

# **A Response to Dr. Fikre Tolossa/Tolassa**

By Dr. Beyan H. Asoba

May 30, 2013

**Dear Dr. Fikre Tolossa/Tolassa,**

I was travelling when the open letter your addressed to me appeared on a number of websites and was thus not in the position to respond sooner. In this response, I will address only those aspects of your open letter that personally concern me. The Oromo Democratic Front will have to respond on the general content of your writing.

**Dear Dr. Fikre,**

Let me start my comment by making a brief observation on how you spell your last name. I checked as many of your published works as possible and they are all signed by Fikre Tolossa. That is how your name appears on your University of Bremen dissertation of 1983 and numerous subsequent publications. And it is also how you spell your name on your Facebook. To my knowledge, it is only in the open letter addressed to me that you not only spelled your name as Fikre Tolassa but also added apparently your grandfather's name, Jigsa.

Let us leave Jigsa alone and allow him to continue lurking in the shadows, where you usually place him, and focus on Tolossa/Tolassa that more commonly appears after your first name. Tolossa could ostensibly be construed as a derivative of the Amharic word "tolo." And I know for sure that Tolassa is a derivative of the Oromo word "tola." Consequently, by spelling your name in two different ways, you appear to evince two contrasting identities. If by doing so you wish to sit on the Amhara/Oromo identity fence, all I can say is "suit yourself!" I fully respect your right to call yourself whatever you want and to proclaim any identity you choose.

My question is: Why could you not accord me the same right? My name is not Bayyanaa Suba. I have never spelled my name in any other way than Beyan Asoba. I would not have recognized that this new name actually refers to me if it were not used in context of commenting on the Oromo Democratic Front, of which I am a member. Obviously, you took the liberty to attribute another name to me in order to serve your political objective.

Only creators have the right to name the object of their creation. For example, auto-makers give specific names to their various brands just as parents name their children.

Unfortunately, for us, the sons and daughters of the Oromo nation, suffering the indignity of being re-named by Chauvinists has been a very common and bitter experience. Our very national name (Oromo) was erased from public records and replaced by another one along with a bundle of pejorative connotations associated with it. Even pupils used to be coerced by their teachers to dump the names originally given to them by their parents and to assume a new in order to start the process of qualifying as an Ethiopian.

It is this practice of demanding that individuals need to first die as Oromos, Sidamas, Walayitas, Kambatas, Hadiyas, etc. in order to be reborn as Ethiopians that sits at the heart of the political contestation in that country. And so long as being an Oromo and an Ethiopian are made incompatible, we have no choice but to either reject your Itophiyawinnet or suffer the imposed self-abnegation.

I want to make one thing perfectly clear to you and your likes. The days when Oromos had to endure self-abnegation are over and shall never return. We have rejected the Itophiyawinnet that is the antithesis of being an Oromo and shall continue to do so as long as this antithetical relationship is maintained. The choice is yours and your likes'. You either accept us with our identity and other rights fully respected or you kiss goodbye to your much vaunted Itophiyawinnet and Ethiopian unity. Can you not see that there is something immoral in trying to build Ethiopian unity on graves of Oromos, Sidamas, Walayitas, Kambatas, Hadiyas, etc .? Why do you refuse to recognize that this aspiration is ultimately counterproductive? I only hope that this irrational, immoral and ultimately destructive aspiration would give way to a more sober and fair articulation of an Ethiopian identity that is as an amalgam of the identities of the various nations inhabiting its territorial space.

Finally, I would like you to know that this is the last time I will comment on this very painful issue.

Beyan H. Asoba 5/29/13