

WAFIDO TURNS "ONE"- HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

SOLIDARITY MESSAGE

On December 17, 2005 **Warraqsa Fedaraalistii Dimokraatawa Oromoo** (WAFIDO) celebrated the 1st anniversary of its founding in Finfinnee. About 3000 people attended this landmark occasion marked by keynote speeches, poems and a live musical performance by an Oromo band.

The **WAFIDO Support Group** in Washington, D.C. would like to extend its congratulations to the founding fathers of this movement for their hard work, dedication, courage, vision and esteemed leadership. With equally dedicated Oromo Nationalists behind you, at home

and abroad, we look forward to continued success in the coming years.

We also want to applaud those exceptionally brave Oromos who took the risk of playing a leading role in expanding the organizational network into the rural areas of Oromia under the threat of imminent harm to themselves and their families, and to those who actually registered and ran for legislative offices on the Wafido ticket to answer a national call. Last but definitely not least to the millions of Oromo youth who turned out to meet and support Wafido leaders and candidates during the campaign period.

Having witnessed years of political neglect, economic disempowerment and social degradation of our people by the autocratic rulers of Ethiopia, the founders embarked on a mission of "**peaceful struggle**" by forming a political party. You had only four months before the elections of 2005. You were and still are extremely under-funded and under-staffed. You had no access whatsoever, to the state monopolized media. Somehow, you entered the race and tried to fill a political vacuum. Our people have long been disenchanted with the status quo They were anxious to see a genuine Oromo political organization with alternative ideas and programs. You had a long-term view of setting in motion a "**peoples' movement**" for freedom and justice by rallying around such fundamental issues as **Federalism, Oromo Identity, Land and Electoral** reforms.

- You have given hundreds of thousands of Oromos, especially the youth, hope, pride and inspiration.
- You have demonstrated the power of "**Unity**".
- You have helped us understand our potential to bring about a political change.
- You have shown us what is possible: You've won **11 Federal Parliamentary** seats and **12 State Assembly** seats. We know you could have done better had the political system been fair, free and the playing field level.
- You uplifted our spirits when you campaigned, debated on TV and addressed the federal parliament using Afaan Oromo, distinguishing yourself from those members of parliament who still suffer from identity crises.

- You have been a wonderful advocate and spokesmen for Oromo causes on many broadcast and print media around the world as well as the internet during the past year. It is a great contribution.
- You have also been instrumental in spearheading the effort to forge closer alliances among Oromo political organizations. Your initiative formalized the union of five small Oromo parties under an umbrella name of **Adda Humnoota Qubso Oromoo** (HAQO) or **Front for the Forces of Oromo Struggle** (FFOS) to lead the quest for self-determination, economic and social development. An official legal permit is pending. Other independent Oromo parties are welcome to join it.
- You have endured the enemy's attack from left and right; through it all you have remained resilient in upholding the Oromo National cause

Today, as we commemorate the 1st anniversary of the founding of this movement, we should also remember our fallen comrades. Wafido's small success came at great sacrifice to many individuals and families. Many have died, physically and mentally harmed, jailed or fled their community for attending an opposition party meeting and/or embracing it.

More Recently, harassment of Wafido members and supporters has intensified throughout Oromia. High schools and colleges remain closed. In rural Oromia the Federal police force have taken the lead in arresting, beating, killing and deporting any and all Oromo opposition party members and supporters.

Several recently released detainees from different locations in Oromia have said that the Federal police in conjunction with local officials and militias forced them to sign statements disavowing support for opposition political groups and pledging support to the local ruling party affiliate as conditions for their release.

We know that there is neither democracy nor federalism in Ethiopia today. However:

- We fully support your continued struggle to create institutions that will bring democracy to that country.
- We fully support your effort to build WAFIDO into a viable political force in Ethiopia.
- We support WAFIDO, a grass-root Oromo Political Organization based locally that our people rally behind.
- We also support and help build a forum where young Oromo leaders will train and continue the struggle until our goals are attained. This is very important because other ethnic groups are busy training the next generation of oppressors.
- We support and appreciate your courage to expose the regime's empty claims of democratic practices.
- We also support your effort to make parliament a real forum where national issues are duly debated, deliberated and even criticized in a responsible manner.
- We commend and support your determination to stand up to the enemy on the front line in demanding **OROMO'S RIGHTFUL PLACE IN THE ETHIOPIAN SOCIETY**

- We urge Oromo expatriates to embrace, support and strengthen the home based WAFIDO "**peoples' movement**" as they continue to spearhead the peaceful struggle for self-determination "**HERE and NOW**"

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY!!

UNITY IS STRENGTH!!

OROMIA SHALL BE FREE

WAFIDO SUPPORT GROUP

**FOR NEWS UPDATES, RADIO INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT
WWW.WAFIDO.ORG**

MISSION STATEMENT:

Warraaqsa Fedaraalistii Dimokraatawa Oromo (Wafido) or Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM) is a registered political party founded in the fall of 2004 and headquartered in Finfinnee, the heartland of Oromia, to engage in a nonviolent struggle to pressure the empire-state of Ethiopia to resolve the Oromo National question once and for all through genuine implementation of Federal/State power sharing arrangement administered by a home-grown and independent political organization. The movement is committed to the promotion of the rule of law, adherence to democratic principles, respect for human, civil and individual rights and better political and economic freedoms for all oppressed peoples of various nationalities and ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

WAFIDO FOUNDERS:

1. Obbo Bulcha Damaqsa Chairman
2. Obbo Gebreselassie Waldya Vice-Chairman
3. Dr. Mogga Frissa Vice-Chairman
4. Dr. Getachoo Jigii Political Affairs Coord.
5. Dr. Tassamaa Taa'aa Executive Committee Member
6. Obbo Baqalaa Jirataa Party Secretary
7. Col. Sahlu Birrii Executive Committee Member
8. Obbo Berhanu Disasaa Executive Committee Member

9. Obbo Tasfaa Bushen Executive Committee Member
10. Obbo Margoo Saaqqataa Executive Committee Member
11. Obbo Kabbadaa Firisaa Executive Committee Member

Wafido's core political platform revolves around four issues among others, namely:

- 1. Federalism**
- 2. Oromo National Identity (Language)**
- 3. Land Reform**
- 4. Electoral Reform**

Now let us discuss each one briefly as follows:

Federalism: Federalism is a new concept in Ethiopian politics. It is supposed to be a decentralized, power sharing mechanism between Federal(central) and Regional states as a means of rectifying long-standing grievances. The participants of the Transitional Government after the downfall of Mengistu H/M in 1991 concluded Federation as the best alternative form of government for a multi-ethnic and multi lingual empire state like Ethiopia. These provisions are enshrined in Ethiopia's present constitution but they were never fully implemented in Oromia, the largest and most populous state in the Empire. Similar to the practices of the absolute monarchs of the past era, Oromia is still controlled from the center, this time from the Prime Minister's office. The managers or custodians of the state administration come from a surrogate organization that does not represent the interest of the Oromo people. Therefore, Wafido demands preservation and implementation of genuine federalism managed by an independent and credible Oromo political organization.

Wafido also would like to admonish some aspiring opposition political forces in Ethiopia to reexamine their ambitions to rule over the different nations/nationalities against their will by dismantling the framework of the current federal system.

Language: Wafido, as a genuine Oromo party championing fundamental

Oromo issues, has adopted Afaan Oromo as its official language. The party vehemently demands the Ethiopian empire state dully recognize Afaan Oromo, the language of its majority population, as one of the official languages of the country. Afaan Oromo is already a working language in the entire State of Oromia. The majority of the legislators in the Ethiopian Federal Parliament are Oromos. Therefore, the language is here to stay and it must be legitimized. In Canada for example, French and English are official languages.

Farm Land: The issue of 'Land' has always been at the center of Oromo politics. Oromos are farmers and whoever controls their land, controls their destiny. When the Abyssinians conquered Oromos with the help of European weapons in the mid 1800's, the first valuable asset that they lost was their land. They became serfs and sharecroppers. The new landlords set the terms and conditions for maximum exploitation of their labor. Abyssinian feudal exploitation and mistreatment of the Oromo peasant was so intolerable that Oromo peasants from Bale, Borana and surrounding regions fled to the then British administered Northern Kenya in 1800 in search of better living conditions. The Abyssinian feudal landlords complained to their Emperor that they were no longer interested in land without farmers. They demanded either the return of the farmers or a grant of farmland with tenants elsewhere in the empire. The emperor filed a complaint with the British government to return the Oromo peasants. The British Parliament reviewed the matter but declined to forcefully repatriate them (Hess).

There are several other references where land or lack of it became a crucial socio-economic issue. For example:

(a) When the Italian army occupied Ethiopia in 1936, the Italian colonial administration abolished the feudal arrangement known as the GEBAR system. Unfortunately, it was restored after the Emperor Haile Sellasie returned from exile 1941. He presided over the practice until it became the major cause of his own downfall in 1974.

(b) The Socialist Revolution of 1974-1989, that uprooted the feudal system in Ethiopia and closed the chapter of Imperial rule, had farmland distribution as the centerpiece of its movement. At the same time, the revolution ushered in a new era of state ownership of land where abuse and exploitation of farmers changed hands (i.e.) from individual warlords and/or aristocrats to minority state authorities.

(c) The Bale peasant uprising of the 1960's.

(d) The architects of the aborted coup d'etat of 1960 had land distribution to peasants as the top priority among their reform agenda.

Land as a Political Weapon: Farmers held hostage

Chris Albin-Lackey of Human Rights Watch traveled to Ethiopia's vast and overwhelmingly rural Oromia region in March 2005, and interviewed dozens of farmers from communities throughout the region. Almost all of them complained that local authorities in their communities punished political dissent by selectively imprisoning critics for unpaid debts and withholding vital agricultural inputs from them.

The Ethiopian government distributes fertilizer on credit to poor farmers throughout the country in an effort to boost their productivity. Many farmers welcome the help, but it comes at a very steep cost. The fertilizer is so expensive that farmers often find it difficult to repay their debts. Local officials routinely throw farmers into prison for days or weeks at a time if they fail to make debt

payments. Some farmers told Human Rights Watch how their neighbors were forced to auction off livestock or household goods to get out of prison.

Despite the risks, most farmers buy the government-provided fertilizer in the hope that it will make their tiny plots of land more productive. Farmers who openly criticize the government or its policies often find themselves denounced in public meetings as "troublemakers," "anti-development" saboteurs or even as members of dangerous "anti-people" organizations. And in many cases the authorities then withhold the much-needed fertilizer from them. In the eyes of many ruling party cadres, such people have no right to expect any kind of agricultural help from the government.

While local authorities often single out farmers who criticize the government by rigorously enforcing their debt repayment obligations, they will allow pro-government farmers to carry their debts over from year to year. In one small town, we met an elderly man who had fled his village several days earlier because he faced imprisonment over an unpaid fertilizer debt of roughly \$30. He complained that almost no one in his village had been able to pay off their debt, but that he alone was being punished because he had publicly criticized the village authorities. Other farmers made similar allegations; one man said that, "The men they send to take us to prison have also not paid for their fertilizer."

Control over fertilizer and agricultural inputs in general have given Meles's government a remarkably effective tool for quashing dissent in rural Ethiopia. Most of the farmers said that they simply tried to keep quiet at community meetings rather than risk angering the local authorities by expressing their opinions. One man went so far as to say that "even if he comes and says, 'I will take your wife,' I might just keep quiet." **(HRW.ORG) Chris Albin-Lackey, Sandler Fellow at Human Rights Watch**

Re-Settlement: Another form of displacement has been taking place under the guise of re-settlement: It is a politically motivated undertaking of moving people from drought prone areas to more fertile regions. The settlers are usually non-Oromos and are authorized to bear arms. State ownership of land has greatly enhanced these operations. In recent years, millions of settlers have been moved to take over Oromoo lands.

Leasing: Urban encroachment, globalization and displacement:

Oromo Land is being leased out, often without paying adequate compensation to the indigenous people, for projects ranging from housing development to commercial flower growing companies. Ideal climate, land availability and proximity to market is attracting floriculture companies from Kenya, India and Europe.

Sify.com reports that the Ethiopian government offers large tracts of land to floriculture companies on a perpetual long term lease at very attractive rates. One such company, Karuturi Networks from India, has setup a 50 hectare unit at Holota, near Finfinnee and is in the process of adding 50 more hectares. Annual flower exports from Ethiopia from existing units are expected to reach \$100 million by 2007. Current revenue is around \$20 Million. Projects by another 100

investors from the Netherlands, Germany India and Israel which have acquired 450 hectares of land to setup farms should generate another \$300 million a year by 2007.

In addition, there are opposition political parties who advocate the rapid sale of Oromo farm lands under the cover of 'Privatization'. To combat these trends, Wafido proposes a land reform policy where land is owned by communities and farms by individuals operators. A similar land holding system was in use in northern Ethiopia in the past.

Wafido demands that the government relinquish ownership of farm land. State ownership of land is a political tool used by minorities to intimidate farmers in order to stay in power indefinitely.

Electoral System: The electoral system of Ethiopia should be Presidential so that every individual in every state can have a chance to elect a president for the federal post. The Parliamentary system as it is now, has not served the interest of the Ethiopian people. It has become an instrument that enables minorities to rule over the majority forever. Even the former British colonies have abandoned the parliamentary system because it does not give the individual citizen a voice for or against a candidate.

WHAT SHOULD OROMOS AT HOME AND ABROAD DO TO MITIGATE THE SITUATION:

1. Oromos in the front lines of this struggle for emancipation are paying the ultimate price for freedom and justice.

2. There is something Oromos in the Diaspora need to know. Oromo issues today appear on the Ethiopian political

agenda in BOLD letters and is being discussed among Ethiopians and in diplomatic circles more openly than ever before. We have to take advantage of this new situation by aggressively being a major player on the Ethiopian political stage. We have to have big time politicians influencing people, events, agendas, issues, development aid decisions, whether or not Ethiopians should accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Eritrean-Ethiopian relations, sea port issues etc.

3. We call upon our compatriots to reach out, develop clarity of purpose, pull our resources together, work in harmony and intensify our drive for freedom by rallying behind a home-based peaceful movement such as WAFIDO before a good portion of the State of Oromia is further partitioned into parcels of private property and our people relegated to the status of daily and seasonal laborers.