

## **Ethiopian American Civic Advocacy (EACA)**



### **EACA's Presentation to Tacoma Park Government, Maryland, USA**

Honorable Council Members Ladies and Gentlemen, guests and fellow Ethiopian and Ethiopian Americans. My name is Kassa Ayalew and I am a naturalized Ethiopian American living in the USA since 1996.

On behalf of Ethiopian Americans living in the city of Tacoma Park and DC Metropolitan area, we would first like to extend our sincere gratitude to allow us to speak for the voiceless.

It is the policy of the United States to support the advancement of human rights, democracy, and economic freedom in Ethiopia as well as other African countries in concert with 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. Ethiopia has a central role to play in United States foreign policy. As the oldest independent nation in Africa and a strategic ally for centuries it is a key member of the African union.

Nevertheless, the ruling dictators who have held power now for 15 years threaten that progress and thereby affecting the interests of United States and Ethiopia. Over the last fifteen years Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International as well as numerous international organizations has reported the harassment, detention, assassination, beatings, ethnic cleansing, suppressing of independent media vital to any democracy, and even torture of critics of the Government. The list is just too long to list here.

In 2005 after tremendous pressure from the US and EU, the government of Ethiopia was forced to hold open elections. International election observers reported the turnout of millions of eligible voters in the, elections, further confirming the desire of the citizens of Ethiopia to express their political will through the ballot and their desire for change in government after 14 years of brutality. After the election ended, the dictatorial government responded by detaining all the opposition party leadership members, civic leaders, lawyers, and journalist to be charged with treason and genocide for winning an election. Over 110,000 civilians of opposition members were rounded up and detained in a remote location far from family members and loved ones. Several hundred innocent civilians including women and children were gunned down in broad daylight for demonstrating against the dictatorial government vote rigging. Despite the above facts, the United States has continued to provide and expand aid to the authoritarian government.

Ethiopia is today another example where one can learn how part of our foreign policy is failing as we continue to assist the authoritarian self-appointed governments because of our concern on terrorism and strategic interest.

As a possible partial remedy to the problems in relation to Ethiopia, we would like to lay out series of recommendations to the city and kindly ask you all to denounce any kind of support to self appointed authoritarian dictators in Ethiopia.

We recommend you to call on the Government of Ethiopia to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release all prisoners of conscience detained in Ethiopia, including members of parliament, human rights defenders, independent journalists and nonviolent student protesters.
2. Ensure a fair trial according to international standards to all detainees against whom charges are maintained.
3. Ensure a thorough, impartial and independent investigation into the killings of demonstrators by security forces on June 8 and in early November 2005. This should be done by a non-Ethiopian government entity and should include: taking evidence from the public as well as members of the security forces; guarantees of safety for witnesses; investigation into the excessive use of force by security forces, arbitrary incommunicado detentions without charge or trial (contrary to Ethiopian law); and reports of torture and ill treatment of some detainees. A report and recommendations should be made public in a reasonable period of time.
4. Ensure that all political detainees are treated humanely in custody in accordance with international and regional standards for the treatment of prisoners, with particular regard to medical treatment, family visits and communications, and permission for reading and writing materials.
5. Recognize and respect the right to freedom of speech, assembly, association and press, as set out in the Ethiopian Constitution, and international and regional human rights treaties to which Ethiopia is party.
6. Respect the legitimate role of Ethiopian human rights defenders and civil society activists and their counterparts in international organizations.

We ask the Tacoma Park government to call on the Government of the United States to:

1. Support the above recommendations to the Government of Ethiopia, and make human rights central to U.S. relations with the Government of Ethiopia and Ethiopian civil society.
2. Support our petition that also request that tax moneys not be spent in ways that help support the authoritarian regime in Ethiopia.
3. Support to instruct the Acting U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia to take actions necessary to successfully press the Government of Ethiopia to release all prisoners of conscience immediately and unconditionally.
4. Actively monitor all political trials in Addis Ababa and other places in Ethiopia, demand that they fulfill international standards for fair trials, and actively monitor the treatment of prisoners of conscience and all political detainees.

Acknowledging the obvious fact that the success in our interest in any part of the world is dependent upon promotion of human rights and democracy, we urge you to make a resolution that supports the above recommendations in regard to the situation in Ethiopia and also to appoint a nonpartisan Free Ethiopia Committee to oversee the process. Finally, we also ask you to support the bill introduced by Representative Christopher Smith of New Jersey, HR 5680, which recognizes that a stable, prosperous and democratic Ethiopia is critical in serving U.S. interests in North East Africa and the Middle East.

Please take a stand and actively support over 70 million of Ethiopians!

Thank you,