

Ethiopian Government's Political Propaganda Disguised as an Opinion Piece

Yohannes Gedamu's disingenuous OPED, "Hachalu Hundessa's death exposed an unlikely anti-Abiy alliance", published in Al Jazeera on 7/28/20

By Oromia Global Forum

Oromia Global Forum is a global alliance of Oromo Civic, Professional, and Faith-Based Organizations and individual proponents of Human Rights, residing in North America, Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa. Our mission is to enhance Oromo unity, discuss, analyze and deliberate on man-made and natural disasters as well as human rights abuses plaguing the Oromo nation, and design and deploy strategies and interventions to mitigate the plights of our people.

We recently came across the above article by Mr. Yohannes Gedamu, evidently a piece of partisan political propaganda, published as an OPED in your very reputed international news outlet, Al Jazeera. The management and the entire member organizations of OGF are extremely disappointed that Al Jazeera editors allowed such a glaringly obvious piece of political propaganda, riddled with outrageous inconsistencies to slip through its editorial review process unnoticed and get published as an OPED.

OGF would like to take this opportunity to thank professionals like Mr. William Davison for instantly noticing the Ethiopian Government's Political propaganda that Mr. Gedamu propaganda piece disguised as objective analysis which is "disingenuous and distorts international understanding of the situation in Ethiopia." As individual OGF members who were born and brought up in Oromia but left the country to escape persecution, torture, and extrajudicial killings, we can't agree more.

Dr. Abiy Ahmed's regime disappointing track record that Mr. Gedamu attempted to sugarcoat

Tweets Tweets & replies Media Likes

 **William Davison** @wdavison10 · 1d ✓
Hard to know where to start with Yohannes Gedamu's @AlJazeera latest

Disingenuous partisan analysis distorts international understanding of the situation in Ethiopia, and so contributes to ongoing turmoil

The media should take more responsibility

The current regime in Ethiopia came to power in 2018 on the back of the Oromo youth (*Qeerroo* and *Qarree*) led popular uprising ignited in 2015 and forced the resignation of the then PM H/Mariam Dessalgné in 2018. Shortly after, the new regime introduced several reforms such as “the release of thousands of political prisoners, allowing the return of opposition politicians from exile and legal registration of their political parties, and the repeal of repressive laws that was out in place to paralyze local independent media, civil society and opposition political parties” (Amnesty International)^{1,2}.

The return of the exiled opposition politicians and parties also revealed something the new regime seems did not expect; the overwhelming popular support the returning opposition politicians and parties commanded as demonstrated by the unprecedented turnout of Oromos in millions to receive their beloved Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and its leaders (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gEYGgO2u8iM>)¹.

The new regime taken aback by the overwhelming public support for the opposition seems to have abruptly decided to decelerate the pace of change it introduced. The alternative scenario could be the so-called change was unreal in the first place but staged for the purpose of luring all opposition forces to return to the country for easy control and elimination. OGF suspects the second scenario.

The euphoria over the introduced change was still on the rise when the regime began signaling its determination to remain in power for the foreseeable future. Using COVID 19 as excuse, it postponed regional and national elections, vowed to revise the constitution to replace the current multi-national federal system with a unitary state where one language, one culture and one identity dominates in a country of about 84 nations and nationalities. This is promised under the bogus pretext of taking the country back to its past imperial glory of pre 1974, a glory that never existed for the oppressed nations and nationalities but for Imperial Ethiopia’s ruling class, the Amhara-elites.

The regime and its neo-Neftegnas supporters, a group strongly opposed to or

¹Amnesty International, (2020). Ethiopia: Rape, extrajudicial executions, homes set alight in security operations in Amhara and Oromia. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/05/ethiopia-rape-extrajudicial-executions-homes-set-alight-in-security-operations-in-amhara-and-oromia/#:~:text=Amnesty%20International's%20report%20reveals%20that,people%20dead%20and%20hundreds%20displaced.&text=They%20died%20instantly.>

²Amnesty International (2019). Ethiopia 2019. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/ethiopia/report-ethiopia/>

Accordingly, the regime immediately declared a brutal war on Oromo that make up more than 40% of the country's population and the citizens of the other oppressed nations and nationalities calling for equality, justice, and free and fair election. According to Amnesty International, since Abiy's regime declared war on Oromos, Ethiopian armed forces, the federal police, regional police special forces, local administration officials, armed allied militia, and youth vigilante groups, especially the traditionally ruling group settled in Oromia, have carried out serious human rights violations in places such as East Guji, West Guji, and Wollega. These targeted locations are believed to be Oromo Liberation Front (OLF)'s strong hold.

The regime and its neo-Neftegna supporters target the same Oromo youth (*Qeerroo* and *Qarree*) that were instrumental to its ascension to power. They consider Oromo opposition parties and leaders, especially the leaders of the Oromo Liberation Front and the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) as enemies to be eliminated. As Amnesty International reported, they are carrying out extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, tortures, rapes, forced evictions, destruction of property and other forms of ill-treatment. The recent assassination of Hacaaluu Hundeessaa, a renowned Oromo singer, song writer and revolutionary, is part of this grand campaign.

Simultaneously, the regime and its supporters are engaged in aggressive propaganda campaigns to frame Oromo youth and opposition party members and supporters at home and abroad as Ethno-Nationalists, inciting ethnic conflict and committing extra judicial killings of non-Oromo citizens in Oromia. Nothing is farther from the truth than this bogus claim. Internationally, they are engaged in aggressive propaganda campaigns against diaspora Oromo intellectuals and activists speaking on behalf their people subjected to the regime and its supporter's atrocities. The primary purpose of this propaganda is to distract international communities' attention from the regime financed defense, police, and militia forces

extrajudicial killings of Oromos in opposition strongholds throughout Oromia. The reason for these heinous crimes is obvious; to illegally remain in power for as long as possible.

The extrajudicial killings and destruction of properties that are claimed to have been committed by Oromos have been known to be preplanned and executed by government operatives to blackmail the Oromo struggle for justice and incite conflict among people. This has been the tactic of this government under the principle of ‘divided and rule’ to maintain its grip on power

The interest of the regime’s primary supporters, especially the Amaharas who are the creators, rulers, and primary beneficiaries of Imperial and/or Colonial Ethiopia, aligns fully with that of the regime. Their shared interests are dismantling the federal constitution that protects the rights of all nationals and nationalities to govern themselves, forcing Amharanization a.k.a. Ethiopian Nationalism on non-Amahara citizens, assert to rule the country with brute force.

Mr. H. Cohen’s Tweet of 24 June 2019

embedded here succinctly captures the rationale behind the behaviors and actions of the regime’s ardent supporters; to “restore Amhara hegemony over all of Ethiopia that existed for several centuries prior to 1991.” It is this shared vision and objective of the regime and its neo-neftegna supporters that inspires individuals like Mr. Gedamu to illegally misuse and exploit public trust and platform to advance their hidden political agenda.



How did we get here?

Emperor Menelik II of Imperial Ethiopia conquered free nations and nationalities south of the Abyssinian empire, including the Oromo, Gumuz, Benishangul, Sidama, Kambata, Gurage, Wolaita, Somali, etc., between 1883 and 1900^{3,4,5,6}. As part of their colonial strategy, the predominantly Amhara Imperial ruling class that ruled the empire through 1974 used racist colonial policies to eradicate the identities of the non-Amhara groups and excluded them from economic, education, and employment opportunities. The policy legally recognized only Amharic as a national language and Orthodox Christianity as State endorsed religion. This carefully socially engineered country in the mold of one language, one culture and one identity at the expense of all the other peoples of the country was then labeled as a brand “Ethiopia” and relentlessly promoted “Ethiopian Nationalism” as an Orthodox Christian Country with Amharic as its only national language. Frighteningly, this is exactly what Dr. Abiy’s regime and its neo-Neftegna collaborators are frantically working to reintroduce.

This system relegated the rest (those who resisted abandoning their identity, culture and religion) to 2nd class citizens. People who did not have Amharic as their first language were discriminated against in all areas of life including education, jobs, politics, the judiciary system, and the economy. The glaring inequality the system engendered, specially the debilitating dual land tenure policy guaranteed land ownership by family lineage for northerners, and expropriated the ancestral

³Baxter, P.T.W., 1978. ETHIOPIA'S UNACKNOWLEDGED PROBLEM: THE OROMO; *African Affairs*, Volume 77, Issue 308, is
Pages 283–296,

⁴Herbert S. ⁵Lewis, 2001; Jimma Abba Jifar: An Oromo Monarchy Ethiopia 1830-1932, 2001-11-01) ve

⁵infoplease: <https://www.infoplease.com/world/countries/ethiopia>

student uprisings calling for land reform in late 1960s. The then student movement culminated in deposing the emperor in 1974 and ending the feudal form of governance. The movements at the time also led to the creation of liberation fronts to address the demands of nations and nationalities for self-determination.

The military regime that took power in 1974 became dictatorial, totalitarian and could not resolve the question of nations and nationalities for self-determination. The military junta was defeated by liberation fronts including the OLF, TPLF and EPLF in 1991. The EPLF declared independence of Eritrea and the OLF gave a chance for peace trying to implement a free and fair election in order to democratize the empire. But to no avail, the TPLF decided to monopolize power and rule the country using the satellite parties that it created for all nations and nationalities.

The OLF is the most beloved, the most accepted and supported Oromo political organization, among the few Oromo Organizations, which participated in the introduction of the currently existing federal system and the formation of Oromia as one of the federal regional states in Ethiopia. Despite its tremendous contributions the OLF was intentionally ousted from the political transitional process by the TPLF. TPLF led by EPRDF imposed a reign of terror on the Oromo people. Any proud Oromo or nationalist Oromo was labelled as an OLF member or supporter and subjected to extrajudicial killings, torture, imprisonment, displacement from ancestral land, and all kinds of persecutions. The Oromo people suffered immensely under the TPLF led EPRDF regime to which the current PM of the country and his team belonged.

The TPLF and its supporters including its satellite party members dominated all areas of business and the economy using systems of corruption in ways that are similar to apartheid for over 27 years.

As the TPLF criminal enterprise with its satellite parties worked hard to obliterate Oromo and Oromia, Oromo youth intensified their peaceful struggle demanding justice and equality. The regime retaliated by assassinating and incarcerating thousands of Oromo youth, accusing them of being OLF members and supporters. The irony is that the supposedly OPDO dominated EPRDF regime,

rebranded as the Prosperity Party that self-identifies as a reformist government, invited OLF and others back to the country. In doing so, it promised to allow the returnees to peacefully participate in a free and fair democratic process. And yet, it is now hunting and incarcerating the returnees exactly the way its predecessor, the TPLF dominated EPRDF did. This same group that served in the TPLF dominated EPRDF is now accusing OLF for collaborating with TPLF to oppose it. Where is the truth?

We understand the complicated and rapidly evolving group and party relationships in Ethiopia's recent political dynamics sounds confusing. However, the factors and incentives that are controlling the actions and behaviors of the various actors are not. Both the previous TPLF dominated EPRDF and the current neo-Neftegna dominated EPRDF are terrified with the prospect of entering into a competitive free and fair political process to compete with representatives of the most populous and richest region, Oromia, and the other equally rich but previously oppressed nations and nationalities. That is the rationale for TPLF to have provided lip service to democratic values and federal form of government but to have ruled the country as dictators.

The neo-Neftegnas addicted to unique privileges and opportunities, though those privileges were eroded over the last 30 or so years, are also equally terrified with the prospect of participating in competitive democratic process, the outcome of which will likely further empower the previously oppressed nations and nationalities to have more say in their regional affairs and control their resources for their citizen's use.

The team currently ruling the country, fully aware of the crime it committed, as it repeatedly confessed at the peak of the Qeerroo and Qarree protest, the departure of TPLF, and during the appointment of Dr. Abiy Ahmed, seems to be deeply concerned with the prospect of being held accountable should it relinquish

power through elections. It is this converging interest that explains the newfound love between the neo-Neftegnas and the regime that is putting the country on an extremely dangerous path toward civil war should they continue to kill and incarcerate opposition party politicians and prolong and/or further delay holding national elections.

Ethiopian Government propaganda and Mr. Gedamu's dubious analysis are presented in quotations and rebuttals are given bold italics text below.

“During the violence (this refers to the spontaneous protest at home and abroad that started as soon as the assassination of Hachaaluu Hundessa was announced and still continues today), scores of innocent Ethiopians were murdered for the sole "crime" of belonging to a certain ethnic group, mostly Amhara.”

This bogus assertion repeated also by Prime Minister Abiy's surrogates, senior advisors, and supports such as Mr. Gedamu have been crowding social media. The truth is that the overwhelming majority of the victims (killed, incarcerated, and targeted with bogus character assassination campaign) are predominately Oromos!

“The violence...drew renewed attention to the ethno-nationalist detractors of Abiy's government. More importantly, it exposed the dangerous alliance. The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) - the political representative of the Tigray minority which dominated a coalition government for years before Abiy took office - and some radical Oromo political organizations formed to undermine the reforms that are being enacted by Ethiopia's first Nobel Peace Prize laureate to end the country's ethnic divisions.”

These are the most outrageous allegations only desperate dictators like Dr. Abiy and his team as well as their fanatic supporters have been throwing out hoping somehow it will stick. Currently, several versions of it are lurking on internet, in addition to saturating airwaves and print media in Ethiopia since the regime fell off TPLF's good book and began attacking. Mr. Gedamu is simply reposting the bogus allegation as OPED. It is also important to again remind readers that PM Abiy and all his team were part of the TPLF led EPRDF regime. In fact, Abiy served as one of the top spy agents of the TPLF led government herding people to their torture and death quarters.

“The violence that followed Hacaaluu's tragic murder drew renewed attention to the **ethno-nationalist** detractors of Abiy's government”

Note that the folks Mr. Gedamu and Dr. Abiy now refer to as “Ethno-nationalist” and “Detractors of Abiy’s Government” are the same folks who paid enormous price in blood and treasure to fight TPLF and eventually paved the way for Abiy to ascend to power. The Prosperity Party team and their neo-Neftegna supporters coined and began labeling all Oromos demanding their right to self-determination and retain and develop their language, culture, and identity as such. Similarly, by all accounts, including Mr. Gedamu, no other citizens suffered (murdered, and incarcerated in mass and resources expropriated/looted and transferred) like Oromos. The TPLF-dominated EPRDF regime, of which all the individuals and parties currently in government belonged to, are rejected by all nations and nationalities.

“The Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) - the political representative of the Tigray minority which dominated a coalition government for years before Abiy took office - and some radical Oromo political organizations formed to

undermine the reforms that are being enacted by Ethiopia's first Nobel Peace Prize laureate to end the country's ethnic divisions. After Haachaaluu's murder, rather than allowing the relevant authorities to investigate the crime and punish the perpetrators, the TPLF and ethno-nationalist Oromo groups embarked on a blame game and intentionally raised tensions across the country.”

Dr. Abiy and the Prosperity Party team targeted OLF as their number one enemy the very day the senior leaders of OLF landed in Finfinnee and they witnessed millions of Oromos literally carpet Finfinnee for as long as the eye could see from all corners of the city. The same day the ruling team began blowing their fake propaganda claiming a sudden partnership between TPLF and OLF. These are the same guys who worked for TPLF and murdered OLF members and supports throughout their tenure as TPLF employees! How convenient, Mr. Gedamu!

“Oromo leaders who expected Abiy, himself an ethnic Oromo, to fight solely to expand Oromo influence over the federal government were disappointed by his policies aimed at achieving national reconciliation.”

This is probably the most baffling claim for playing a prophet and magically detect what Oromo leaders expected and what disappointed them. At all times the Oromo leaders uttered a word in person or imprint, they conveyed a single message – hold the constitutionally mandated and required election now! No, they are not “disappointed by his policies aimed at achieving national reconciliation.” They and the entire 40+ million Oromos and all the other nations and nationalities are not just disappointed but ready to fight to stop Abiy and his cronies from reversing the gains that has been achieved by the bloods

and bones of their children. They will not allow Abiy to take our country back to pre 1974 colonial political order.

Conclusion

Yesterday when the Oromo youth were peacefully fighting the TPLF led EPRDF for change, they were heralded as hero and applauded for their sacrifices only until they ascended to power. Today, after ascending to power, they reversed their stand and defaming the same people when they know very well that the Oromo people's struggle is not directed against any group of people, but is for justice, equality, and genuinely democratized federal system through a fair and free election. Mr. Gedamu knows this truth but chooses to ignore it for political expediency.

In fact, Abiy's supporters and our detractors know this fact very well. But they are deliberately trying to divert to race to blame the victimized Oromo people to cover up their crimes and their effort to revive a 19th century imperial and backward system of slavery. This is a system, where Oromos and other marginalized nations and nationalities of the country are considered as second-class citizens. Their land is confiscated, and they are used as free laborers.

This is where their Oromophobia comes from. As well explained in this letter, Oromos are not willing to accept the stories, lies, and deceptions of the old ruling bandits that are now trying to come back. That is why they are using all means to defame the Oromo people.

In this effort, Mr. Gedamu and other supporters of this government are sponsored by Abiy and his embassies around the world. Their goal is to suppress

the Oromo people by silencing Oromo intellectuals, students, businesspeople, and Oromos cultural heritage.

Their effort to hurt diaspora Oromo professionals through blatantly false and fabricated allegations and telephone calls to their employers with utterly fabricated accusations have awfully failed as all of them have been cleared of false accusations after thorough investigations. Unfortunately, our brothers and sisters at home are paying heavy price as the regime and its supporters continue to murder and incarcerate them far from eyes and ears of the international community. It is our hope that Al Jazeera would also take the same measures as Facebook, employers, etc. after learning the facts we listed in this piece. We also hope Mr. Gedamu and his group stop the destructive path they are on and join the Oromo people and other nations and nationalities to build a free and fair tomorrow for all the peoples of Ethiopia as they so choose.

Oromia Global Forum

Signatories:

1. Advocacy4Oromia
2. Bilal Oromo Dawa Center
3. Canaan Oromo Evangelical Church
4. Charismatic International Fellowship Church
5. DMV Oromo Islamic Center
6. Gaadisa Sabboontottaa KP
7. Global Gumii Oromia
8. Global Oromo Advocacy Group
9. Global Waaqeffannaa Council
10. Horn of Africa Genocide Watch
11. Human Rights League of the Horn of Africa
12. International Oromo Lawyers Association
13. International Oromo Women's Organization
14. International Qeerroo Support Group

15. Network of Oromo Studies
16. Mana Kiristaanaa Fayyisaa Addunyaa
17. Oromo Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church
18. Oromo Community of Bergen
19. Oromo Community of Oslo
20. Oromo Communities' Association of North America
21. Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church of Los Angeles
22. Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Church of Washington DC Metropolitan Area
23. Oromo Evangelical Lutheran Mission Society
24. Oromo Human Rights and Relief Organization
25. Oromo Legacy, Leadership and Advocacy Association
26. Oromo Lutheran Church of Baltimore
27. Oromo Relief Association in USA
28. Oromo Parliamentarians Council
29. Oromo Political Prisoners Association
30. Oromo Scholars and Professionals
31. Oromia Support Group
32. Oromo Studies Association
33. Tawfiq Islamic Center
34. Tawhid Oromo Islamic Center in Minnesota
35. Union of Oromo Communities in Canada
36. United Oromo Christian Church in Australia
37. United Oromo Evangelical Church
38. Wabii Maccaa Association
39. Washington DC Metropolitan Oromo SDA Church