

The logo for the New York City Bar, featuring the text "NEW YORK CITY BAR" in a serif font, centered between two horizontal blue bars.

NEW YORK
CITY BAR

March 8, 2006

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Vicki J. Huddleston
Chief of Mission, Embassy of the United States of America
c/o Ethiopia Desk
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice and Ms. Huddleston:

I am writing on behalf of the New York City Bar Association to express our grave concern over human rights abuses in Ethiopia. The government has resorted to arbitrary and politically motivated detentions and the use of excessive and deadly force to suppress political demonstrations. The government's actions are unacceptable in a democratic free society, and are clear violations of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the African (Banjul) Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The Association calls upon you to exert all possible political and financial pressure to persuade the government of Ethiopia to restore the rule of law and abide by international standards of human rights.

The Association is an independent non-governmental organization with a membership of more than 22,000 lawyers, judges, law professors and government officials, principally from New York City but also from throughout the United States and 50 other countries. Founded in 1870, the Association has a long history of dedication to human rights, notably through its Committee on International Human Rights, which investigates and reports on human rights conditions around the world, including within the United States.

On May 15, 2005, parliamentary elections provided the Ethiopian people with the opportunity to participate in a true democratic election. International election observers from the Carter Center received reports of intimidation and harassment. Delays in the announcement of official results exacerbated tensions and fueled rumors of vote rigging.

A preliminary report by the European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) found improprieties including counting irregularities, and release of electoral results that seriously undermined the transparency and fairness of the election. Even before these reports, demonstrations protesting the elections took place on a large scale. On June 8th, government security forces open fired into large crowds of demonstrators, killing more than 40 demonstrators and injuring hundreds.

Attempts to resolve the contested results failed. During the first week of November, government security forces detained thousands of protestors and open fired into crowds of demonstrators. According to Amnesty International, schoolchildren, college students and teachers are among thousands of demonstrators detained. There have been reports of detainees being beaten and tortured by soldiers and police, and being held incommunicado in rural prisons and army camps. [PUBLIC AI Index 25/001/2006] Peter Takirambudde, Director of Human Rights Watch Africa Division conducted a research trip and reported that Ethiopian authorities were using intimidation, arbitrary detentions, and excessive force to suppress the post-election protest and political dissent. [HRW, January 13 report]

On December 21, 2005, 131 opposition leaders, supporters, journalists, aid workers and intellectuals [see appendix] were charged with treason and genocide, crimes which carry the death penalty under Ethiopian law. Approximately eighty-eight are in custody without bail.

In light of these events, we urge you to exert all possible political and financial pressure to achieve the following goals:

- (1) restoration of the rule of law in Ethiopia;
- (2) immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners of conscience and prisoners detained without charges;
- (3) a fair, transparent and speedy trial with full access to legal counsel, medical care, adequate food, water and shelter, and family members;
- (4) an independent inquiry into allegations of election fraud with third party mediation of unresolved disputes;
- (5) an independent inquiry into reports of post-election detentions, use of excessive force, and abuse of prisoners, with possible referrals to the International Criminal Court; and
- (6) protection of the freedoms of opinion and expression and the rights to hold peaceful demonstrations and to political assembly

Representative Chris Smith of New Jersey has introduced the Ethiopia Consolidation Act of 2005 calling for various measures to support human rights, democratization and economic development in Ethiopia. The draft bill declares that it is the "...policy of the United States to support the advancement of human rights, democracy, and economic freedom in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia in concert with the United States security interests, in order to better enable Ethiopia to play a leading role in participating with the United States and other countries in fostering

stability, democracy, and economic development in Africa.” [H.R. 4423] The overwhelming voter turn-out in the May 15, 2005 elections demonstrates the Ethiopian people’s strong desire to fully participate in a democratic society. As a nation committed to the advancement of human rights, democracy, and economic freedom, we have an obligation to support the will of the Ethiopian people.

Thank you for your time and prompt attention to these serious concerns.

Respectfully yours,



Bettina B. Plevan

Cc: His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. Box 1031
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

His Excellency Assefa Kesito
Minister of Justice
Ministry of Justice
P.O. Box 1370
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

His Excellency Seyoum Mesfin
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Ministry of Foreign Affairs
P.O. Box 393
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

His Excellency Kassahun Ayele
Ambassador of Ethiopia to the United States
Embassy of Ethiopia
3506 International Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008

APPENDIX

The 131 individuals accused of treason and genocide include the following:

Hailu Shawel, 70, President of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy party, who is diabetic and in need of medical care

Bertukan Mideksa, Vice-President of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy party, lawyer, former judge

Berhanu Nega, 48, CUD mayor elect of Addis Ababa, former President of the Ethiopian Economic Association, founding head of the Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute

Yacob Hailemariam, 61, former lead attorney for U.N. tribunal investigating war crimes in Rwanda, former Norfolk State University business law Professor

Mesfin Wolde Mariam, 75, veteran human rights activist, founder and former Chair of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (EHRCO), in poor health with heart condition and acute spinal problem causing chronic pain and difficulty walking

Netsanet Demissie, Executive Director, Organization for Social Justice in Ethiopia (OSJE), environmental and human rights lawyer

Daniel Bekele, Policy, Research and Advocacy Manager to the international NGO ActionAid Ethiopia

Two teenage boys, believed to be fourteen and fifteen years old

Fourteen independent journalists, including five Washington, D.C. based Voice of America reporters

Ten newly elected members of parliament