

February 19, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In your second inaugural speech on January 20, 2005, you made a magnificent promise to all people in the world who endure under despotism and dictatorship, "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 Ethiopian Americans commend you for your steadfast commitment to the cause of liberty throughout the world.

Ethiopians Have Responded to Your Promise

Mr. President, on May 15, 2005, Ethiopians rapturously responded to your promise, and stood up for liberty and democracy. Over 26 million of them -- over 90 percent of the registered voters -- stood up at the polling stations throughout the land and cast their ballots to choose their government, and to peacefully petition the seasoned practitioners of tyranny and oppression to stand down.

On that fateful day, Mr. President, Ethiopians did what has never been done in their ancient country's history: They chose their leaders freely; and spoke directly to their present rulers and told them they are tired of 15 years of one-party rule. They want change. They want a country where the rule of law reigns supreme, and human rights and civil liberties are respected.

But human rights, democracy and justice remains elusive in Ethiopia, even today. One hundred and eleven prisoners of conscience who have been held in detention for nearly a year and half -- many of them top leaders of opposition parties and members and human rights defenders -- were told to come to court today to find out their fate. But when they showed up after months of calculated and malicious delay, they were told once again to come back. So justice is delayed and denied once more. Such, Mr. President, is the elaborate shell game the present rulers of Ethiopia play with justice, and the human rights of innocent victims of a wrongful and vindictive government prosecution.

Ethiopians Ask If the United States will Ignore Their Oppression

Mr. President: Those accustomed to ruling by force and intimidation have defiantly refused to heed the collective voice of their people, and allow a peaceful transition to democracy. They have cynically dismissed the prudent advice of the international community, and refused to conform their conduct to the rule of international human rights law. They continue to cling to power despite universal exhortations for national reconciliation and dialogue.

In the aftermath of the May, 2005 elections, Mr. President, Ethiopia's rulers have chosen the path of repression, and unleashed violence against the civilian population unmatched in the recent annals of political savagery. An official Inquiry Commission set up by Zenawi's regime, in its briefing to the United States Congress, documented the wanton killings of 193 unarmed protesters, and wounding of 763 others over a 14 day period in June and November, 2005. The Commission also documented the imprisonment of 30,000 suspected political opponents.

But, Mr. President, the catalogue of flagrant human rights abuses is not limited to atrocities committed over these few days. Zenawi's regime continues to engage with impunity in extrajudicial killings of opponents, and presently holds thousands of political prisoners throughout the country. Zenawi's regime has criminalized the exercise of the basic rights of free speech, assembly and the press, and continues to use the criminal justice system for political ends. Opposition leaders and human rights defenders continue to be subjected to prolonged prosecution and detention for pretended offenses, and judges have been inducted in the service of political partisanship. The regime has erected an extensive security apparatus and dispatched swarms of malignant mercenaries throughout the land to harass, intimidate, persecute and wreak havoc on the lives of the people. And for good measure, the current rulers of Ethiopia in their unrestrained hubris, continue to thumb their noses at the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other related conventions necessary for the public good.

Mr. President, to borrow the words of Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, the Ethiopia's rulers today continue with impunity their "history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny."

Ethiopians Ask If the United States will Excuse Their Oppressors

Mr. President: Today, Ethiopians ask whether you will honor your promise and stand with them, or excuse their oppressors. As Ethiopian Americans, we do not believe for a moment that you will stand on the side of those who have perpetrated unspeakable atrocities on thousands of unarmed protesters, imprisoned thousands of ordinary men and women on suspicion of political opposition, and jailed the rightful representatives of the people. We believe you will keep your promise and stand with all who stand up for liberty.

But our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia are not sure, and so they ask: "Will you excuse their oppressors, or stand with them?"

Two Types of Ethiopians in the World Today

Mr. President: There are two kinds of Ethiopians in the world today. There is an infinitesimal number of Ethiopians upon whom God has shed his grace and live with dignity, respect and hope in the greatest nation in the world, the United States of America, and other parts of the free world. And there are millions upon millions who live in their homeland seared in the flames of withering tyranny and oppression.

But the suffering masses of humanity in Ethiopia are not strangers and nameless people to be pitied from a distance. They are, Mr. President, our kinsfolk -- our fathers and mothers, brothers

and sisters, uncles and aunts, grandmothers and grandfathers, and neighbors, and countrymen and women.

As Lincoln has taught us, half the people can not bask in the sunlight of freedom while the other half struggles in the darkness of oppression. We, Ethiopian Americans, can not stand mute living under the beneficence of the American Constitution while our kinsfolk suffer under the sweltering heat of oppression.

Duty of Freedom Loving Ethiopian Americans

Mr. President: As free Ethiopian Americans, we have a solemn duty to help those we have left in Ethiopia. It is a duty that geminated in the magnificent promise you made to the world's oppressed: "When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you." When those we have left behind in the land of our birth stand up for liberty, it is our duty to stand with them, by them; and with you, Mr. President, and the American people standing by our side.

As Ethiopian Americans, Mr. President, we bring to your attention the daily solicitations of our loved ones: "Isn't there anything we can do to help them as Ethiopian Americans using the mighty Constitution of the United States of America? Isn't there anything the American people can do to help them rise from under the yoke of tyranny and oppression?"

Must American taxpayers bankroll their oppressors?"

Illusions of Hope

Mr. President, the great American patriot, Patrick Henry, facing similar tyranny and despotism as contemporary Ethiopians said: "It is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope." And looking over the past 15 years, Ethiopians are beginning to wonder if their aspirations for liberty are merely idle indulgencies in the illusions of hope.

Mr. President, the present rulers of Ethiopia have spurned and ignored all demands for justice and liberty; and have responded to their peoples' petitions for democratic rights by inflicting upon them unspeakable violence and injury. They have categorically rejected the intercession of the international community -- to release all political prisoners and their leaders who languish in prison, to institute the rule of law, to seek peaceful reconciliation -- with contempt and derision. All efforts to institute the rule of law and ensure respect for human rights have been reduced to a distant illusion of hope.

In vain, Ethiopians now ask: How much longer must they languish under withering oppression? When will they breath the fresh air of liberty? Will America shut its eyes as they are transformed into lifeless mannequins by a totalitarian government?

But we Ethiopian Americans refuse to believe America will turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to their plight. We believe there is real hope so long as the millions of Ethiopians remain armed in the holy cause of liberty. There is hope, because as Patrick Henry said: "There is a just God who presides over the destinies of Nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us." And

as Ethiopian Americans, we know you and the American people will fight with us, alongside us, and with God's will, help bring the blessings of liberty and human rights to those we have left behind.

Counter-terrorism and Human Rights

Mr. President: When you addressed the United Nations General Assembly last September, you spoke passionately of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and “the more hopeful world that is within our reach, a world beyond terror, where ordinary men and women are free to determine their own destiny, where the voices of moderation are empowered, and where the extremists are marginalized by the peaceful majority.” You said, “This world can be ours if we seek it and if we work together.”

Mr. President: Ethiopians know all too well the scourge of terrorism that has been unleashed on the world. They appreciate and support America's role in spearheading the struggle against these elusive forces of evil. You should rest assured that Ethiopians wherever they are will never abandon America in its struggle against global terror. Never! Never! Never!

But, Mr. President, America must also never, never, never abandon the cause of human rights in Ethiopia. As you have eloquently pointed out, we can defeat extremism by making it possible for ordinary men and women to freely determine their own destiny, and by upholding those principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. America must stand by Ethiopians as they strive to build a democratic society where there are no arbitrary arrests or detentions, where citizens are free from torture, cruel, inhuman treatment or punishment, where those accused of criminal offenses are given a fair trial by an independent and impartial tribunal, and the rights of free speech, press, assembly and petition for grievances and privacy are respected, and the rule of law reigns supreme.

Mr. President, in March, 2005, at the National Defense University, you said: “When a dictatorship controls the political life of a country, responsible opposition cannot develop, and dissent is driven underground and toward the extreme. And to draw attention away from their social and economic failures, dictators place blame on other countries and other races, and stir the hatred that leads to violence. This status quo of despotism and anger cannot be ignored or appeased, kept in a box or bought off.”

We agree with you. In Ethiopia the “status quo of despotism and anger cannot be ignored or appeased, kept in a box or bought off.” The status quo must change. But there are those who will resort to duplicity and chicanery to preserve the status quo. They have now embarked on a global diplomatic and public relations offensive to draw attention away from their nauseating record of gross human rights abuses. They blame their neighbors and stir up fear against them; and by spreading rumors of war seek to create alarm and plunge the international community in historic regional conflicts. But Mr. President, these are also the very same ruffians who rule not by the consent of the people, but by force of arms and intimidation; and now seek to conceal their monstrous crimes against humanity in a wicked litany of anti-terror rhetoric. They have no credibility.

But, Mr. President, America's abiding support for human rights should not be deflected by artful propaganda, bogus regional crises, savvy disinformation campaigns or other clever political trickery and deception. We echo your words when we say the fight for human rights is fundamentally a fight against terrorism; and we believe the "world beyond terror" that you spoke of to be a world in which human rights are truly respected and upheld, and the dignity and liberty of ordinary men and women preserved and protected under the rule of law.

America Always Keeps Its Promises

Mr. President, last June you said, "When America gives its word, it keeps its word." We believe you will keep your word that America will stand with the oppressed when the oppressed stand up for liberty. Now that Ethiopians in Ethiopia have stood up for liberty, we Ethiopian Americans and Ethiopians in the Diaspora ask you to stand tall with us as we stand together in brotherhood and sisterhood for human rights and democracy in Ethiopia. We ask you to stand with us and exert the moral authority of the American people, and condemn those who brazenly and flagrantly violate international human rights law, and seek to drag humanity back to the age of barbarism.

Now Is the Time to Stand Up For Human Rights in Ethiopia

Mr. President, now is the time to stand up with the Ethiopian people. Now is the time to stand up for human rights in Ethiopia. Now is the time to call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners in Ethiopia, and to demand freedom for all jailed opposition leaders and human rights defenders. Now is the time to demand justice: "Bring the killers and those who ordered the killing of 193 men and women and children to account for their crimes." Now is the time to declare: "All who violate the human rights of their people will have to account for their crimes before the bar of justice." Now is the time to state with conviction: "America has had enough! American taxpayers will no longer bankroll tyrants and dictators!" Now is the time to candidly tell Ethiopia's dictators. "Stop playing games with human rights. Stop making a mockery of democracy." Now is the time, Mr. President, to proclaim to the Ethiopian people: "It's high time for you to enjoy the blessings of freedom, democracy and human rights! America stands by you!"

Please Stand With Us and Support H.R. 5680 -- "The Ethiopian Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Advancement Act"

Mr. President, there is a simple way you can stand with Ethiopians and help advance the cause of freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia: Support H.R. 5680.

This bill provides for a comprehensive scheme to advance democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. First and foremost, it demands the release of all prisoners of conscience in Ethiopia, including opposition party and civic leaders. It provides ample resources to undertake institutional capacity building, including technical assistance to perfect the electoral process, strengthen legislative bodies, political parties and civil society organizations, assist in the development of an independent judiciary and professionalize the prosecutorial agencies, foster the growth of independent private journalism and promote the privatization of the electronic media, facilitate the free operation of human rights defenders and organizations, and promote reconciliation efforts

between government and civil society organizations and opposition elements, among other things. This past October, the bill passed with full bipartisan support in the 50-member House International Relations Committee.

Mr. President, in the words of the great American civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, in H.R. 5680, America offers Ethiopia a promissory note for \$20 million in down payment to promote freedom, democracy and human rights. But instead of accepting and cashing this note in the bank of democracy and human rights and spreading the blessings of liberty to the people, the present rulers in Ethiopia have hired a mighty army of lobbyists to defeat this bill, hoping to extinguish forever the yearning for freedom of the Ethiopian people. But with your support, Mr. President, we will prevail against any army that threatens liberty and human rights.

Mr. President, you have said, “Americans, of all people, should not be surprised by freedom’s power. A nation founded on the universal claim of individual rights should not be surprised when other people claim those rights. Those who place their hope in freedom may be attacked and challenged, but they will not ultimately be disappointed, because freedom is the design of humanity and freedom is the direction of history.”

Mr. President, we Ethiopian Americans say: “Amen!” and “Hallelujah!”

Mr. President: As an Ethiopian American, the greatest reward and honor that I have received is the opportunity to defend the American Constitution and American liberties in the courts of the realm, and to prepare young Americans to understand, appreciate and defend this great instrument of government. Those who have had the good fortune of making close acquaintance with our Constitution are able to discern its meaning and relevance to all those who live beyond America’s shores. Though the words of this great Constitution and the liberties enshrined in it speak directly to Americans, Mr. President, its spirit, its genius lifts the world’s oppressed and the wretched of the earth from the depths of their despair. So, on behalf of all Ethiopians who have heard your call and stood up for liberty on May 15, 2005, we Ethiopian Americans now ask you to stand with us, and by us.

Please support H.R. 5680.

GOD BLESS AMERICA!

Sincerely,

Alemayehu G. Mariam, Ph.D., J.D.
Professor of Political Science &
Attorney at Law

cc:

Vice President Richard Cheney
Dr. Condoleeza Rice, Secretary State
Jendayi Fraser, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs
Representative Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House

Representative John Boehner, U.S. House, Minority Leader
Representative Steny H. Hoyer, House Majority Leader
Representative James E. Clyburn, House Majority Whip
Representative Roy Blunt, House Minority Whip
Representative Tom Lantos, Chair, House Committee on International Relations
Representative Donald Payne, Chairman, House Subcommittee on Africa,
Global Human Rights and International Operations
Representative Chris Smith, U.S. House of Representatives
Representative Michael Honda
Senator Harry Reid, Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
Senator Russ Feingold, Chair, Subcommittee on African Affairs
Senator Richard Durbin, U.S. Senate Assistant Majority Leader
Senator Mitch McConnell, U.S. Senate Minority Leader
Robert Gates, Secretary of Defense
Ambassador Donald Yamamoto