



Oromia Youth Association, MN

We are the future! Nu abdii borutii!
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

APRIL 15, 2009

OROMO MARTYRS DAY: A DAY OF COMMEMORATION OR FUNDRAISING?

The Oromia Youth Association (OYA) in Minnesota is issuing this press release to inform the general public (all Oromos) about our failed attempt to host this year's Oromo Martyrs Day in the state of Minnesota and to express our disappointment with the responses to our proposal from the OLF political groups. OYA is and has been an integral part of the Twin Cities based larger Oromo Community. Maintaining its neutral stance on internal Oromo politics, OYA strives to bring together Oromo youth from all walks of life to educate them about Oromo culture, history, struggle and politics.

April 15th is Oromo Martyrs Day also known as Guyyaa Gootota Oromo. This commemorative day was first started by Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) following the death of its prominent leader's on diplomatic mission enroute to Somalia on April 15, 1980. Since then this day was observed as Oromo Martyrs Day by Oromo nationals around the world to honor those who have sacrificed their lives to free Oromia and to renew a commitment to the cause for which they have died.

However, over years as Oromo politics get polarized what is supposed to be a commemorative day for all Oromos has been altered and become more political and a day devoted to fundraising for political organizations. At times, it is observed that less attention has been given to honoring those heroes and heroines that died to emancipate Oromo people from oppression and subjugation by successive Ethiopian regimes.

This year, it has even become more troubling due to the recent split among OLF leadership where both factions are organizing separate but similar events so declared as Guyyaa Gootota Oromo around the world. Deeply concerned about the broader implications of such schism, OYA-MN took initiative and proposed to both OLF factions to host this year's Guyyaa Gootota Oromo in Minnesota. This genuine effort by our youth to honor our heroes and heroines in unison was turned down by both camps and has raised many questions among our members.

OYA'S CORE CONCERN AND PROPOSAL TO OROMO POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Oromo Liberation struggle led by pioneer Oromo organization- the OLF, had taken many turns in recent years. The events that took place in the summer of 2008 were the most dramatic and heartbreaking to many of our members in the State of Minnesota. Considering the activities that led to the split and the fragmentation that occurred as a result; the current OYA leadership started their term with the assumption that there is going to be two Oromo Martyrs Day events in 2009. Thus we were set out from the beginning to prevent that from happening.

At our monthly meeting in December, this issue was discussed and many had suggested that the current OYA leadership play a constructive role by creating a forum where different political groups can come together and engage in constructive discussions. Furthermore, OYA members have expressed a concern that organizing **separate but similar Oromo Martyrs Day** events will not only contribute to our disenfranchisement but it will also be a clear departure from honoring our heroes/heroines. However, at that point OYA members believed that despite their differences in political approach, our leaders shared essentially the same fundamental principle in honoring our heroes and heroines. Thus, OYA members unanimously decided that OYA organize an inclusive Oromo Martyrs event in Minnesota with a spirit of bringing all Oromos together. OYA member's believed that in order to honor our heroes and heroines, Oromos from all walks of life should gather in one place to remember the sacrifices that were made thus far and renew our commitments to carry forward the struggle. And there is no better day to stand in unity, refocus and renew our commitments to that cause than on Oromo Martyrs Day.

RESULTS OF OUR INITIATIVE AND OUR DISAPPOINTMENT WITH OLF LEADERS

Our proposal to bring all Oromos together on this historic and symbolic day was turned down by both OLF factions in Minnesota. The faction that is led by General Kamal Gelchu replied to our proposal telling us that they have already planned for the Oromo Martyrs Day despite the fact that we have contacted them early in February. The other group led by Mr. Dawud Ibsa responded to our request by simply saying **no**. These responses affirmed some of our member's hesitations/doubts about these groups commitment to the cause for which our fallen heroes have died.

The OYA board and its members are deeply saddened by these responses especially by the fact that our leaders could not put aside their political differences and come together on this commemorative event. Thus, we call upon **all Oromos** to stand up to these politicians to make Oromo Martyrs Day the day all Oromos can come together regardless of their political affiliations in order to remember all our heroes and renew our commitment to the cause for which these heroes and heroines have died. We also urge OLF leaders to refrain from disenfranchising Oromo public and ensure that the public to come together and honor our fallen heroes/heroines in unison.

OYA would also like to hereby acknowledge other Oromo political organizations that were contacted showed their support for our proposal and were willing to fully cooperate with us on organizing the event. While we are very grateful for their cooperation, we would like to inform them that it was our plan not to organize additional event unless all parties agree to OYA hosting one inclusive event.

In closing we reiterate a powerful message from one of our pioneer heroes, **Haji Robale Ture**, who said, "...streams join together to form a river, people also join together to be a nation and to become a country", calling on the Oromo to strengthen their unity and create their own country (1966).

Oromia Youth Association Board