

Ethiopian-Americans for Democracy

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Via Fax #011-251-1-242401

&

Ambassador Timothy Clarke
Head of the European Commission
Delegation to Ethiopia
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Via Fax #011-251-1-61-28-77

Your Excellencies,

Please allow us to thank you, your respective governments, the European Union and the Ambassadors Donor Group for a tireless effort to mediate the post-election conflict between Prime Minister Zenawi and his political opposition. We are also thankful for your July 13, 2005 joint statement that called on all parties to resolve differences through dialogue.

While appreciative of your efforts, we are disappointed that the joint statement chose to ignore the following key issues:

- The June 8 killings of more than 36 innocent civilians by Mr. Zenawi's security forces.
- The continued intimidation, kidnapping and arrest of political opponents. It is an ominous sign when elected members of parliament are assassinated.
- You called on all sides to refrain from violence. The fact is the ruling group has *the security forces, the financial means and the motive to use violence. We believe the burden of not using violence should be directed at the Prime Minister who showed no reluctance to unleash lethal violence on numerous occasions.*
- It is unfair to pressure the opposition to accept National Electoral Board of Ethiopia (NEBE) rulings as final, knowing full well that NEBE is partisan and under the control of the ruling Tigrai People's Liberation Front. *If the NEBE is allowed to have the final word, it is a fait accompli that the Tigrai People's Liberation Front will remain in power against the wishes of the majority of the Ethiopian people.*
- Neither the Ethiopian people who were brave enough to vote in unprecedented numbers nor those of us in the Diaspora have confidence in the NEBE or the judiciary system.

- The voice of the opposition has been muffled while the ruling Tigray People's Liberation Front uses public media to misinform, attack and wage psychological warfare against those who support the opposition.

To remedy this one-sided, potentially explosive situation and to lay the groundwork for peace and stability in Ethiopia we appeal to you to consider the following steps:

- Request an immediate, transparent and impartial investigation into the June 8 and subsequent killings of unarmed civilians;
- An immediate halt to further intimidation, violence and the targeting of those who voted for the opposition;
- The immediate release of all students, journalists, leaders and supporters of the opposition parties;
- Access to publicly owned media by opposition parties; and
- A nationwide rerun of the May 15 elections with close international supervision along with a truly independent electoral board and new election rules.

Your Excellencies,

This may be Africa, but we would still like to believe the lives of our people mean something. We are therefore writing to ask you to reflect on the gravity of the situation and not to gloss over the death of so many Ethiopians and to call for an internationally supervised, independent investigation.

We believe it is unhelpful to ignore the massive killings and instead call on "all parties to renounce violence." You suggest a moral equivalence between right and wrong, between a government that has monopoly over the instruments of violence and a peaceful opposition that is at the receiving end of much harassment, jail and even death.

We suspect the compromise struck by Western powers to keep Mr. Zenawi in power and to remain silent about the killings is made at the expense of the Ethiopian people and in the name of some mythical stability; but it will bring anything but stability.

We also find it unhelpful that you continue to pressure the opposition to accept the National Electoral Board as the final arbiter of Ethiopia's much-disputed elections. The National Electoral Board is a partisan arm of the ruling party; it may have as well been called the Ministry of Elections. Even Prime Minister Zenawi agreed that he handpicked members of the Electoral Board – he admitted so in his July 4, 2005 interview with Stephen Sackur of the BBC.

The opposition was forced to accept, almost at gunpoint, the NEBE as the final authority and to sign the June 10 and 13 agreements. As you are well aware, the "negotiations" took place while the government continued to threaten, harass, beat and imprison opposition leaders and their supporters, thus resulting in a zero-sum negotiation.

Six weeks after the elections, the votes are still not fully counted, the ballot boxes are very likely compromised and the process is mired in technicalities. Under these conditions, much of the present commotion has only one likely outcome: giving legal cover and legitimacy to Mr. Zenawi's illegitimate claim to victory.

We believe the right thing to do under such circumstances, as happened in the Ukraine, is to conduct a nationwide rerun of the elections through a free and fair process. Such a move would alleviate much of the anxiety and once again create trust in the integrity of the process.

Your Excellencies,

Ethiopia under Mr. Zenawi has gone from the frying pan into the fire. We have no doubt the May 15 elections were a vote of no confidence in the 14-year rule of Prime Minister Zenawi and his Tigray People's Liberation Front. Many ask, as a recent article in the Financial Times did, "Why are things so bad in Ethiopia?" (<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,3-1677418,00.html>)

The misery index under Mr. Zenawi's rule has gone up in every respect. Upwards of 14 million people are dependent on foreign food handouts, three million are HIV-infected (the third largest in the world) and millions more are jobless. Incompetence, mismanagement and ethnic cronyism are the order of the day. In a cynical and Orwellian manner, human rights abuses and political tyranny are camouflaged in democratic garb for the benefit of foreign donors.

Under the guise of a "coalition" government dubbed EPRDF, the Tigray People's Liberation Front and its cohorts control all land (and fertilizer distribution), urban houses, major business enterprises, all mass media, the police, the army and the secret services. Under Ethiopian law no political party is supposed to own businesses or mass media. But Prime Minister Zenawi, his party and the handful of Central Committee members who run the country are above the law and accountable to no one.

The ruling group also controls over \$20 billion in official development assistance that Ethiopia has received in the last fourteen years. There is very little to show for all this money. Yet, based on extensive, ill-gotten wealth, the Liberation Front has created a secret network of businesses and an extensive patronage system. Dissent is kept in check through an elaborate network of spies both in the cities and the countryside. Political opponents and business rivals who get in the way are routinely thrown in jail on trumped up charges or "rubbed off", mafia style.

Such is the source of the anger that drove Ethiopians to the polls on May 15 in unprecedented numbers. We believe the people have spoken and their vote should be respected.

In 1991, Mr. Herman Cohen, former Under Secretary of State for African Affairs, threw the power and prestige of the United States behind the Tigray People's Liberation Front, an otherwise fringe Albania-worshipping guerilla group to rule over 70 million people. The Ethiopian people were never consulted; instead, secret deals were struck behind their back ostensibly to maintain stability. Another secret deal to allow Mr. Zenawi and his lieutenants to stay in power for five more years is one sure way of keeping Ethiopia a shackled, beggar nation for a long time to come. We beseech you not to follow this path.

Your Excellencies,

There is no substitute for democracy and good governance if Ethiopia is to dig itself out of the current quagmire, and trading stability for democracy has not worked. Furthermore, the Western world will have a stronger and more reliable ally with a leadership in Ethiopia whose legitimacy derives from the ballot rather than the bullet.

In his inaugural speech on January 20, 2005, President Bush said, "*All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know the United States will not ignore your oppression or excuse your oppressors. When you stand for your liberty we will stand with you.*"

We certainly hope the United States and the European Union will not ignore Ethiopia's oppressors or create excuses for them.

Respectfully yours,

Ethiopian-Americans for Democracy

CC:

Former President Jimmy Carter

Mr. Tom Casey, Acting Spokesperson, United States Department of State

United States Department of State, Ethiopia Desk

Ambassador of Austria

Ambassador of Belgium

Ambassador Canada

Ambassador of Czech Republic

Ambassador of Denmark

Ambassador of EU Delegation

Ambassador of Finland

Ambassador of France

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Ambassador of Italy

Ambassador of Japan

Ambassador of Netherlands

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Mr. Bono

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