

Washington update
October 28, 2018

1. Although the appointment of Ethiopian women to the cabinet post and to the president is a welcome development, the situation is unstable.

There's been a startling revelation from Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed. It's been just over a week since soldiers marched on his palace. At the time, he described it as nothing more than a pay dispute. Now, the premier has told the country that it was actually a coup attempt.

Contrary to his promises to allow peaceful protest and freedom of assembly, 2,000 young Ethiopians demonstrators were arrested in Addis Ababa without due process. They were released in response to international pressure, but the episode makes it clear that the political situation in Ethiopia is volatile.

The government lead by Prime Minister Abiy must focus first on peace, law and order, and development. Ethiopia is at a turning point. For it to move toward prosperity, peace and democracy, it is essential that the government find ways to increase economic opportunity, especially for the growing population of young Ethiopians who need training and jobs.

2. Now, more than ever, the U.S. can play a constructive role in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's fate is in the hands of its people, but the U.S. can and should be helping them forge a democratic, prosperous future.

Ethiopia has some friends in the U.S. Congress, and Ethiopian-Americans must support them. The Ethiopian-Americans community endorses Congressman Chris Smith as Representative for the State of New Jersey for his fight for human rights for voiceless people all over the globe.

We also endorse Congressman Mike Coffman of Colorado and Senator Ben Cardin of Maryland for the fight for human Rights as well.

They are friends of Ethiopia.

Congressman Mike Coffman has written a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo requesting that the Global Magnitsky Act be applied to a former Ethiopian official. Coffman (R-CO) sent a letter to the Pompeo and to the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, Steven Mnuchin, to request that Getachew Assefa, former head of the Ethiopian National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) be sanctioned under the Global Magnitsky Act for having committed human rights violations against the Ethiopian people.

“I have asked the Administration to apply the Global Magnitsky Act to Getachew Assefa. The United States must stand with the Ethiopian community as they continue to fight for democracy and a respect of human rights”.

https://coffman.house.gov/uploadedfiles/coffman_ethiopia_magnitsky_act.pdf

In addition, Congressman Chris Smith has spoken out about the arrests of human rights lawyers in Ethiopia. On Oct. 19, Smith (R-NJ), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, issued the following statement on the Ethiopian government’s arrests of human rights lawyers Henok Aklilu and Michael Melake:

“I am concerned by the Ethiopian government’s recent arrest of human rights lawyers Henok Aklilu and Michael Melake, and am worried that it may signal backsliding. I hope and expect that Ethiopian authorities will afford them due process and fair treatment, and that Prime Minister Abiy and his government will not waver from the path of reform they have previously undertaken. It is important that Ethiopia’s government protect the civil and political rights of all Ethiopians, regardless of ethnicity, and that it seek national harmony.”

In a letter to United States Senators and Congressman, we wrote that “the present situation in Ethiopia is at critical junction. Armed groups are harassing the entire population. Ethnic cleansing is occurring both in Southern and Northern Ethiopia. Ethiopians are concerned that their government has not taken any action to avoid further bloodshed. The situation is very dangerous and attention from the United States is needed to prevent Ethiopia from becoming a breeding ground for extremist groups such as al shebab and al qaeda. Ethiopia is an ally in the war on terror with the United States.”

“Eskinder Nega, journalist, human rights and democracy activist, and Mesfin Mekonen, initiated and delivered to Prime Minister Abiy during his recent visit to the United States a declaration calling for Ethiopia to move forward with a truth and reconciliation project animated by the spirit that propelled change in South Africa.

The goals are clear: peace, justice, respect for human rights, democracy, and prosperity. Achieving these basic goals will require a process of truth telling, particularly about human rights abuses, achieved through testimony from both victims and perpetrators, coupled to a pledge of reconciliation. The declaration, was signed by prominent Ethiopians. Its recommendations must be implemented to avoid ethnic cleansing and other human rights abuses in Ethiopia.”

Mesfin Mekonen