiscated from the Oromo, ruled over Oromia up to the 1974 Ethiopian revolution. The revolution that overthrew the imperial regime of Emperor Haile Selassie was hijacked by a military junta, which ruled the country with terror until 1991.

The Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) regime, which rules Oromia with martial law today, has not only inherited the militaristic and authoritarian styles of their predecessors, but also intensified their abusive political and economic practices. The extractive economic policies of the past regimes are put back in place and the impunity with which the lives of innocent people had been destroyed by past Ethiopian regimes has become even worse under the TPLF.

As numerous reports from human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Horn of Africa Human Rights League clearly indicate, the brutality of the TPLF regime is threatening the very survival of the Oromo people.

Hence, needless to say here that the political goal of the Oromo struggle led by the OLF, namely the formation of independent Republic of Oromia is as relevant, if not more so, as it was when it was ratified by the political programme of the OLF. In fact, in tandem with the intensification of tyranny against the Oromo under the Tigrayan ruling elite, the Oromo struggle for independence has been enhanced; coordinated and waged nationally and internationally, it has entered the final chapter. However, as we will indicate later, the struggle needs to be much more sharpened and coordinated in order to stride forward to the realization of the ultimate goal.



2. The current uprising: a decisive step to independence

As mentioned above, the root cause of the unrest in Oromia today is the century and a quarter long colonial domination and illegal occupation of Oromo country by successive Amhara and Tigrayan (Abyssinian) rulers. The view that if the TPLF regime is removed the cause of the unrest in Oromia will settle and peace will be restored is myopic: the “Master Plan”, lack of democratic rule, human rights abuse, land-grabbing etc. that have triggered the ongoing Oromia-wide protest do not in themselves constitute the root cause; they are its manifestations.

The colonization of Oromia is the root cause for the crisis. Therefore, the aim of ongoing Oromo revolution is, and must be, not only to remove the TPLF regime from power, but go beyond that and achieve independence from the vicious circle of tyranny that has kept our people in bondage for the last 130 year.

The Oromo struggle is waged for a just cause. Therefore, the Oromo youth are facing the guns of the TPLF regime holding high the objective of liberating their homeland from colonial occupation. Their cherished aspiration is freedom from subjugation and building an independent state of Oromia. They have no desire of replacing one form of Ethiopian state with another.

The uprising is supported by the entire Oromo nation who have been participating in the protests in their tens of thousands all over Oromia. Consequently, the wind of revolution is blowing all over Oromia: the only obstacle standing between the people and the rebirth of free Oromia are the occupying forces of the TPLF regime.

The current uprising has refuted many of the misrepresentations of the Oromo which the Ethiopian ruling elite have been using to rule over them. As we have seen during the last eight months, wherever the TPLF-led rule is dismantled, the Oromo have, contradicting the picture of the “chaotic tribes” with which Abyssinian elite have depicted them, been quick in setting up peaceful democratic governance, maintaining law and order and organizing self-rule, based on their centuries-old Gadaa traditions, avoiding breakdown of law without exception.

Furthermore, the national consciousness and solidarity reflected in the spontaneous uprising throughout the entire Oromo country, showed that our people are ready to build their own state and control their destiny as an independent nation. It is important to note here that the self-discipline and sense of fairness and justice exhibited by the Oromo towards non-Oromos including the Tigrayans amid the TPLF violence is simply extraordinary. The conduct of our people should win admiration from freedom and peace-loving peoples of the world. It should also convince international organizations to support the quest of our people for justice and recognize the legitimate demand of the OLF for national self-determination.



3. Resilience in the face of adversity

Although the uprising has proved beyond doubt that the Oromo are a peace loving people, the TPLF has shown consistently that it is the most repressive regime that has ever occupied Oromia. The regime has made it abundantly clear that it will not leave Oromia without bloodshed. It has persecuted peaceful Oromo protestors with utter disregard of all moral considerations and any thought about the long-term danger its actions pose even to the regime itself and its supporters.

At the time of writing, eight months after it started in Ginchi on November 12, 2015, the Oromo youth uprising is still going on across the width and breadth of Oromia. The regime continues also with its atrocities against Oromo of all walks of life on an unprecedented scale. In particular, university and high school students are targeted by the police and military forces of the regime, hunted down and shot at with live bullet, beaten, tortured, molested and imprisoned, or summarily dismissed from schools and universities. So far hundreds of students and unknown number of civilians including children under the age of ten, pregnant mothers, and old men and women over seventy have been murdered. Tens of thousands have been arrested and detained, and countless Oromo refugees fled their home country and many have perished in the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean Sea.

The aim of the TPLF regime's atrocities is to create the fear of and acquiescence to its power. The regime thinks by beating, torturing and killing the youth it can kill the aspiration of the Oromo nation. However, the result was the opposite. It showed that no amount of killing, torture, disappearances, displacement or imprisonment will make the Oromo quiescent any more or save the regime from an impending demise.

Paranoid of any organised Oromo group, the TPLF regime has labelled peaceful Oromo political activists and leaders of registered political organizations "terrorists" and rounded them and large number of people and imprisoned most of them in concentration camps as all of the country's prisons are filled.

Nevertheless, the Oromo people have remained firm and are demanding freedom or death. Experience from the last twenty-years has taught the Oromo that terrorism is a Woyane (TPLF) character. That taking lives of Oromo youth with impunity is a vicious method used by the regime with the aim of intimidating the rest of the Oromo population to prolong its political life is well-known and courageously defied. Its Agazi forces have been using their horrible method of punishing and humiliating the Oromo with rape and beating. However, the Oromo have refused to be scared or humiliated.

The courage and resilience which our youth have shown under barrages of live bullets fired at them during peaceful demonstration, the house to house search and lethal beatings by the Agazi during the last eight months has become a source of courage to all Oromo and invigorated Oromo revolutionaries and freedom fighters to intensify the struggle. Consequently, the Oromo at home and in the diaspora have risen in unison and reinvigorated resolve to regain their independence. By and large, the shape of a free and liberated Oromia is emerging.



4. The Woyane regime in disarray

The nationwide Oromo revolution that erupted in November 2015 was not anticipated by the TPLF regime. Therefore, the tyrannical regime is unable to cope with the speed, intensity and consistency of the Oromia-wide civil disobedience and mass rallies or suppress them in spite of the brutal crackdown exercised by its armed forces, police, and the notorious Agazi Special Forces who have been butchering unarmed children, students, farmers and city dwellers across Oromia.

As it is losing its grip not only on power, but sense of sanity, the TPLF regime is becoming increasingly scared and violent without reservation. It has been spending vast public funds including international humanitarian aid on building its killing machines. However, no amount of military armament can prevent its impending demise. It is to be remembered that the number of tanks did not save its predecessors, particularly the Derg regime from an inevitable downfall and international condemnation which had been the fate of dictatorships everywhere in the world.

Politically, the TPLF regime is in deep crisis. The unprecedented waves of protests in Oromia has led to a deep mistrust and even fear of its “partner” party in Oromia, the surrogate Oromo People’s Democratic Organization (OPDO). This has led to the division of Oromia into eight military command posts and the imposition of direct marshal rule over it under eight TPLF army generals. Thus, as the repressive system which had maintained its hegemony is irrecoverably debilitated by the sudden volcano of the Oromo uprising, the regime is tittering on the brink of total collapse.

The internal political crisis of the regime is also complicated by diplomatic ones. For the first time, the Oromo struggle for freedom is gaining international recognition. The crimes which the regime has been committing against humanity is exposed by the media and Oromo diaspora to the international community. Furthermore, truthful and detailed documentations of the blatant human rights abuse which the regime has been perpetuating against the Oromo have been made by human rights organisations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

Members of the international community, particularly the European Union, and governments around the world have, for the first time, shown concern about the Oromo people. Consequently, the Oromo people have started now to feel that the world has not forgotten them. The OLF is immensely grateful for the concern shown by international community.

However, press releases expressing “grave concern” about the mass killing of the Oromo by Ethiopian state security forces alone will not persuade a dictatorial regime like the TPLF regime to respect human rights. We urge the UN, the African Union and their member states to put pressure on the TPLF to stop its atrocities against our people.

5. Our stand on Ethiopian political organizations

Some Oromo academics and politicians may argue that the *naftanya* elite view the Oromo as a force for democratizing the Ethiopia-empire state. However, the fact on the ground is the direct opposite. Ethiopian political organizations have never cared to understand the cause of Oromo struggle properly.



However, that does not stop them from prescribing a solution they see fit. This particularly is the position of *naftanya* political organizations.

As reflected in many of the articles produced during the last eight months in reaction to the Oromo uprising, the attitude of the *naftanya* elite is hostile to the Oromo movement. All kinds of rationalizations are used to deny solidarity to the Oromo. Indirectly, and perhaps unintentionally, their attitude supports the TPLF's violence against the Oromo.

Giving away the Oromo people's inalienable rights of national self-determination, by yielding to pressure from others, will place the OLF or any other Oromo political organization at odds with the Oromo people since today the Oromo are fully aware of their birth rights and struggling to achieve it. Therefore, on our part we will not allow that Oromo human and material resources be tapped for the promotion of Ethiopian ruling elites' interests.

The Oromo youth are sacrificing their lives to free their natural and human resources from colonial exploitation and rehabilitate the environment that has been destroyed for decades under consecutive Ethiopian regimes. They want to revive the Oromo culture and language, developed their economy and live with dignity. The victories they have achieved so far and the national independence they are yearning for are not negotiable.

We believe that understanding this factual reality will guide Oromo political players. We say that the recognition of Oromo sovereignty, that is to say an independent Oromo state, and the right of our people to their land and its natural resources, is a starting point for a constructive dialogue between Oromo political organizations and any non-Oromo political parties or groups about the future. This is a fact which those who will form a coalition with the Oromo should recognize.

The Oromo are a nation that will not be dominated anymore. It is a nation of vibrant youth, of energetic youth full of poets, authors, artists and cultural activists who are fully aware of their rights and strive to put their nation in its right place among the family of nations and states. Needless to say those who are trying to capitalize on the sacrifices paid by the Oromo youth and come back to power and rule the Oromo and exploit their resources are wasting their time.

6. The urgent need to build a national consensus

The Oromo unity of purpose is never more required than now. The Oromo people inside and outside Oromia are mustering their resources and intensifying the revolution to hasten the demise of the terrorist regime. The Oromo people, young and old, have totally rejected the Woyane regime. Not only have they rejected the current rule openly, but also denounced the Ethiopianness imposed on them.

The Oromo people have spoken in one voice. They demand freedom of Oromia. Different Oromo political and civic organisations should understand the root-cause of the ongoing Oromo revolt and its emancipatory nature as a matter of urgency in order to contribute constructively to its success and the emancipation of our people. It is to be remembered that misinterpretation of the Oromo cause by some quarters within the Oromo national movement has shackled the progress of the national struggle and diminished its success so far.



The goal of the struggle should be articulated crystal clear once and for all to avoid misinterpretation and confusion. We stress the fact that understanding the Oromo popular demand for sovereignty by Oromo political organizations is of paramount importance to make their contributions in the achievement of the objective for which our people have paid immense sacrifices.

The long and proud history of the Oromo nation teaches us that our forefathers held conventions to deliberate and legislate on critical national issues known as *Tumaa Seeraa* at critical junctures. The OLF believes that it is our time, responsibility and obligation to come up with an honest *Tumaa Seera Qabsoo* right now and work accordingly to determine the future of Oromia.

To this end, we intend to initiate an Oromo Convention that should adopt a document of Oromo National Consensus that guides the behaviour of different Oromo political actors in their endeavour to represent the Oromo cause and act in the interest of the Oromo nation at all levels, be it internal or external.

The OLF stands ready to play a leading role in organizing such a Convention. Naturally we expect that Oromo scholarly, religious, and civic organizations, elders, as well as all Oromo political organizations will also play a leading role as equal partners, in contributing to the process of organizing and shaping the outcome the Convention. We invite also intellectuals to make their contributions to this effort without reservation, fear or favour. Oromo media organizations are expected to play a significant role for the realization of the Convention as well as holding political actors accountable once a Consensus is adopted.

The Convention we envisage will not only produce a clear roadmap that takes our nation to independence, but also provide a much needed code of conduct for Oromo political actors. We believe that once agreed upon and adopted by the majority, the National Consensus will help in devising a transitional structure for Oromo self-governance during the post-Woyane period and beyond. Our action now can have a significant impact on the fate of our nation, and be under no illusion, so does our inaction.

Oromia shall be free!