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Open Letter to the U.S. Congress Prof. Mammo Muchie, Network of  
Ethiopian Scholars (NES) June 31, 2007

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We would like to add our voice of support for the US Congress to pass the HR 2003 bill to support human rights, the rule of law and democratic governance. We think the HR2003 is very important in supporting the US Government from being accused of double standard. This is a great opportunity to clear the decks and come out principled and consistent for the US Government and US legislative arm. We are also puzzled why the Meles Government links this bill to the demand to get the prisoners of conscience released and even more puts up such an incredible opposition to it by hiring expensive lobbyists. If indeed this regime stands for rule of law, human rights and establishing with the US Government to form principled relations on a sustainable foundation with the Ethiopian people and possibly successive Ethiopian democratic Governments in the future, the current regime should have been part of the opposition that advocates this bill rather than fighting it.

It is also very surprising that Prof. Ephrem Issac would stake his reputation apparently by joining the expensive lobbyists against this human rights bill. One can see why Prof. Ephrem may demand in the bill that the demand to release prisoners of conscience should be dropped since he helped arbitrate the release of most of the prisoners of conscience. But it still matters that there are political prisoners including anti-poverty activists that are classified as prisoners of conscience that have not been released. So the bill is very balanced, fair and provides a robust framework for Ethiopian-USA relations for years to come.

As the bill goes through the floor of Congress and Senate, naturally there should and can be all legitimate amendments reflecting any positive changes in the attitude of the regime in Ethiopia.

This bill is not just aimed at a particular Government. It is a standard setter for any Government. It establishes what Ethiopian-Americans wish to see as a principled relationship between their country of birth and their new country of America. It is what the US legislative branch adopts also to make US policy consistent in Ethiopia by firmly backing human rights, rule of law and orderly democratic transition based on the values of freedom and justice.

NES calls for allowing the bill to go through the normal US rules, procedures and regulations. Only when this happens can all the stakeholders from the opposition, the Meles Government, lobbyists paid and unpaid, the US Government can achieve a win-win outcome by enlisting US moral and legislative authority in backing principles of human rights, democracy, rule of law and the prospect of effecting sustainable democratic transition in Ethiopia. If this bill succeeds indeed, the model can likewise be replicated to many other areas of the developing world, which have difficulties and are painfully coming out from the era of dictatorships into democratic civilisation. Only then can strong democratic bulwarks that can clear challenge effectively despicable terrorism spring and mushroom throughout the world lifting

the current huge burden the USA has been shouldering in the struggle against global terror.

We believe a big historic mistake is being committed in blocking this bill which is inspired by the principle of enshrining democratic accountability and the submission of power to the rule of law. This bill should not be seen in the context of the current occupants of power in Ethiopia or USA. It is democratic and freedom values more than the transient politics of current politicians in Ethiopia and the USA that guide this bill.

What is happening makes us recall the prescient statement of Ferdinando Galiiani in 1770 who said " Believe me, do not fear crooks or evil people, fear the honest person who is wrong. That person is in good faith, he wishes everyone well, everyone has his confidence, but unfortunately his methods fail..." It looks very much that the action to stop the bill can leave us with the unclarity of US positions with all the ambiguities that can license tyranny even when it aims to protect liberty. Killing this bill is to kill liberty by appealing to a good that serves temporary political interests by sacrificing long-term evolution of principled relations between a rich democracy and potential democracy from Ethiopia.

Ethiopians would like to see HR2003 as the best gift to their millennium from the USA. This nation of the earth's oldest democracy in the youngest country of America has supported the principle of upholding human rights, rule of law and democracy in the oldest country Ethiopia that has not had these rights planted in its soil to grow a democratic system of governance and transition.

Finally, Fredrich Nietzsche in 1885 said:" And whatever harm the evil may do, the harm done by the good is the most harmful harm."

Ethiopia and Ethiopians know the evil of dictatorship, but the indecisiveness of honest and good democrats like Ms. Pelsoni in derailing a bill of principle they know can harm all of us and the world and that portion of humanity who believe in liberty and justice for all, whether poor or rich.

We call upon the USA to live up to its creeds of liberty and justice and pass the human rights bill 2003 to help Ethiopian democracy grow step by step without indulging in the politics that harms all rather than builds us all.

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