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OBBO BAQQALA MOKONNON:

A PIONEERING AND LIFE-LONG OROMO NATIONALIST



It was with deep sadness that our people both in Oromia and in the Diaspora heard on January 24, 2016, of the passing away of Obbo Baqqala Mokonnen, one of the distinguished pioneering founders and leaders of the renowned Macha–Tulama Self-Help Association (MTA). He was a great leader and a highly respected nationalist who devoted all of his adult life to fighting for the rights of the Oromo people.

Obbo Baqqala died at the age of eighty-six. He spent about a decade in an Ethiopian prison as a prisoner of conscience and about a quarter of a century in exile. His death is a tremendous loss to his family members, to our nation, and to all Oromo nationalists who have sacrificed their lives by struggling for the liberation of the Oromo people and their beloved country, Oromia. *Oromummaa* (Oromo nationalism), which Oromo nationalists such as Obbo Baqqala and his father Mokonnen Wasanu helped to blossom, has developed into the leading ideology of the Oromo national movement and has mobilized the entire Oromo nation into action to liberate itself from Ethiopian colonialism and global imperialism. The current Oromia-wide protest movement is the living example of this process.

This pioneering Oromo nationalist started to fight for the national rights of the Oromo when he was very young. While an Oromo collaborator class has emerged that seeks personal gain and interests at the cost of the Oromo nation, Obbo Baqqala continuously struggled and sacrificed for his people until his death. While living as an exile in London, England, Obbo Baqqala was a dynamic and vibrant nationalist; he actively participated in the affairs of the Oromo nation in the Diaspora by building and supporting the

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Oromo Community Association in London and by energetically participating in the activities of the Oromo Liberation Front. All those who knew Obbo Baqqala can testify to this reality.

In the 1960s, Obbo Baqqala was known for two important contributions to the MTA. With other members of the association including Maamo Mazamer, Haile Maaram Diima, Taaffasa Gammachuu, and Fiixuma, he provided security service for the members and leaders of the MTA during meetings. Particularly, as a trusted and brave man, he worked closely with General Taddassa Biru, who would later emerge as the leading figure of the association. His second contribution was in the area of membership recruitment. He helped build the membership base of the association by identifying prominent Oromo individuals and professionals in Finfinnee, explaining to them the objectives of the association and recruiting them. For instance, with the advise of General Taddassa Biru, Obbo Baqqala recruited Addee Axadaa Habte Maaram Bakare, a prominent Oromo woman, to be a member of the association. She helped in recruiting many Oromo individuals from Wallaga to be members of the association. Later Addee Axadaa and Obbo Baqqalaa married each other and promoted the Oromo struggle together.

When the military regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam was overthrown and when the OLF participated in forming the transitional government of Ethiopia, Obbo Baqqala joined the OLF and participated in the Oromo national struggle. In 1992, when the Tigrayan-led Ethiopian government forced the OLF out of the transition government, he sought political asylum in London and lived there until his death.

The Members and the Board of Directors of the MTA-USA are proud that the Oromo nation has given birth to the likes of committed nationalists such as Obbo Baqqala Mokonnon who contributed their knowledge, skills, financial resources, and lives for the liberation of the Oromo people and country. Those who serve their people will always forevermore live on in history and will have a special place in the hearts and minds of the Oromo people. We will always remember the long and dedicated service of Obbo Baqqalaa to the cause of our people. May our *Waaqa* bless our people with millions of other committed nationalists just like Obbo Baqqala Mokonnon! The members of the Board of Directors of the Macha-Tulama Cooperative and Development Association, USA, Inc. express their deepest condolences to his family members and to all those who were touched by his life-long service to the Oromo and, his infectious love for the dignity of his people.

Sincerely,

Asafa Jalata

Asafa Jalata, PhD

President, Board of Directors of Macha-Tulama Cooperative and Development Association, USA