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UNESCO  
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His Excellency Mr. Kishore Rau  
Director  
World Heritage Centre (CLT/HER/WHC)

**Subject:** our opposition to the pending process for the inscription of the so called Gada age- grade system on the Representative lists of Intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

Your Excellency

Here with we the **A**lliance of **N**illotic and **O**moti**c** **P**eople of **A**frica (NOPA) would like to bring to your attention that we categorically reject the gada age grade cycling system of Oromo pastoralists to be recognized as world heritage. The self called Oromo (Galla) clans who invaded the Ethiopian Empire in the wake of Adal-Muslim jihadist War in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century began to become sedentary in the Ethiopian fertile highland. Subsequently they gave up their nomadic gada system and especially some of the clans who immigrated into Southwestern Ethiopia established a government by a monarchy same as their neighbours. The vestige of **Gada system** survives in the nomadic and pagan clans of Borana in southern Ethiopia and their siblings Orma (Tana Galla) in the Republic of Kenya along the Tana valley. The Gallas have displaced the indigenous Bantu tribes in the Tana, Juba and Shebele Rivers. Thereby they perpetrated an atrocious crime to Pokomo, Giryama, Nyika, etc. as it was systematically recorded in Arabic language in the chronicle of East Africa (*Kitab- al Zanuj*).

On Boran raiding methods:

<<The usual practice is to lay up outside a village of the enemy until its occupants are asleep, and then swoop in and kill as many people as possible. If stock can be driven away so much better, but this is secondary to the killing. Trophies are carried back to home villages. (Baxter, 1979, 89)  
The trophies were the severed genitals of slain males of any age or size from an embryo or a baby boy to an old man (Schlee, 1989, 38). >>

The Boran identify "being human" with being "a Boran". Other ethnic groups are "less human" as their distance from them such as Rendeli, Garba. Molo, Pokomo; Giryama, etc. On the other hand the Somali Muslim clans began to expel the Gallas from their holdings in Kismayu. The continual ethnic conflicts in Northeastern Kenya are due to the Boran Galla and Somali expansion and subjugation.

Currently Oromo nationalists are wishfully longing for the gada system. As a result they are manufacturing fabulous myths about an "indigenous democratic" social organization. The very recent construction of the pan-Oromo ideology has set the mark of an authentic Oromo identity and nationalism by taking gada symbolism.

Your Excellency

It must be noted that the most brutal expansionist War of the Galla pastoralists in Northeast Africa has resulted in the extinction of many developed states and communities in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Therefore, the intention to inscribe the gada system in the lists of an intangible cultural heritage of the world will be tantamount to either an insult to humanity or to turn a deaf ear to the barbarity of Oromo pastoralists in Northeast Africa ever since the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Our objections are based on the following reasons:

- Oromo (Galla) ethnic groups have no exclusive rights for the age-grade organized cycling type of government. It is in indeed the most distinctive feature of Nilotic, Omotic, Cushitic and Bantu ethnic groups. The Age set or the gada generation-set System is by no means an Oromo invention but distributed in independent forms throughout the cultures of Lowland Eastern Cushitic speakers, Nilotic and Bantu ethnic groups as well (Schel, 1994, 4). In East Africa in particular and other regions in the world in general age set system of organization are prevalent and the cycling period differs significantly among the various ethnic groups. For instance, the age grade in Massaia ethnic group cycles every 15 years, in Murele every 6 years, in Achole every 10 years and in Boran every 8 years. The Nilotic speaking Massais, Arusha, Nandi, Dinka, Sur, Murle, Achole, Kipsing, Kalingin, Luoha and other Bantu language family speakers such as GiKukuyu, and Cushitic speakers such as Konso, etc. are well known to use age set system of social organizations.

Age-grade or Gada system is one of the savage customs in the dark ages. Oromo clans treated their conquered enemies with greater savagery of emasculation and annihilation.

- The age-grade gada system totally excludes the womenfolk. It has nothing to do with the democratic system of government and egalitarianism. In all regions where the Oromo tribes conquered such as Sidama, Hadiaya, Enaria, Gurage, Kembata, Damot, Binzamo, Gongga, etc. the gada system was **oppressive and exclusive** in practice. This has been corroborated by the German ethno historian Ulrich Braukaemper that minorities and those who even assimilated like Hadya were considered to be of lower social status than the pure Galla and did not possess equal right in the gada system. Moreover, the Boran identify "being human" with being a Boran. Other ethnic groups are "less human" as their distance from the Boran observer increases (Personal communication, Nairobi Workshop).
- In the age- grade system the 5<sup>th</sup> stage (40-48 years) called gada **Luba** has a chieftain named Aba Dula is the master of an assault on non-Galla ethnic groups. Every new Luba set had to invade and intrude himself into a new territory larger than the previous Luba has conquered. "The gada system of the Boran provided the rule that each new set initiated into the raaba grade had to go on a ritual war expedition to procure livestock and cut-off genitals of male strangers as trophies. As these initiations took place every eight years, the neighbours of the Boran were subjected to a regime of periodic terror." (E.Kurimoto & Simon Simones: *Conflict, Age & Power in North East Africa*, (1998), P.128)

The Gada system has nothing to do with a democratic system of government. It is in fact a ritual association of Oromo males, for a fixed number of years (8 years) to create social unity and stability within the ethnic group. Its main objective is to perpetuate violence towards others.

We therefore, your Excellency, request you to reject the Gada, the most barbaric system of expansion, subjugation and the continual conflict propagation in East Africa not to be recognized as an intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

Yours sincerely

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