

Washington Update
January 4, 2017

1. At a recent meeting, congressional staff reported on plans to introduce legislation promoting human rights, good governance, and democracy in Ethiopia. Like legislation introduced in the last session of Congress, the bill will condemn the killing of peaceful protesters and excessive use of force by Ethiopian security forces; call for the release of detailed journalists, students, activists and political leaders; and condemn the abuse of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation to stifle political and civil dissent and journalistic freedoms. The legislation will also call on the Department of State to review security assistance, and improve oversight of U.S. assistance, to Ethiopia, and for the U.S. Agency for International Development to lead efforts to develop a strategy to support improved democracy and governance in Ethiopia.

The legislation has strong support in Congress, but sustained pressure from the Ethiopian-American community will be needed to get it enacted. When the legislation is introduced, it will be essential for Ethiopian-Americans to contact their members of Congress and demand its rapid enactment. The Ethiopian regime's lobbyists will try to persuade members of Congress that the legislation is unnecessary and that it isn't supported by Ethiopian-Americans. We must prove them wrong.

We realize that some people are disheartened by the lack of progress. It is important to remember that success in Washington comes from persistence. We will continue to knock on doors in Congress, to speak with the State Department and work tirelessly until we get positive results. We can't promise success within any specific time period, but we can guarantee that nothing will happen ever if we give up or if we spend our time fighting among ourselves.

Our efforts to influence Congress and the State Department have been successful in the past. For example, in early 2000 we spent a lot of energy explaining the desperate shortages of food in Ethiopia to members of House Representatives, especially the late Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Henry Hyde of Illinois. We provided testimony for a Committee hearing. After the hearing Congress ordered USAID to send food to Ethiopia. In 2008 we Ethiopian-Americans were heavily involved in lobbying the US Congress to pass a bill sponsored by Congressman Chris Smith called the Human Rights and Democracy in Ethiopia Act. It passed unanimously. In the 2007, Ethiopian-Americans also worked hard with Congress, the White House and State department for the release of political prisoners, and we are still working to all political prisoners and journalists in Ethiopia released. We also worked with the State Department and the US Embassy in Ethiopia to get permission for the late Engineer Hailu Shawl to travel to South Africa for medical treatment.

2. At a December 18 Town Hall meeting convened by Democracy for Ethiopia Dr. Taye Woldesemiat invited anyone to join "Democracy Le Ethiopia." Its general principle is to support the basic principles of democracy for Ethiopian society. Its aims and goals are:

1. Respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including rights to food, water, education, health care, gender equality, mass access to culture, sports and security in old age.
 2. Respect the uniform application of the rule of law.
 3. Support civil society as the backbone of democratic organizations: women's associations, teachers associations, trade unions, etc.
 4. Support freedom of the press and free access to information.
 5. All theories that seek to justify or that tolerate injustice are wrong.
- For more information, contact democracylethiopian@gmail.com.

Ato Abayenah Berhanu told the audience that the Ethiopian opposition must work together for the interest of Ethiopia. Division only leads to weakness for the struggle. He also said that we must learn from the All Ethiopia Unity Party's successful election results in 2005 encompassing the entire country.

Wzro Negist Geberhewit said that Ethiopians are very generous and kind people. She reported that when she travelled in the rural parts of Ethiopia, people showed how important it is to work together to struggle for democracy. She spoke about the importance of democracy for Ethiopia, and emphasized that women must be a part of the struggle.

During the question and answer session someone in the audience asked if there any plans to work with other nations or the African Union. Another person asked Dr. Taye where he has been while Ethiopia has been struggling. Dr. Taye responded that he was watching Ethiopian issues very closely and was very disappointed and concerned, especially about the repression. That is why he different forums, including the new Democracy for Ethiopia forum, have been organized recently. We will do whatever we can for my country, Ethiopia, he said.

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