

**Joint Open Letter to the United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Support of the
use of the Legal name *Finfinnee* by the U.S. Embassy**

November 30, 2023

The Honorable Antony Blinken
United States Secretary of State
The State Department
2201 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We, the undersigned Oromo-American scholars and professionals (OS&P) together with our colleagues in Europe and Australia, write to express our concern about the unprecedented online attack against the Head of Mission in Ethiopia by some Amhara extremists. The extremists are reportedly “outraged” because the Embassy posted content online that referred to the capital city of Oromia and Ethiopia by its original name, Finfinnee.

Historical record clarifies that in 1887, Emperor Menelik’s wife renamed the city of Finfinnee (which means hot spring in *Afaan Oromo*) as “Addis Ababa” (new flower in *Amharic*) following the forcible incorporation of Oromia into the Abyssinian Empire (later renamed the Ethiopian Empire in the 1931 Constitution of Emperor Haile Selassie). During the era of Emperor Menelik (1889-1913), Ethiopia instituted an assimilationist policy that centered on the Amharic language, Amhara national identity, culture, and Orthodox Christian religion at the expense of the languages, religions, and cultures of other nations and nationalities, which is why Finfinnee was renamed as Addis Ababa. This assimilationist policy—which would last from 1889 to 1991—was designed to facilitate the conquering and transferring of resources from the conquered peoples including the Oromo, the single largest national group in Ethiopia, and to gradually erase indigenous languages, cultures, and identities. For instance, *Afaan Oromo*, the Oromo language, was banned and it was not permissible to teach, preach, write, and broadcast in the language up to 1974. Even today, the Orthodox Church does not permit preaching and publishing in *Afaan Oromo*. Oromo Orthodox Christians are denied the right to worship, teach, learn, and reason their religion in their language.

During the 1960s and early 1970s the oppressed nations and nationalities resoundingly rejected the assimilationist policy. They established multiple liberation fronts that battled the government forces resulting in the defeat of the last unitarist military regime in 1991 and thereby adopting a new constitution that recognizes nations and nationalities and the establishment of a federal system.

Referring to places by their original names does not in any way threaten anyone’s safety and security nor will it lead to the breakup of a country, as some extreme online voices claiming to

represent the Amhara suggest, it rather demonstrates knowledge and respect for the indigenous name of a city. Most importantly, the use of *Finfinnee* by the Embassy as a legal name is consistent with what the previous EPRDF led government declared in 2017 that both *Finfinnee* and Addis Ababa are legally acceptable under the country's law. Further, a nationality based federal system strengthens, not weakens, the will and potential of the various nations and nationalities to co-exist peacefully.

Another example of this extremist group's deep-seated hate and discrimination against Oromo language and identity took place earlier this year when Oromo Orthodox leaders demanded to be able to preach to their followers in their language, *Afaan Oromo*. Because of this request, Amhara extremists accused the priests of ethnicizing and dividing the religion, called for protests, excommunicated the Oromo priests, and facilitated attacks against them. In contrast, when the Tigrayans officially formed their Synod, these Amhara extremists did not show the same degree of outrage.

Mr. Secretary, as Oromo-Americans, we are appreciative of not only the recognition of the capital city's original name Finfinnee, but also of the State Department's role in encouraging a negotiated resolution of the devastating war in Oromia. We strongly believe that the only hope for peace and stability in the country is to fully enforce its constitution and its principles of federalism, guarantee the equality of nations and nationalities as enshrined in the constitution, ensure human, political and cultural rights are respected, and enforce the rule of law. Peace in Oromia is paramount for peace in Ethiopia and the region. Furthermore, we believe that a genuine all-inclusive peace negotiation of the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC), and the Federal Government is the only way to end the five years long war in Oromia.

Finally, we wish to take this opportunity to thank the State Department for prioritizing ending the devastating war in Oromia as part of our nation's foreign policy initiative and thank the Head of Mission in Ethiopia, Ambassador Ervin Jose Massinga and his Mission personnel for their outstanding effort to work with and support all regions and peoples of Ethiopia.

CC

Honorable Michael McCaul
US House Foreign Affairs Committee
Honorable Ben Cardin
US Senate Foreign Affairs Committee
Ambassador Ervin Massinga
U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia

Respectfully,

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