



Oromia Global Forum

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OPEN LETTER Re: Upcoming Visit to Ethiopia by the US Secretary of State

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

The Oromia Global Forum ([OGF](#)) - a global alliance of Oromo civic, professional, faith-based organizations, prominent human rights defenders and activists, residing in North America, Europe, Australia, Asia, and Africa welcomes your upcoming visit to Ethiopia. It is a country that has been undergoing significant political, economic and social turmoil over the past several years. We understand that you will have a critical role to play in ensuring peace, security and stability in Ethiopia, and we hope that you will use this opportunity to advocate for the human rights and dignity of the Oromo people, the largest nation in Ethiopia and Horn of Africa.

The Oromo people have long suffered political persecution, economic exploitation, social discrimination, dehumanization and marginalization at the hands of successive Ethiopian regimes. Under the current leadership of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, thousands of unarmed Oromo civilians have been killed, over one million Oromos have been displaced by joint operations of Ethiopian armed forces, the security and extremist paramilitary Amhara Fano, and more than three million Oromos are suffering a devastating famine caused by a combination of natural drought and man-made, mismanaged policies. The Oromia Global Forum is calling on you to use your influence and position to pressure the Ethiopian government to take immediate action to address the following urgent concerns:

1. *Release all Oromo political prisoners*

The Ethiopian government has arrested and detained numerous Oromo activists, journalists, and opposition party members and leaders on charges of “terrorism” and other fabricated crimes. Many of these individuals have been subjected to torture, inhumane treatment, and lengthy periods of detention despite their cases being dismissed repeatedly by the courts. We urge you to press the Ethiopian government to release all Oromo political prisoners, including Abdi Regasa, Lami Benya, Dawit Abdeta, Kennsa Ayana, Michael Boran, Geda Oljira, Geda Gabbisa, and others who are currently languishing in Ethiopian prisons. The above listed Oromo Liberation Front [OLF] leaders were acquitted and their cases dismissed by the Ethiopian Federal Supreme Court and Oromia Regional Supreme Court but they are still kept in jail because the government refused to release them. We call on the Secretary of State to request the immediate release of these and all other political prisoners, and ensure the protection of their human dignity and safety. We also urge you to press the Ethiopian government to lift the house arrest on Mr. Daud Ibsa, the OLF leader, and all restrictions on the OLF members, including opening of their offices and conducting political activities freely.

2. *Hold accountable those who are responsible for the killings of innocent Oromo civilians*

We are deeply concerned about the continued wave of violence against the Oromo people and other peoples, including the killing of six innocent Oromo people in West Shawa zone using aerial attack early this month, the killing of a health professional and entrepreneur Badhasa Akkasa, and the killing of three Oromo demonstrators in Guji who were protesting against the recent arbitrary re-demarcation of Oromia, and their towns and villages without any consultation with the affected people. We call on you to use the good offices of the Secretary of State to pressure the Ethiopian government to hold those responsible for these heinous crimes accountable and bring them to justice.

3. *Bring an end to the denial and delaying of life-saving humanitarian aid*

Halt exportation of food while people are suffering from famine in Oromia

The Oromo people are facing an acute humanitarian crisis due to drought and the government's use of famine as a weapon of war against innocent civilians. Many Oromo farmers and pastoralists in Borana and Guji have lost their crops and livestock, leaving them without food and income. Despite this, the Ethiopian government continues to deny and delay the delivery of urgent humanitarian aid to the people and instead orchestrates the export of food to other countries, while thousands of Oromos are dying of hunger. At this moment, Ethiopia's food export is driven by political propaganda, to give a false impression that the country is self-sufficient, in order to buy military equipment for its internal war on the people. We urge you to pressure the Ethiopian government to immediately stop denying and delaying the delivery of humanitarian assistance, to halt exporting food in order to provide for those who are miserably affected by famine in Oromia.

4. *Negotiate with OLF-OLA to immediately halt/end the war in Oromia and resolve contentious political differences peacefully*

The conflict between the Ethiopian government and the OLF-OLA has caused immense suffering for the Oromo people at the hands of the Ethiopian government, including massive displacement, frequent drone attack and massacre, loss of life, and destruction of property. We call on you to pressure the Ethiopian government to immediately halt the ongoing war in Oromia and enter into a negotiated peace deal with OLF-OLA mediated by impartial and capable international third-party negotiators. The Ethiopian government must accept and respect the practical implementation of constitutional rights of the Oromo people to self-determination and work towards a lasting peace by resolving contentious political differences via popular decisions, rather than perpetuating destructive war and military confrontations with OLF-OLA and other political forces.

5. *Open the political space, and enable access to the people and information on the ground*

The Ethiopian government has fully locked up Oromia. As a result, no single media, or human rights organization, nor humanitarian organization has access to the people on the ground to report the extreme human rights violations and humanitarian crisis in Oromia. The totalitarian practices of the dictatorial regime of Ethiopia, and its consequent complete blockage of information must end.

In conclusion, the Oromia Global Forum urges you to use your position and influence to advocate for the rights and dignity of the Oromo people and other peoples in Ethiopia. We hope that your visit will result in meaningful action and tangible improvements for the Oromo people and other marginalized populations, who have been suffering under successive tyrant regimes of Ethiopia, for far too long. The US commitment to democracy is being tested in the Ethiopian arena. The largest groups are yearning for democracy but that aspiration is suppressed at every turn.

Sincerely,

Jemal Ebrahim M. Sadik, Executive Director
Oromia Global Forum

CC:

- Molly Phee (Mary Catherine) Phee, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs of the United States
- Mike Hammer, Special Envoy to the Horn of Africa, Bureau of African Affairs.
- Geoffrey Parker, Senior Ethiopia Desk, US Department of State
- Nora Dempsey, Senior Advisor for Diaspora Engagement, US Department of State