

## **PRESS RELEASE**

April, 18, 2024

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### **A Brutal and Undignified End to A Dignified Life**

Washington, D.C., April 18, 2024 – The Coalition of Oromo Advocacy and Human Rights Groups mourns the loss of a courageous advocate for peace and human rights, as, yet again, the world is informed of the silencing of an emerging Oromo voice on the Ethiopian political scene.

The killing of Battee (or Bate) Urgessa, a 41-year-old rising Oromo politician, sadly, extends a pattern of extrajudicial killings that systematically snuff out the lives of those who show commitment and skill in their efforts to support civil liberties while inspiring others to adapt non-violent means to pursue peace.

Battee Urgessa was such a person. He would have been an excellent younger generation candidate to speak about Oromo aspirations for peace in any internationally-hosted dialogue platform on the future of Ethiopia. Instead, one week ago he was abducted by security agents from a small guest house and ill-treated as he was taken into a waiting government-issue truck in the presence of several onlookers. Hours later, his bound body was deposited in the outskirts of his hometown, Meqi Oromia, and left for scavenging animals. It was an undignified end to a dignified consequential young leader. It indelibly sears into history the regrettable contrast between the potential in Ethiopia and the ugly reality currently pursued with impunity.

Both Battee's arrest and his killing were witnessed, and his body protected by innocent local residents who fended off wild beasts until the police arrived. Notably, the fate of those witnesses themselves appears in jeopardy. Battee's killing and the crimes now committed to cover it up expose the disregard and disdain of the Abiy Ahmed regime for protecting civil liberties and cultivating civil society.

This deadly trend can no longer be ignored or explained away. It should be of concern to all countries, especially the US, who partnered with the Abiy regime amid great fanfare, expecting a transition to democracy.

Battee's brutal murder is not an isolated incident but emblematic of the broader crackdown on civil liberties and dissent under Abiy's government. The regime's frontal attack on activists and advocates who openly support democratic values, and the ruthless suppression of critical voices has fostered a climate of fear and oppression. In addition to such extrajudicial killings, tactics such as intimidation, arbitrary detention, forced conscription and disappearances exacerbate this repression, enabling the government to operate through fear and coercion.

The government's cover-up of the circumstances surrounding the apparent execution of Battee Urgessa underscores the urgency of the call for accountability and justice. Ethiopia's allies and partners must not again turn a blind eye to atrocities in Oromia but should demand a thorough investigation and hold those responsible accountable within their own partnership arrangements. It is essential to reconsider support for a regime that violates the specific principles it committed to uphold and has now flagrantly abandoned.

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