April 2017

To: The School Board of Directors, Teachers, Administrators, Parents,

Kadara School, Arbegona

From:  Sonja Simmons,

 The Davis Moon Project

Thank you for meeting with me last month when I visited the school. I was happy to see the electricity wiring, the pre-Kindergarten program and the new buildings.  As always, it was nice to see the students.

I have been extremely concerned since my visit by the changes in the school administration.  Not only the removal and subsequent treatment of Headmaster Melese but the installation of the new administrators under the direction of Elias.  As I expressed during my visit, your dismissal of Headmaster Melese destroys 7 years of built trust that facilitated our working relationship. I do not have trust in the current administration.

As I expressed in our meeting, I am deeply troubled by the new administrator’s inability to produce routine documents such as bank statements, vendor invoices, bid documents related to needed supplies/construction and well-documented income statements.  I only visit once a year and for the school not to have these simple documents prepared for this meeting was unacceptable.

Another troubling aspect of my visit was the school administration’s unwillingness to communicate effectively with the uniform vendor in Hawassa. I have raised the funds to pay for 1,200 new uniforms and I simply asked that you communicate with the vendor to have the uniforms ready for my pick-up and delivery to the school.  This was not done. Only 85 uniforms were ready for pick-up.  In order for me to ensure the integrity of the donations I make to the school, it is imperative that I personally witness the entire cycle of the donation, payment, purchase of goods and delivery of those goods to the children - in this case, the uniforms. I must be 100% positive that my entire donation benefit only the students of the Kadara School.

Further, the school is not in the position to expand to 9th grade next year. The current financial situation at the school will not support an expansion and my continued participation at the school is uncertain. You are unable to adequately meet the needs of the current students you have enrolled and I ask that you reconsider the proposed increase in students. It is unwise to grow the school in order to gain prestige and power in the community.

Finally, I was very upset by all the new people attending the meeting at the school. Who are these people and what is their interest in the school? If they are officials from the government, then why are they all unable to produce identification and why have I never seen them before? Why was Melese not included in the meeting to provide a transparent transition of authority?

All of these concerns have lead me to mistrust the school administration’s intent and competence to operate the school to benefit the children of Arbegona. I will no longer make contributions to the school account.  Any donations that I do make will be in the form of direct payments to the vendor(s) of my choice that will in turn provide goods or services to the school. These vendors will be directed to provide no payment to any school official under any circumstances. If at any point, I determine that it is the intent of the new administration to divert the funds or services I provide to benefit any individuals or entities other than the students of our school I will immediately terminate our relationship.

Make no mistake, the responsibility for this situation lies completely with Elias and the school leaders who made the decision to disrupt a system that was working well by replacing Headmaster Melese.  I will never condone corruption of any type that only serves to undermine the competent and thoughtful operation of the school solely to benefit the children who attend.

I hope we are able to build trust again and move beyond the current situation. As I repeatedly stated in our meeting, it will take years to reestablish the trust that was in place for the last 7 years. I care deeply for the children that attend the Kadara School and ask that we always put their needs first in our decision-making process regarding the financial needs at the school.

Sincerely,

Sonja Simmons