

**Washington Update
March 12, 2017**

Lawmakers and policymakers in Washington are becoming increasingly concerned about the situation in Ethiopia. A congressional hearing last week highlighted bipartisan criticism of the Ethiopian government. Members of Congress made it clear they are convinced that the Ethiopian government is routinely violating human rights.

Speaking at a March 9 hearing of the Africa and Global Health Subcommittee, Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) said he is "deeply concerned and troubled about the deteriorating conditions in Ethiopia. The EPRDF regime is becoming increasingly totalitarian. My concern continues for the deteriorating condition of political prisoners, who testified to this committee, and continues to languish in prison in Ethiopia, along with hundreds of other [political prisoners] and journalists without access to medical care and due process."

According to the State Department's newly released Human Rights Report on Ethiopia, security forces killed 'hundreds' in the context of using excessive force against protestors in 2016," said Smith, Chairman of the Africa Subcommittee. "In addition, there are at least thousands more people held in jail who are considered political prisoners, and the government continues to arrest and imprison critics of its actions. Dr. Merera arrested upon his return to Ethiopia after testifying in November at a European parliament hearing about the crisis in his country."

Ethiopia's Communication Affairs Minister, Negeri Lencho, says his government has been providing Merera with protection as a prominent member of a legal opposition party. Lencho acknowledged that Merera, who he said is being held for violating the terms of the state of emergency, is very well respected in the country. "He met with terrorist organizations, groups that the Ethiopian parliament designated as terrorists," [Negeri told VOA Amharic](#), adding the court will decide whether to jail or release Merera once an investigation is completed.

Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) said that "unfortunately, the Ethiopian regime shows deteriorating signs of human rights practices, This oppression is preventable," said Smith. "Rather than spend hundreds of thousands on consultants to try to mislead Members of Congress on the facts and inciting e-mail form letter campaigns by supporters, the Government of Ethiopia can acknowledge their challenges and work with the U.S. government and others in the international community to seek reasonable solutions. We are prepared to help once they are ready to face the ugly truth of what has happened and what continues to happen in Ethiopia today."

The hearing followed the introduction of [House Resolution 128](#), which offers an outline to bring Ethiopia back onto the path towards democracy. This resolution is designed to promote democracy and good governance in Ethiopia and, among other key provisions, condemns the actions of the Government of Ethiopia and calls on the Secretary of State to improve the oversight and accountability of U.S. assistance in Ethiopia.

Terrence Lyons, Associate Professor at George Mason University, noted the extreme control the regime has over the media: “Following the 2005 elections and subsequent crackdown, the regime successfully expanded and institutionalized its system of authoritarian control, virtually eliminating independent space for opposition political parties, civil society organizations, and non-state media. The EPRDF controls mass organizations for women and youth, humanitarian and development organizations, and large economic enterprises.” [Click Here to read Lyons’ Full Statement.](#)

Felix Horne, Senior Researcher for the Horn of Africa at Human Rights Watch said, “The state systematically ensures that many of the country’s 100 million citizens are dependent on the government for their livelihoods, food security and economic future.” [Click Here to read Horne’s Full Statement.](#)

The President of the Coalition of Oromo Advocates for Human Rights and Democracy, Seenaa Jimjimo, explained the strife within Ethiopia, “Today...people are afraid to speak and exercise basic rights guaranteed by the constitution. Under the codename of “State of Emergency” a husband watches his wife and daughters get raped, sons taken away or killed. I myself have lived under terror and being watched and beaten by this government.” [Click Here to read Jimjimo’s Full Statement.](#)

Tewodrose G. Tirfe, a Board Member at the Amhara Association of America, highlighted the plight faced by the Amhara people, “As stated in the 2007 Ethiopian Census that was released in 2010, the Amhara population was short by 2.5 million. A debate was not even allowed in parliament when this fact was presented. Some estimates have the number now closer to 5 million. We believe there has been a systematic effort by the government to depopulate the Amhara population.” [Click Here to read Tirfe’s Full Statement.](#)

Guyaa Abaguya Deki, a Representative for the Torture Abolition and Survivors Support Coalition and a Polio survivor, gave his personal experience with the Ethiopian Government, “They picked me up in a taxi. The driver punched me in my mouth with his pistol, and I lost my two lower teeth. They kept me for three days in solitary confinement in a tiny dark cell. I had to crawl on the ground outside the cell to lift myself up to get to the toilet. And I was only allowed to go to the toilet twice a day. My hands were tied to a chair and my mouth was wrapped up with dirty wet socks.” [Click Here to read Deki’s Full Statement.](#)

Deacon Yoseph R. Tafari spoke about the religious persecution going on in Ethiopia, “Ethiopia is ruled by a minority ethnic regime which has brought about highly destructive governance by perpetually marginalizing and terrorizing other ethnic group and religious groups by pitting one against the other.” [Click Here to read Tafari’s Full Statement.](#)

Smith has held four hearings on Ethiopia with the first, “[Ethiopia and Eritrea: Promoting Stability, Democracy and Human Rights](#),” was held more than a decade ago in 2005.

The hearing and report make it clear that the world realizes the Ethiopian government is preparing to steal another election, and that it fails to respect

basic norms of human decency, human rights and democracy. The real question is if the U.S. or the European Union will do anything about it, or if it will take a tragic event to focus the world's attention on the Horn of Africa.

In the mean time Reuters news agency reported that Millions of drought-stricken Ethiopians needing food, water and emergency medical care are not receiving it due to funding shortages, the United Nations said, warning the crisis will worsen if spring rains fail as predicted.

Some 5.6 million people need food aid in the Horn of Africa nation, which has been hit by a series of back-to-back droughts.

"The needs relating to the developing emergency exceed resources available to date," the U.N.'s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said on Monday.

"Each day without food assistance exponentially increases human suffering, lengthens the recovery period of affected people, puts increasing pressure on humanitarian and development systems, and the interventions become that much more expensive."

All hands for Ethiopia - Ethiopian Drought response report from Debre Genet Medahnalem Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Temple Hills, Maryland, in a town Hall gathering with its members and supporters to report the drought response that was raised funds to help address the food disaster in Ethiopia. The church has raised total of \$385,303.96 for food assistance. The committee worked with four credible non governmental organizations to distribute food assistance to the major affected area through out Ethiopia.

This kind of efforts must be encouraged by all Ethiopians in the Diaspora.

Mesfin Mekonen