

ADDA DEMOKRAATAWAA OROMO (ADO)

Oromo Democratic Front (ODF)

Political Program

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Introduction

Since its emergence as a modern state at the end of the 19th century through the brutal war of conquest under Menelik II, Ethiopia has been the prison of nations and nationalities, the Oromo being one of them. The conquest was one of genocidal campaigns leading to massive loss of life, disease and famine. Consequently the Oromo lost their freedom, land and other resources, and were reduced to serfs under the notorious *gabbar* system. Ever since, they have waged relentless struggles to regain their freedom and dignity by every available means at their disposal, suffering untold repression and misery, despite which their determination has not waned, but only stiffened like never before.

The proud heritage of struggle of the gallant sons and daughters of the Oromo people against tyranny has registered important advances in recent decades. Today Oromia is at least recognized as an administrative entity, and Afaan Oromo has been transformed from a language slated for extinction into a language of instruction and administration. Yet, the Oromo people are not free and still struggle for basic rights that are taken for granted in most parts of the world.

In order to bring to an end the misery, humiliation, and exploitation of the Oromo and other nations, Ethiopia must be transformed from its imperial character and status as a prison of nations into a common state that fairly serves its diverse communities. A genuinely democratic

multinational federation can serve such a purpose thereby making it the guarantor and upholder of the freedom and dignity of the Oromo and other nations constituting the state.

Such a state would afford the Oromo and other nations a level of representation in all aspects of Ethiopia's political, economic and social life commensurate with their demographic position and other forms of contribution. The objective of the Oromo people's struggle for self-determination, freedom, democracy and equality shall henceforth be to achieve such a transformation.

Reformulating the objectives of the Oromo struggle in this manner enables the Oromo people to struggle for their legitimate national rights while remaining cognizant of the yearning of other nationalities for similar rights and bolster their various forms of relationships and interdependence. The Oromo Democratic Front is obviously an organization primarily speaking for the Oromo people, yet at this historical juncture in the long drawn-out struggle of our people, it is incumbent upon us to advocate freedom and justice for all persons and communities.

This advocacy of freedom and justice for all is driven by our profound conviction that struggling for justice for oneself alone without the enjoyment of the same rights by all those in our proximate environment, could ultimately become futile, as "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Consequently, we are convinced that the Oromo struggle for self-determination would have a substantive popular content once the relationship between the people and the state is transformed and the people achieve the status of empowered citizens with fundamental rights,

instead of subjects and the state becomes the servant of its empowered citizens. It has to be noted that this new re-articulation of the Oromo quest for freedom and emancipation is not a repudiation of the heroic struggle waged under the leadership of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), but rather to build on its achievements and to render it more proactive and forge strategic relations with all those seeking justice and a truly popular multinational federation. The articulation of OLF was correct four decades ago when the very identity of the Oromo people was questioned.

There are real and inherent dangers in the current state of affairs with unforeseen consequences for all peoples. The aspiration of those forces advocating the revival of the policy of upward homogenization through coercive assimilation of the diverse societies has disastrously failed in the past and cannot be achieved in the future. Similarly, the obverse policy of aspiring to achieve downward homogenization through the creation of smaller culturally and linguistically homogenous independent entities may not necessarily bring freedom, prosperity and stability, because this alone does not suffice as a cementing factor as the experience of neighboring Somalia, among others, tragically demonstrates.

Moreover, transforming the Ethiopian state into one owned by its inhabitants through the establishment of a genuinely democratic multinational federation will definitely end the present ruling elite's indisputably unsustainable aspiration to indefinitely remain in power by inventing itself as a new type of vanguard party, serving as the sole guarantor of the so-called democratic unity. As experience in other parts of the world has shown, while it is obvious that the present

system's attempt is a smokescreen behind which it hides its hierarchical dictatorship, such a formula would never bring democracy, freedom or equality, but inevitably culminate in the kind of bloodshed that accompanied the unraveling of the former Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, the ruling party's irresponsible policy of divide and rule through deliberately fanning inter-communal and intra-communal, as well as inter-religious and intra-religious suspicions and discord in order to prolong its grip on power is increasing tension and instability. Coupled with the regime's heavy-handed response and repression to any expression of dissent, this policy does not augur well for peace and stability in Ethiopia and consequently the region as a whole.

The Oromo people in particular have been primarily targeted by the regime's repressive actions since it came to power. This has resulted in the death of tens of thousands, the disappearance of thousands and the imprisonment, displacement and exile of hundreds of thousands. Moreover, the policy of occupation of Oromo lands has continued, and eviction from ancestral lands has become the lot of hundreds of thousands of Oromo peasants and pastoralists. The policy of leasing land to local and foreign businesses has resulted in the denial of access to our people's traditional farming and grazing lands, and subsequently loss of their livelihood. This policy affects other oppressed peoples as well.

Hence the struggle for self-determination of the Oromo and other oppressed peoples in Ethiopia remains legitimate as the result of the lingering imperial character and hierarchical centralization of the Ethiopian state. Though many changes have taken place over the past few decades, the state has not shed its exclusivist nature despite passing from imperial rule to a military dictatorship and to an exclusivist one-party minority dictatorship.

Therefore in order to finally put to rest this nature of the state and transform the relationship between the state and the inhabitants, the principle of self-determination should be interpreted as a mechanism of changing the status of all of its current subjects into the empowered citizens. This can be achieved through a democratic multinational federation that fairly reflects the identity of all communities and equitably serves their interests, safeguards and guarantees their security and equality of opportunity.

I. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Oromo Democratic Front is to lead the struggle of the Oromo people to achieve freedom and self-determination through the creation of a genuinely democratic multinational federation in Ethiopia, where all peoples enjoy citizenship and democratic rights as well as self-rule and shared rule. The Oromo people and all other nations shall exercise full powers of sovereignty over their affairs, save for those they expressly entrust to the jurisdiction of the federal government.

II. Fundamental Beliefs

1. Every person shall be equal before the law, and no one is above the law. Governments at all levels shall act only in accordance with known, established, and duly enacted standing rules, regulations and legal principles and procedures. Laws shall not be made in respect of particular persons. There shall be no retroactive application of the law. Government officials shall not be given unfettered discretion to prosecute individuals for violating a law that is vague and no one shall be prosecuted by a law that is promulgated or became effective after the offense is committed.
2. Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed and all citizens of the federation shall be free to live and work in any part of the country.
3. The right of free expression is a basic human right and fundamental to democratic governance. Thus every person shall have the right to hold opinions and the freedom of expression without state interference. This right shall include the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas, regardless of frontiers, orally, electronically, in writing, print, art or through any other media of the person's choice.
4. All citizens shall have the right to organize and petition their government at all levels.
5. The public media shall serve the general interests of society, and play the role of informing and educating the public. Its governance shall be regulated by law and shall not be used as an instrument of the government, party in power, or any other partisan entity. The right of private and independent bodies or persons to participate in the media shall be guaranteed.
6. Freedom of religious belief shall be guaranteed. Government shall treat all religions equally and shall not interfere in their internal matters. Nor shall religious institutions interfere in the state.
7. The fundamental private rights of individuals shall be respected. There is a realm of personal sphere which the government may not enter, including protection against invasions of the sanctities of an individual's home and privacies of life.
8. The intelligence and police services shall not be used for monitoring the private activities of citizens.
9. Gender equality shall be promoted at all levels, including in political, economic, social, and other spheres. Women's empowerment shall be advanced.
10. Government institutions are there to serve the people, and public officials shall not be allowed to ask for or take favors. Corruption is corrosive and inimical to the welfare of a free society and shall be fought and prosecuted.

III. POLITICAL STRUCTURE

1. The ODF shall strive to establish a democratic federal republic in Ethiopia, where sovereignty shall be shared between states and the federal government.
2. Each state shall determine the form of government it so wishes, but shall respect fundamental freedoms and democratic norms.
3. Separation of powers shall be the norm at all levels, where jurisdictions shall be divided between the legislative, executive and judicial branches.
4. The legislative branch shall be formed through direct and indirect vote of citizens at all levels. Elections shall be free and fair, conducted by an independent and impartial electoral body, composed of persons of integrity, ability and a track record of independence, and sound judgment. The judiciary shall oversee the conduct of elections,

and independent civic groups shall be encouraged to educate the population on of elections and monitor their conduct.

5. The legislative branch of the federal government shall be composed of two chambers: a House of Representatives and a Senate. The House of Representatives shall be formed through direct elections of all the citizens; the size and composition apportioned on the basis of population size. This shall be revised every decade on the basis of a census. The Senate shall be formed by representatives of the states elected through their assemblies.
6. An independent judiciary is essential for a truly democratic society. Based on this truth and taking into account the abuse of the judiciary as an instrument of repression against political opponents by successive regimes, the establishment of an independent and competent judiciary shall be one of the central objectives of the ODF.
7. Another pillar of a democratic society is the existence of a competent and professional civil service. There shall be an independent civil service commission and civil servants shall be hired and promoted on the basis of their skills, merit, performance and professionalism without any discrimination on the basis of gender, religion, ethnicity, disability or political views. However, the federal and state governments may institute affirmative action programs to redress historical disadvantages or to correct gender, ethnic, regional, and religious imbalances.

IV. PUBLIC FINANCE AND TAXATION

1. The federal government shall be responsible for fiscal and monetary policy. It shall have the exclusive power to create and destroy money, to levy and collect duties on imports and exports, air, rail, and sea transport services.
2. All land, minerals, natural gas, and other natural resources in Oromia shall be the common property of its people, and the exploitation and administration shall be determined by law. The Oromo state shall contribute its equitable share to the central government as determined by federal law.
3. State governments shall have exclusive rights to collect all property, income, corporate, road and sales taxes from individuals employed in the state, and companies conducting business or other commercial activities in the state, and decide on their expenditures.

V. LANGUAGE POLICY

1. Afaan Oromo shall be the official working language in Oromia. The Oromo state government shall take steps to promote the development of the Oromo language.
2. Afaan Oromo shall be one of the working language of the federal government.
3. The ODF supports and struggles for the rights and privileges of all nationalities to be respected and accorded equitable status, including the right to develop their languages and cultural heritage, as well as use their languages in education and administration.

VI. ECONOMIC POLICY

1. The foundation of the economy shall be built on the principles of hard work, innovation, and free enterprise, with the partnership of government where appropriate. The

government's economic policy shall be guided by the need to eradicate poverty, overcome economic malaise, promote economic prosperity and sustainable development, economic justice, and improve the living standard of the people.

2. As an essentially peasant and pastoral society, land is essential to the wellbeing of our people. Taking into account the historical disadvantages and discrimination in land ownership, the ODF shall promote a land policy that protects the rights of the principal users: peasant cultivators and pastoralists. At the same time it shall devise a policy that redresses imbalance and promotes economic prosperity and the overall development of the country, while protecting the rights of indigenous communities. Urban areas shall be determined by law and their limits established, and land policy shall be guided by the principles of promoting balanced urban growth, industry, employment and the welfare of urban dwellers.
3. Federal and state governments shall strive to encourage entrepreneurship, initiative, and restructure the economy to address the basic needs of the people, especially uplift the most disadvantaged sectors of the population as much as possible.
4. The government shall create conducive atmosphere and establish incentives for the flourishing of the talents of our people, to harness their creative and entrepreneurial potentials in their contribution to the national wealth.
5. The ODF shall develop policies centered on the development of agriculture, to transform the lives of the rural masses. The primary objective of such a policy shall be to achieve self-sufficiency in food production, and create conditions for capital accumulation and industrial development.
6. One of the major impediments hindering development in the agricultural sector is the lack of access to credit. Hence special attention shall be given to develop an elaborate system of microfinance for farmers, agricultural micro-entrepreneurs and small businesses.
7. Another major hindrance to progress in agriculture is technology and know-how. The government shall therefore invest in the development and training of technological know-how. It shall also encourage farmers to develop cooperative societies for marketing their products, provision of inputs and facilitate credit.
8. A thriving business sector is essential for economic growth and must be encouraged and developed. The ODF shall strive to create an appropriate environment to encourage private capital and entrepreneurs, both domestic and foreign. Special efforts shall be exerted to reduce red tape and stamp out corruption.
9. Politically affiliated businesses and crony capitalism distort the smooth functioning of the market and are anathema to free enterprise. They are also sources of corruption and the ODF shall discourage them and develop policies for the smooth functioning of the market.

VII. SOCIAL POLICY

1. Federal, state and local governments shall create safety nets for citizens. They shall develop a system of unemployment insurance, to which the employees, employers and

the government contribute, and a social security system to support those who are physically challenged, the elderly and veterans.

2. Education is a key factor in economic development and social progress. The ODF shall promote a policy of quality mass education, and expansion of free public education to every, accessible to all. The quality of education is paramount with special attention paid to primary, secondary, teachers, vocational, and technical training levels. Moreover, higher education is crucial for social and economic progress in producing scientific manpower, research, innovation, and managerial skills. The quality of institutions of higher education shall be greatly improved with special focus on languages and scientific skills. Higher education shall provide equal opportunities for all. Every child has the right to be educated in its own mother tongue in primary school.
3. Educational success also depends on improving teaching skills and the prestige of the teaching profession, so that it attracts the brightest. Federal, state and local governments shall strive to encourage teachers and make teaching a celebrated profession. Teachers shall be encouraged to strive in improving their skills. Governments at all levels, parents, teachers, and students shall be encouraged to work together to make the learning and teaching environment enjoyable and productive. A system of student and teacher accountability shall also be instituted.
4. A compulsory and free ten years of schooling shall be promoted for every child in the country. Special efforts shall be made to close and eliminate the enrollment gap between boys and girls.
5. The ODF shall promote the development of a quality health care system accessible to all, and centered on prevention, care and cure. Primary health care units shall be expanded in the rural areas, and training of health care professionals shall be provided with special attention. Research in the elimination of certain diseases shall be encouraged. Basic health education shall be given and integrated in school curricula to ensure healthy lifestyle among the people. Hospitals shall be established in every district. Religious institutions, charities and the private sector shall be encouraged in the provision of health services. Traditional medical and healing practices shall be developed with scientific knowledge.
6. Citizens shall be encouraged to form and actively participate in civic and professional organizations to ensure self-governance and democratic participation.
7. Trade unions are important institutions of a democratic society. Vibrant and independent trade unions shall be encouraged and their right at collective bargaining shall be protected.

VIII. PROTECTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

1. The ODF is committed to a sustainable environmental protection. Governments at all levels shall develop policies and practices towards fulfilling this goal. Construction, industry, agriculture and mining ventures shall be required to observe environmental, health and safety standards. Federal, state and local governments shall strive to combat recurrent drought, deforestation, flooding, air, soil, and water pollution, degradation of soil, water, and vegetation, and loss of biodiversity. They shall take concrete steps and educate the public to achieve these goals.

2. Poor sanitation, unsafe water, and unhygienic environment are the leading causes of many preventable diseases, and high infant mortality. Special efforts shall be exerted to deliver safe drinking water for our people.
3. The ODF shall promote conservation, protection and improvement of the environment, the development of environmental and ecofriendly technologies, renewable and efficient energy sources.
4. Growing urban pollution and unsafe disposal of household, electronic, chemical, industrial and agricultural waste shall be tackled. All trade agreements, industrial, agricultural, and other projects shall be reviewed for environmental compliance.

IX. FOREIGN AFFAIRS

1. The ODF shall promote a policy of peace, good neighborly relations, regional cooperation, and economic integration with all neighboring states.
2. The ODF advances a foreign policy based on equality and mutual respect, cooperation, promotion of mutual interests, and non-interference in internal affairs.
3. The peaceful resolution of all conflicts among states is one of the guiding principles of the ODF.
4. The ODF is committed to the achievement of African unity and dignity. It supports the work of continental bodies to achieve these goals.
5. The ODF promotes regional cooperation in issues that cut across state boundaries, such as combating communicable diseases, pests, the protection of the environment and natural resources.
6. The ODF shall strive to forge common security architecture for our region, to enhance human security and well being of the inhabitants of all countries in the region. The purview of duly constituted regional organizations shall be enhanced to achieve these goals.

X. NATIONAL DEFENCE AND SECURITY

1. The ODF shall work towards the establishment of a professional, non-partisan and non-political national defense force that reflects the demographic spread and national composition of the country. It shall promote professionalism, the development of modern know how, and the educational standards, skills and welfare of members of the armed forces.
2. The role of the armed forces shall be one of defending the territorial integrity of the country. They shall always observe the supremacy of the constitution and the authority of civilian leadership.
3. Each state shall maintain a National Guard that can be mobilized to mitigate natural and man-made disasters and similar emergencies. The federal government, through the declaration of a national emergency by the House of Representatives, may call on the National Guard of each state into active duty. Their mobilization shall be limited to the duration of the emergency.

4. Police forces are accountable to the state and local governments. The federal government shall maintain a federal police force, whose role shall be prevention and investigation of federal and interstate crimes.
5. The federal government and the states shall establish a professional, competent and nonpartisan security organ to safeguard public security and safety.

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