

## ***Coalition of Oromo advocacy and human rights groups<sup>1</sup> applauds the prospects of breakthrough legislation on Ethiopia in the US Congress***

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The United States Senate and the House of Representatives are currently advancing legislation referred to as S3199 and HR6600, which introduces among the strongest Congressional measures ever proposed regarding Ethiopia in the long history of the U.S - Ethiopia relationship. It offers a unique opportunity to shift US policy to embrace a broader outlook towards Ethiopia. The legislation connects US policy to long hidden communities who have collectively expressed the desire for democracy. Its comprehensive measures provide the means to assist communities in Ethiopia to establish the kind of democratic governance they seek. In addition to strong provisions intended to hold the regime and its supporters accountable for violence and massive destruction carried out against marginalized groups, the legislation also indirectly recognizes the vibrant, once-in-a-generation, grassroots peaceful and democratic movement led by the Oromo youth.<sup>2</sup>

The proposed Senate bill together with the House Resolution if enacted and implemented, would significantly impact the peace and stability in Ethiopia in ways that we Oromo advocacy and human rights groups would welcome. It provides a possible corrective to the authoritarian direction Ethiopia is currently taking. Therefore, every peace-loving group with a focus on Ethiopia should work to ensure its passage by engaging Senators and members of the House to co-sponsor and vote for it, while also supporting a few amendments to broaden its scope.

### **Background**

When Abiy Ahmed assumed the position of Prime Minister in Ethiopia in 2018, he publicly committed to transition the country to democracy. His government was formed after a non-violent Oromo youth-led resistance from 2014-2018 brought the collapse of an authoritarian government led by the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Abiy, who was appointed by the ruling party,<sup>3</sup> was tasked to lead the party and the government in a transition to democratic governance and answer the demands of the resistance movement. However, Abiy dismantled the party that elected him and attempted to dismantle the youth movement which had served as the vanguard for democracy and whose peaceful tactics created the political opening that made his appointment possible. He has turned to the old playbook of centralizing power.

Abiy was initially warmly accepted and supported by US diplomats, who were slow to realize Ethiopia's failure to transition to democracy under his administration. The new regime's systematic and damaging attack against the youth and those who shared their demands, started a

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<sup>1</sup> The coalition of Oromo advocacy and human rights groups is based in USA, Canada, UK, Europe, and Australia. See signatories at end of document.

<sup>2</sup> Often referred to as the "Qeerroo or Qeero-Qarree" movement which refers in the Oromo language to young, unmarried persons, men and women respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF)

process that caused Ethiopia's rapid descent into chaos after such high hopes both locally and internationally. The government first launched a war in Oromia, then declared war in Tigray, followed by economic crises, famine, and conflict that extends beyond its borders. In order to accomplish these operations and help consolidate his power, Prime Minister Abiy called upon authoritarian leaders of Eritrea, Turkey, and UAE, further abandoning ties with the US.

### **Provisions of the Legislation**

S3199 in the Senate and HR660 in the House address this crisis by acknowledging that the anticipated transition to democracy has failed utterly and that the US partnership with Ethiopia needs adjustment. They create mechanisms to expose the actual drivers of conflict and to redirect the transition to achieve stability and peace in the region, acknowledging the position of all peoples in the region. The legislation calls for 1) disclosing *disinformation* that fuels continued crises and violence, 2) *investigation* into real conditions that prevail in the country, 3) support for *full-scale negotiations toward a peace process and dialogue*, 4) support for a new transition process toward democracy that protects the rights of marginalized populations, 5) provisions for *accountability*, and 6) application of *strong sanctions* on those who continue to instigate violence and profit from war through a variety of schemes. Each of these provisions can play an important role in adjusting course and creating avenues toward stability in the country and the region.

Key aspects of this legislation are innovative, practical and offer the opportunity for a shift in US-Ethiopia policy. The mandated investigations would assess the extent to which the country's populations are under attack and are facing crimes, rights violations and desperate famine conditions. It is important that the bill's focus is not restricted to Tigray alone but includes every region in the country.

### **Urging Support for and Passage of the Legislation on Ethiopia now before Congress: S3199 and HR6600**

Passage of S3199 and HR6600 could mark a turning point in US-Ethiopia policy. The legislation encourages changes which empower the grassroots representatives of civil society by highlighting the role of women and youth, a significant majority of the country's population that played the leading role in peacefully toppling the EPDRF regime. Their primary demand was a move to basic freedoms and democracy which has not yet come. This legislation has the potential to bring into the spotlight both the country's long obscured and neglected majority and the demands they sacrificed for. We urge broad support for these innovative legislative initiatives in both the Senate and the House of Representatives of the United States.

### **Signatories:**

Advocacy 4 Oromia; Melbourne, Australia  
Baro Tumsa Institute; Greenbelt, MD  
Jabdu Oromo American Women's Council; Minneapolis, MN  
Human Rights League for the Horn of Africa; Toronto, ON; Finfinnee/Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Macha Tulama Association; Washington, DC  
Oromia Global Forum;\* Tacoma Park, MD

Oromia Support Group; Malvern, UK; Melbourne, Australia  
Oromo Advocacy Alliance; Washington DC  
Oromo Legacy Leadership and Advocacy Association; Falls Church, VA  
Oromo Menschenrechts und Hilfsorganisation (Oromo Human Rights and Relief Organisation);  
Hanover, Germany  
Oromo Professionals Group; Washington, DC  
Oromo Studies Association; Knoxville, TN  
Team Free Oromia; Washington, DC  
Union of Oromo Communities in Canada; Ontario, Canada  
#OromoProtests; Washington, DC  
\* Oromia Global Forum is a coalition of over 40 Oromo faith-based, community, civic,  
professional and scholarly organizations, and human rights advocates.