FOUNDING A NATIONAL COUNCIL OF OROMIA

To Chart a Roadmap for Oromo National Liberation Struggle

(A Proposal)

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to the integrative liberationist
Reformist
our move is Separatist.
to the radical Nationalist
it is a de-colonization process
long overdue!

(In my Book, "ON OUR ANCESTORS' BONE," a collection of my poems coming soon).

I. PREAMBLE

The present proposal recommends the founding of a National Council of Oromia as a first step toward transforming the long protracted Oromo national (liberation) struggle from stagnation to a more dynamic, inclusive, and active political force. This urgent need for an inclusive national dialogue among Oromo political organizations and the general public is compelling at least for two reasons: first, our struggle for democratic rights has been slowed down by the Ethiopian regime which seeks to assert and maintain its power indefinitely using lethal force; second, instead of cooperation and forming organizational alliance, Oromo political elites hindered the struggle and reduced it to clashes of interest over power, and consequently, the struggle suffered major setbacks such as the lack of ideological clarity and organizational discipline, i.e., transparency and dynamism, among others.

Hence, there are two main aims for the present project: first, it is believed to increase awareness within areas that are regarded as important to revitalize the Oromo national struggle for
democratic rights. Second, it is hoped to encourage collaboration in the Oromo general public, between individuals, and political organizations that have showed no need in the past to solve practical problems and accomplish tasks collaboratively. As the project will evolve into practice, it is expected that possibilities and hindrances will become more obvious, which necessitate careful handling of differences, issues, and attitudes with democratic principles.

For the purpose of this project it is essential to delineate in the future meanings of terms and concepts central to the project. These include, among others: people, nation, democracy, rights, self-determination, union accord, roadmap, national council, league, organization, front, party, protest, nonviolent revolution, emancipatory resistance, and grassroots.

The call for founding a National Council of Oromia and opening a national dialogue among the Oromo general public and Oromo political entities is imperative to set a Roadmap for Oromo struggle, to reach a national consensus on the Roadmap and discharge a Union Accord, and to implement it. The problem is urgent because as we all know the Oromo are bleeding, our children are dying on daily basis, and Oromia, our homeland, is set on fire and suffering from the occupation of the regime’s Aghazi paramilitary force, under the administrative jurisdiction of a “Command Post” effective December 15, 2015, which has now transferred to occupation under Martial Law. The Oromo youth and the peasants are seeking freedom earnestly to exercise their democratic rights and the right to life as a people on their land, and in order to be heard, they are dying.
The problem is equally crucial because our voices are divided and a house divided against itself cannot stand firmly in the face of a turbulent wind. At this historical juncture, there is no one unified and legitimate Oromo political organization to represent the people’s voice and to speak in unison to the world community. It is an anarchic tendency, leadership machismo, shown by individual Oromo elites who seem to stick to power to maintain their legacy over the institution which they once founded and led with audacity and, as a result, our national struggle is stuck at the crossroad to date.

Power struggle is the essence of politics, and politics is one mechanism of managing conflicting interests in a non-violent way. What the current war of occupation in Oromia accomplished is that it steered more than ever the urging need for maintaining uniformity and consistency of position within Oromo political organizations and also encouraged awareness of shared destiny in the general public irrespective of region, religion, gender, and ideology. Hence, I think there is no any better time than the present for the Oromo in the Diaspora and back home, Oromia, to work together toward ideological clarity and organizational transparency, dynamism, to unite around one common goal, *kaawo*, to plan to reach a national consensus, and, so doing, to emerge as a nation. I strongly believe that it is the honorable and serious position to take, which should have been taken long before now, but, partly because of our insensitivity to the dire situation our people suffer, and partly because of the scandalous manipulation of our elites and our potential strategic allies by the Ethiopian regime, to our shame we didn’t take a serious action to defend our people and save our cause from stagnation. Nationalism can easily degenerate into chauvinism where political elites resist against change, dynamism, and organizational discipline.
II. BACKGROUND

The Oromo are the largest ethnic group inhabiting Oromia, the most populous regional state in Ethiopia and sprawling over 32 percent of the country’s total land area. Oromia is home to more than 40 million people and it surrounds the capital, Finfinne, Addis Ababa, traditionally the ritual site of the Oromo.\(^1\) The Oromo population is quite diverse in terms of history, religion, means of livelihood, and other factors, but the people share common tradition, common ancestry, common language, Afaan Oromoo—part of the Cushitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family.\(^2\) The Oromo also share a strong and distinct sense of ethnic and national identity, Oromummaa (Oromoness), which evolved into Oromo nationalism and the long, difficult and often protracted national struggle in response to political subjugation, economic exploitation, and cultural domination imposed by the Ethiopian state.

The Oromo social history shows that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “when various peoples were fighting over economic resources in the Horn of Africa, the Oromo were effectively organized” under the *gada* system and administered themselves by the democratic institution until toward the end of the nineteenth century when Oromia was conquered and forcibly incorporated into the Ethiopian empire.\(^3\) The Oromo launched the national struggle under the leadership of the vanguard Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) for over four decades to

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\(^1\) The 2007 census reported Oromia's population at over 27 million, making it the largest state in population and area. However, since there is a large number of Oromo population living outside of Oromia, the region’s exact population is substantially higher than this estimate and it likely exceeds 27 million.


The etymological root of the name “Oromo” is probably “Horo” or “Hormaata,” which denotes “breeding,” “abundance,” “finna,” or “suga,” and also the name of the first Oromo father, “Horo,” not “Orma” (“stranger”), which Abyssinian and Ethiopianist scholars used to justify the “outside origin” theory for the Oromo.

regain their freedom from the widespread repression and subjugation and to seek freedom to implement their democratic right to self-determination.

*The Autumn Revolution*

Whether or not the current situation in Oromia is a Revolution can only be arguable from the vantage point we witness or observe it. For the integrationist liberationist (Oromo or not) it is merely a “Protest”; the reason being, it is not organized, as it were. For a nationalist liberator, it is a “nonviolent revolution” an “emancipatory resistance” aimed at liberating both the oppressed (to liberate from fear) and the oppressor (from an insatiable human greed). The Oromo resistance has been escalated and being transformed, I strongly believe, toward a nonviolent Revolution, in spite of the insensitiveness and oblivion of Oromo intellectuals in the Diaspora who are engaged in “distance nationalism” (cf. my recent article titled “Some Notes on Oromo Cultural Resistance,” under Files doc of NCO Group, FB).

Given the history of “power transaction” in Ethiopia (even one may claim it the case in Africa, in general), where government changes and the system remains the same, so, from our past experience we may not assume Liberation to be possible through a nonviolent revolution means. A nonviolent revolution is a revolution using mostly campaigns of civil resistance. The ongoing Qeerroo-led #OromoProtest is the case in point. It uses peaceful means including various forms of nonviolent protest and aims to bring about the departure of the authoritarian government.

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Perhaps by its nature civil resistance (nonviolent revolution) is intended for much more limited goals than Revolution. However, the Qeerroo-led nonviolent revolution in Oromia is characterized by advocacy of democracy and human rights, which now, gradually, is transformed into the far demanding next step of the national struggle, namely, the question of national freedom. In our case, the ongoing campaign of Oromo nonviolent revolution or civil resistance has a revolutionary purpose and will be able to bring about the defeat of the dictatorial regime in Ethiopia under three conditions: a) may be only if it obtains a degree of support from the armed forces, or at least their benevolent neutrality, b) will be achieved in spite of the government taking brutal measures against the protesters since the political alliances which supported the status quo governance will gradually wane, and c) if national consensus and urgent pronunciation of unconditional unity will be reached among the divided Oromo political organizations.

In general, the commonly held belief that most revolutions which have happened in dictatorial regimes were bloody or violent uprisings is erroneous and not borne out by historical analysis. In the social history of Oromo Resistance, the Autumn Revolution of November 2015 to the present represents the continuation of persistent resistance from below, not an unintended prelude to protest against the Master Plan, but it is an escalation of Oromo political confrontation with the regime. The major cause of Oromo national struggle, both from “below” and at the top led by the OLF, has been to realize the people’s freedom from being victims, victims of social invisibility and epidemic poverty (cf. Franz Fanon’s notion of “epidemiology of oppression”), and conflicts resulting from the uneven distribution of resources, knowledge, and power.
Available data shows that at the local level the aim of the politics from “below” transcends the immediate needs; it is about human freedom—*freedom from* all kinds of disempowering situations. Whereas, at the higher level (elite politics), however divided, the major aim of the Oromo movement is the restoration of the Oromo democratic tradition (*gada*), liberation of Oromo and Oromia from domination, and the fundamental political and economic transformation of the Oromo to ensure sustainable human freedom—*freedom to* empower the people. To work on Oromo resistance poetics within this framework of “*freedom from*” and “*freedom to*” and to open a national dialogue at the grassroots level it requires unity and dynamism among Oromo political organizations as among the general public.

*Transition and Historical Reversal*

The popular Autumn Revolution developed in reaction to the degeneration of the struggle led by elites at the top. The “historical reversal” refers to the escalation of Oromo struggle at the grassroots level led by Qeerroo and Qarree, the *Revolutionary Oromo Youth League* and the peasants as a primary manifestation of doctrinal shortcomings and shortsightedness of Oromo political elites. The movement, Autumn Revolution, I would call it, is more than a populism only temporarily infused in contrast to the suppressive Addis Ababa Master Plan but it is a radical move against the prevailing status quo interests of the predominant oppressive political sector over Oromo and Oromia. The resistance songs, slogans, stories woven around the martyrs are typical examples of the need for national freedom for the Oromo and peoples in Oromia.

At present, the debate over strategy should deal with the demise of the elitist perception and the top-down strategy that arrested the Oromo nationalist movement for over four decades. These
assumptions can be explained on two levels: one is the unspoken deterministic account that
dealing with the regime requires long-range accommodation, and therefore, it is better to focus
on building Oromia under Ethiopia’s umbrella and to democratize Ethiopia, and, at the same
time, to work on tactical alliance with other political entities which work towards the same goal.
Hence, the binding principle of this ideology is this: “Oromia is the stem of Ethiopia; a stem
cannot secede, only branches can fall off the stem,” which some critics view as a survivalist
ideology.

The other assumption is that of the more activist more radical and populist wings of OLF
factions which involve armed struggle, but each struggles for separate end goals: one fights for a
territorial claim over sovereign Oromia (walabummaa), and the other struggles for the “right to
self-determination” (bilisummaa) with referendum as an option. The Autumn Revolution also
looks two ways, Janus-like: on the one hand, Qeerroo & Qarree and the peasants are heard
repeating the OLF slogan: “Oromiyaan ni bilisoomti!” (Oromia shall be free!) and “ABO-n abdii
Oromo ti!” (OLF is Oromo’s hope!). Whereas, which OLF of the three or four separate factions?
It is not clear; what is more, most of the Autumn Revolution protesters and martyrs, no doubt, are
members of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) or Oromo Democratic Front (ODF) but they
repeat the OLF revolutionary mantra of freedom and/or independence, the position which can be
tactically deterministic at the moment.
III. THE WAY FORWARD: Founding a National Council of Oromia (NCO)

The lack of traditional values and steadfastness coupled by displacement, food self-insufficiency, and difficulties to provide for the family and to raise children, i.e., has led the peasant population to join the grassroots resistance in collaboration with the youth. Following the recurrent famine, war, and folkloric poverty, the constant migration to the West and to the Arab world, I argue, has also lead our people to dependence on remittance from relatives abroad and created a psychological milieu for dependence on external aid.

The Way Forward

The ongoing resistance is an emancipatory act, a historical reversal of arrested decolonization process, a spiritual engagement which necessitates escalating and consolidating the national struggle in spirit as in words and praxis at all levels. The end goal of this emancipatory resistance, I posit, is fundamental human freedom and protection for nonhumans (environment) from harm. It is “emancipatory,” I argue, at least for two reasons: first, it is peaceful; second, it aims at liberating not only the Oppressed from subjugation and fear but also the Oppressor from bondage of insatiable human greed for power and material gain. It is a historical reversal because the national struggle is led by the general public, particularly, the Youth League, who took desperately the leadership into their hands and, in so doing, forced history to veer its route, this time, bottom up. To save this historic move from slipping away out of our hands as it did 25 years back and to direct attention toward a common national kaawoo (vision), I propose the urgent need for founding a NATIONAL COUNCIL OF OROMIA.

As we have been divided by ideological fault-lines for over the last two decades, we couldn’t act like a “self” to actualize the long-awaited liberation and “self-determination,” and to emerge as a
nation. Instead, Oromia is now a much reduced place where there is rampant poverty, and social and economic disintegration, and the Oromo enjoy a problematic status, to say the least. The lack of strong potential rival(s) in much of the Oromo political organizations (fronts) to date is seen as another classic mistake committed 25 years back and there is no sign of rejuvenating into a more viable vanguard political force to date to defend the people and to represent their voices on world forums.

In the absence of a united active political force, two issues are at stake at present: one is, our people may be tired of the protest despite the struggle that will go on for so long. They start talking about the dangers of loss of life, and tend in time to become too smaller and weaker to continue the protest, and the solidarity rallies around the world may continue but only for a few rounds and everyone goes home back to their routine life as the winter grips tightly. At the same time, by secret manipulation of leaders of the ongoing protest, by continuing using deadly force and by lying to its allies that it backs from using force, the authoritarian regime may subdue the resistance and remain in power to continue brutal dictatorship and the oppression of the Oromo. The other worse scenario is this: the protest will go on but haphazardly and in the end a perpetual daily bloodbath may be obvious. The Aghazi armed gangsters are doing today to our people what the Interahamway, the Hutu paramilitary organization, did to the Tutsi in Rwanda in 1994 and it must be remembered that no UN or OAU peacekeeping force intervened nor general assembly was called to enforce sanctions and to save the Tutsi as quickly as the UN did in 1992 to save Bosnians in Yugoslavia.
In the current climate of the struggle, our experience has been so fragmented and our political leaders are still divergent and speak mutually unintelligible political languages. Hence, in speaking of the “right to self-determination,” what is in the concept of “right” and in “self”? In so far as the meaning of “right” is the “right” to exist as a people, which is the most urgent meaning to us at present, but are we really close to claiming the “national right” as a “self”? Our principal struggle must be to get to step one, namely, to make sure that we have the right to exist as a people, as a whole collective body who have “national right,” not just as an individual exile in the West leading a migratory life experience with all its difficulties. Then logically it follows that this collective body have the right to “self-determination”; however, at present we are far from defending our people and from actualizing our “national rights” to exist as a people in our ancestral homeland.

Are we really a “self” as a nation that can claim to have the right to “determination,” a nation that can pursue “liberation” struggle, where new multiple political institutions are mushrooming overnight on Pal-talks and the existing political front is degenerating into more than three or four separate political units? Until we reorganize ourselves around clear ideology and re-emerge as a unified political force which has been granted a legitimate representation by its people, we are far from “national right” and “self-determination”. What is more, the claim to have a collective memory, common ancestral origin, and language, is not enough to stand as a “self” and to claim “national rights”. The assignment, namely, getting organized with ideological clarity and organizational discipline is yet overdue and no US Senator or EU Member of Parliament will do it for us.
Amid our negligence, there are two alternatives open to us: one is, to organize ourselves and call on a national council for open dialogue as a coherent society, the other is, to submit to suppression and extinction. The first alternative is an urgent necessity for people like the Oromo, the large majority of whom today live in abject poverty, and who, I would say, enjoy no rights at all. We, the Oromo in the Diaspora, have crucial concern also about how to preserve our identity and the identity of our children where there is no school for them to learn in their mother tongue, Afaan Oromoo, and the consequence of the lack thereof is not so immediate.

Today our media seem to be distracted by continuous reports and broad analyses of the EU and UN or US resolutions about the regime’s excessive use of force against peaceful protesters, which is a significant achievement, instead of focusing at the same time on what should be done next to take the struggle further. Hence, to alleviate our current problems and to seek a long lasting solution, like a strong breed (*akka sanyii gaarii*), next I present the purpose of founding the Oromo National Council as soon as possible.

*Purpose*

The purpose of founding a National Council of Oromia will be to:

-reach national consensus through inclusive national dialogue

Through the inclusive national dialogue, ideas can be shared, perspectives can be challenged, and differences can be argued and tolerated and, ultimately, reason/justice will prevail, and attempts can be made to persuade others of the logic of one’s arguments through *accountable talks*. 
-bring to a round table the issues of *legitimacy* and *legitimacy deficit*

That is, hypothetically, if a political front, organization or party fails to defend its political program and policies, yet claims to represent the people but has no voice of the people at the general assembly, *araddaa nagaa*, i.e., a delegate known to and recognized as such by the general public (back home and in the Diaspora), the party, organization, or front suffers a *legitimacy deficit*.

And the National Council will deliberate on the matter and determine the fate of the polity in question, or to keep it until we build a system in which we can accommodate a multiparty system as a Government. Now IT IS TIME TO FOCUS ON BUILDING A UNIFIED AND ORGANIZED POLITICAL FORCE WITH IDEOLOGICAL CLARITY.

-open venue for exercising a democratic politics of representation.

*Representation* is assigning meaning to events, situations, social practices, objects, and thoughts as preferable, appropriate, and correct among competing groups. That is, through *accountable talks* practicing the *politics of representation* is competing over meaning among groups peacefully and democratically. Despite differences of perspectives (political, sociocultural, and ideological) held by the parties involved, it is hoped that the mode of politics of representation can lead to achievement of the culture of peace through open dialogue (responsible talks).

-prepare for PEACEFUL TRANSITION AS A VIABLE, LEGITIMATE, AND ORGANIZED POLITICAL FORCE both in Diaspora and in Oromia,

-help emerge mechanisms of consensus-building and deadlock-breaking

-instill ideas for convening the First National Dialogue Conference:
- convene the First National Dialogue Conference which will
  - endorse the Bylaw of the Council
  - further the idea and task of the Council

- chart the Roadmap of the struggle, i.e., develop the framework and steps of the Roadmap for Oromo national struggle which will include:
  - opening the framework for Political Dialogue
  - ratifying the Framework
  - organizing a monthly conferences by states, regions and localities to discuss the Roadmap with equal representations from all parts of Oromia
  - implementing the Union Accord within the agreed timeframe.

**Objectives**

Following are some of the objectives of the National Council of Oromia:

1. To seek solutions to the following urgent problems:

   - Is Peaceful Resistance (Non-violent Struggle) the only means? if not, what other possible means should be tried out?

   - Who assumes (or should assume) leadership for the ongoing Oromo nonviolent revolution?

   - Who represents our voice at the UN or EU, if need be, to plead to the world community if some catastrophe may happen (God forbid) as we are not ready, as it seems, to save our people after 40 years of having a vanguard organization we all feel proud of!

   - how many political parties do we need to liberate us?

   - 25 years back, tens of thousands of members of OLA (WBO) were massacred on Tulu Walal, in Dhidhessa valley, and everywhere, and the Army was dispersed beyond any measure to
reorganize and sustain itself as a viable military wing that can defend its people and to weaken its enemy. However, no group or individual has taken responsibility about the tragic loss that affected destructively and set back the Oromo national struggle to this day. So,

-What do we learn from our mistake and what can we do today to sustain the struggle and continue the ongoing OromoProtest led by Qeerroo and the Peasant back home?

2. To create a Forum for, or open a venue to facilitate for National Dialogue and to reach National Consensus among the existing Oromo political organizations which have been walking in a circle.

At present, as we all know, there are many political entities which one can categorize into 3:

a)-those who struggle to establish a Democratic Republic of Oromia in the Horn
b)-those who struggle for Democratizing Ethiopia, and
c)-those who are undecided, Either / Or, but the Liberation is to realize the right to Self-Determination

However, WHAT DO THE OROMO People NEED (and those peoples in Oromia)? Who has the Mandate and Legitimacy to decide on behalf of the 40 million or so Oromo (and peoples in Oromia)? It needs a National Dialogue in which each Political entity (Fronts, Organizations, and Parties) will present their political programs, report to the Council success and major limitations, and plan the way forward.
3. To seek a long lasting solution for the most persisting other problems. We are dying time to time and it is too many a series of tragic deaths: unlawful imprisonment, eviction from ancestral land, forced exile, rape, murder, etc.

We need to have a strong non-political, non-profit organization, a National Council, to which every Oromo and Oromo Political and/or Civic organization will be accountable and which advocates for the Oromo without any political affiliation itself.

IV. A RECAP

At the moment, Oromo Nationalism can be viewed on two levels: on the one hand, the urgent necessity for our people, a significant majority of whom have been expelled from their ancestral homeland Oromia because of our national origin as Oromo, is to stand united at this historical juncture and work together to reach a National Consensus, which does not necessarily mean to reject diverse political thoughts. On the other hand, the National Consensus can lead toward a peaceful transition and building free Oromia. This level of nationalism is what one has mixed feelings about at present but it is the major goal of the National Council of Oromia (NCO) to pave venue toward this edge of our Nationalism--according to the general agreement: be it to build an independent state of Democratic Republic of Oromia or a free state in a democratized federated Ethiopia.

Our national struggle is secular because it is a bitter and long protracted struggle for a "national right to self-determination" at the time when the world is trapped in (economic) and religious
war. Our national struggle is vanguard because it is a peaceful emancipatory liberation struggle for democratic rights and for fundamental human freedom.

By the Oromo principle of seven-generation (akaakilee-torba), any decision a generation makes will have a consequence on seven generations to come. As every history of civilization is a history of barbarity, it is not an easy task to save the identity of succeeding generation in exile and to empower the imagined community where the mainstream culture leaves no room for the minority. Power is a key factor to resource allocation for cultural construction and to make appropriate decisions and preserve the identity of the young generation. In Ethiopia, over the last 25 years, despite the promises made in ethnic federalism to respect the people’s incredible cultural diversity and to give meaningful autonomy to the different ethnic groups in the country, but the violation of human rights, oppression, political and cultural domination and economic exploitation made it difficult for the people to exercise their democratic rights and all those cultural, political, and economic issues belong together and one cannot be fulfilled without the other.

So, we have two choices: should we stand united and change our fate at present, or leave the debts past overdue by seven generations to our children?