



## Press Release

25 June 2018

### RESPONSE OF THE OROMO LIBERATION FRONT TO PM ABIY'S CALL

The speech made by Ethiopia's Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed on June 19, 2018 in the Ethiopian Parliament calling for reconciliation is admirable and his call for peaceful settlement of conflicts in Ethiopia deserves consideration. However, we will take this opportunity to reiterate the goal of the struggle of our organization, the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), for more than 40 years, to come to the concrete content of our response to the call.

It is a well-known fact that the relationship between the Ethiopian state and the Oromo people is not based on an agreement or a political contract entered voluntarily by both parties. The Oromo people were dragged into it against their will. Ethiopia occupied Oromia by force and denied the Oromo people the right to identity, enslaved them, and used their resources and labour, put them in darkness and lived so far. Needless to say, that Oromia has been under occupation and was ruled by force for more than 130 years. It was out of this reality that the OLF was formed in 1973 to organize and lead the Oromo people in the struggle for the liberation of Oromia. The same persistent reality also created the current unrest in Oromia.

The OLF is one of the oldest political organisations in Ethiopia today. It was one of the main liberation organisations that fought to end the Military rule of Colonel Mengistu Hailemariam and played a significant role in shaping the transitional arrangement after the fall of his regime in 1991. However, the OLF was pushed out of the transitional arrangement by the Tigray People's Liberation Front-led Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (TPLF/EPRDF) regime in 1992. Since then, the OLF has made efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict between Oromo people and the Ethiopian state on many occasions.

We have, time and again, warned the TPLF/EPRDF regime that situation in Ethiopia is a recipe for a devastating instability in the region – a region already troubled by civil wars, failed states, famine and other natural disasters, and that solving the conflict between the Oromo people and the Ethiopian state would contribute in stabilising the Horn of Africa as a whole. The TPLF/EPRDF leaders' obsession with total control of power has been a constant obstacle to democratic dialogue and opportunity for peace. Ignoring our call for a peaceful resolution of the conflict, the regime continued to wage its war of annihilation against our people.

Suspected of being members, supporters or even sympathizers of the OLF, tens of thousands of Oromos were murdered, and many more were arrested, imprisoned and tortured by the TPLF/EPRDF's security agents for the past 26 years. The vast majority of those arrested were kept in prison for years although not charged with a crime. Many died in prison. Many came out of prison without limbs and other physical harms; many incurred mental and other health problems that will stay with them for life.

The trauma caused by the TPLF/EPRDF regime is incurred not only by individual prisoners or their families but also by the entire Oromo nation. Many Oromos are still in prison and the whereabouts of our members who were kidnapped by the TPLF/EPRDF security agents and made to disappear is not yet known. The Oromo nation shall not forget the premeditated onslaught against it, its territory and its very existence.

We are proud of our people and the gallant Oromo youth, the Qeerroo, who have resisted the TPLF/EPRDF tyranny persistently for the last many years, became examples for the peoples of the other Regional States in Ethiopia, and created a political condition that brought Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed to power. Perhaps, he could speak with confidence because he came to power borne on the courage and selfless sacrifices of the Qeerroo. We hope he and his party would realize that as well.

We are also impressed by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed's courage and sense of responsibility. That does not mean we do not have our concerns and reservations. Primarily, we are concerned because he represents a deep seated authoritarian political system. His promises are not yet institutionalized and may not be valid once he is pushed out of office.

Furthermore, that the Prime Minister himself is praising Abyssinian leaders who had conquered our country, butchered our people and brought them under Abyssinian domination is also disconcerting. The Abyssinian emperors he praises were not champions of human rights and democracy. They represented a predatory lawless system which was devoid of respect for human life.

In addition, the experience from the 1974 revolution whereby the military junta made many unfulfilled promises to get the support of our people and finally carried out massacres after consolidating its power is in our collective memory. Finally, the behaviour of the TPLF/EPRDF leaders who promised in 1991 to work with the OLF and other political organizations to promote freedom, democracy and justice, but turned out to be the most murderous group in the Ethiopian history, is another indicator of the true nature of Ethiopian political culture.

However, we are ready to take the chance promised by Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed in his speech and use the moment to promote the rule of law and advance the cause of the Oromo nation. The OLF is based not only on the goal of bringing about the liberation of Oromia, but also an aspiration to promote understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all the peoples in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. As an organization with a political program which has the strongest support from the majority of the Oromo people, we see Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed's call as an opportunity that will allow us to struggle for the goal it was created – a national self-determination.

It is inconceivable for liberation to have any meaning without the return of illegally taken lands, wealth, and the properties to their owner - the Oromo people. To allow the existing economic power possessed by the TPLF/EPRDF regime, its supporters and its collaborators to continue is to allow the continuation of their domination over the lives of our people. What is more, for some reason our people are being massacred daily in all corners of Oromia even after the state of emergency is lifted. It is, therefore, a fundamental principle of our struggle and strategy that liberation must embrace more than nominal political liberation and democracy.

We may have our differences with Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed on matters of our national goal but not in the lofty ideas he presents on the rule of law, civil rights, peace and reconciliation. As the first leader of the Ethiopian state to come up with such lofty ideas he has won our admiration. It is also our wish that his mission to establish the rule of law and peace meets its goal.

The primary purpose of a sovereign state is to safeguard the security of its people. The Oromo experience, over the past 130 miserable years, has been nothing but a collective trauma of lack of security, subjugation, displacement, and living under unimaginable abject poverty. Free Oromia will be the surest way of ensuring the collective security of its people. Living in a safe country, where people can live in peace and are able to bring up their children, is a basic human need. The alternative, continuing to sustain the forced unity of Oromia and Ethiopia, is recipe for disaster. You cannot expect safety from a system that has been inflicting collective trauma for such a long time in the first place.

However, we welcome Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed's call for peaceful resolution of conflicts, of course with our goal of Oromo national self-determination and liberation of Oromia in sight. Whether the Ethiopian leader is an Oromo or an Abyssinian, the right of self-determination is basic to the struggle being waged by the Oromo people.

Our struggle is to secure our people's inalienable right to national self-determination. Here, our first task is to end occupation, oppression, and exploitation of our nation and homeland. Having accomplished that, the second task is to persuade our people to establish their own legitimate government. It is this government of the people that can negotiate on behalf of our people as to whether to establish a political unity with other nations and nationalities or go their own way to establish their own independent state of Democratic Republic of Oromia. The choice will be decided by the people themselves.

Oromia shall be free!

Oromo Liberation Front (aka: OLF- QC)