



**E-mail: [passhr5680@hr5680.org](mailto:passhr5680@hr5680.org) Tel: 323-988-5688 Fax: 323-924-5563**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 5, 2007**

**JOINT RESOLUTION ON PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE  
AND H.R. 5680 INTRODUCED IN THE CALIFORNIA  
LEGISLATURE**

**COALITION FOR H.R. 5680 LAUNCHES  
50-STATES LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVE TO STOP HUMAN  
RIGHTS ABUSES IN ETHIOPIA, AND PASS H.R. 5680**  
**(Sample Support Request Letter to California Legislators Provided Below)**



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Majority Leader Karen Bass of the California State Assembly (D-Los Angeles), whose legislative district encompasses Little Ethiopia, recently introduced a joint resolution on human rights in Ethiopia.

[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab\\_0001-0050/ajr\\_12\\_bill\\_20070222\\_introduced.pdf](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_0001-0050/ajr_12_bill_20070222_introduced.pdf)

Assembly Joint Resolution (A.J.R.) 12 “urges the Congress and the President of the United States to demand that the Ethiopian government immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and journalists, and fulfill its obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and urge the California delegation in the House of Representatives and the Senate to support and cosponsor ‘The Ethiopian Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2006’ in the 110th Congress.”

The Coalition for H.R. 5680 expressed its deep gratitude to Majority Leader Bass for her continued interest and deep commitment to the cause of human rights in Ethiopia. Prof. Al Mariam, speaking on behalf of the Coalition, commented: “Majority Leader Karen Bass has been extraordinarily responsive to her Ethiopian American constituents in Los Angeles. By introducing this resolution, Majority Leader Bass reflects the deep concerns shared by her constituents over gross human rights abuses in Ethiopia, and the

need for swift action by the U.S. Government to alleviate the situation. All Ethiopian Americans are all profoundly indebted to Majority Leader Karen Bass.”

On the heels of the California resolution, the Coalition for H.R. 5680 today announced the launching of a **50-State Legislative Initiative** to stop human rights abuses by mobilizing American state legislatures to take a stand on the acute human rights situation in Ethiopia, and urging the release of political prisoners and passage of H.R.5680.

Prof. Al stated, “The effort we have launched at the state level supplements our national efforts to educate the American people on the gross and massive abuses of human rights in Ethiopia. It is imperative on Ethiopian Americans, indeed, it’s our moral obligation to expose the monstrous crimes and atrocities that are being committed today by the ruling regime in Ethiopia to the American people through their state and local representatives.”

A number of efforts in various state legislatures are currently under way. Meron Ahadu of the Coalition for H.R. 5680 said, “There is growing realization among Ethiopian Americans that resources at the state and local levels could be used to impact national policy making. We believe we can positively influence our members of Congress in our respective states and help pass H.R.5680 if we could present to them legislative resolutions from each of the 50 states. Such results could add considerable moral pressure on members of Congress to pass the bill. After all, Congress can not be seen slacking behind the states in standing up for human rights in Ethiopia.”

Prof. Al further emphasized the role of Ethiopian Americans in educating and informing the American people as part of the ingoing grassroots efforts to more effectively advance the cause of human rights in Ethiopia. He added: “If we can effectively educate the American people on the plight of the thousands of government torture and murder victims, and the tens of thousands of political prisoners rotting in Zenawi’s jails, we can mobilize American taxpayers to demand a stop to the use of our American tax dollars to support the regime of a ruthless dictator in Ethiopia. We have to get the truth out to the American public, and the truth shall help make Ethiopia and Ethiopians free.”

The Coalition for H.R. 5680 called upon all Ethiopian Americans in the United States to join in the **50-State Legislative Initiative** and launch their own individual efforts in each state of the union. Prof. Al reminded Ethiopian Americans: “We have a choice. We can talk about human rights abuses and violations in Ethiopia until the cows come home. Or we can put our collective shoulders to the grindstone and get to work. The time has come to fish or cut bait. When our brothers and sisters are walking a tightrope in Ethiopia everyday, we can’t afford the luxury of a slow dance. We must act now, collectively and collaboratively, as we did with our 100,000 letters-in-ten-days campaign.” (An update on the 100,000 letter campaign will be provided shortly.)

**The Coalition for 5680 urges all supporters of human rights in the 50 states of the union to use the California resolution as a template and example for their individual state efforts.**

**SPECIAL CALL TO ETHIOPIAN AMERICANS IN CALIFORNIA TO SUPPORT A.J.R. 12**

The Coalition for H.R. 5680 is issuing a special call to action seeking the support of Ethiopian Americans in California to pass A.J.R. 12. Ethiopian Americans in California are asked to contact their state assembly members and state senators, and urge them to co-sponsor and/or vote for passage of AJR 12.

**In the 50-State Legislative Initiative, the Coalition is reaching out particularly to the younger generation of Ethiopian Americans to show leadership and to spearhead this effort.**

The following sample letter is provided for use in contacting California state assembly members and senators.

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**Sample Letter**  
**and**  
**California Assembly/Senate Roster**

**MAIL BY REGULAR U.S. MAIL**  
**AND**  
**SEND COPY BY EMAIL TO EACH**  
**ASSEMBLY MEMBER/SENATOR**

March xx, 2007

The Honorable [Name of California Assembly Member or Senator]  
[Mailing Address for each assembly member/senator **provided below**]

Dear [Assemblyman or Assemblywoman or Senator.....]

I am a resident and a voter in your legislative district.

I am writing to ask your support for human rights in Ethiopia by co-sponsoring and/or voting for Assembly Joint Resolution (AJR) 12 introduced by Majority Leader, Assemblywoman Karen Bass.

AJR 12 urges the President of the United States and Congress to engage the ruling regime in Ethiopia and secure the immediate and unconditional release all political prisoners, including opposition leaders, human rights defenders and journalist. It also

urges Congress to assist the Ethiopian regime to fulfill its obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international human rights conventions by passing H.R. 5680 (The Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Act).

As you may be aware, following the May 2005 parliamentary elections in Ethiopia, the human rights situation there has deteriorated significantly. For almost two years, hundreds of thousands of political opponents have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured and/or killed. An official Inquiry Commission, set up by the leader of the ruling regime in Ethiopia, 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 alone. The Commission also documented the imprisonment of 30,000 suspected political opponents.

A.J.R 12 specifically urges the California Congressional delegation and California's two U.S. senators to support passage of H.R. 5680, which passed the House International Relations Committee with unanimous and bipartisan support this past October. Among other things, H.R. 5680 provides the Ethiopian regime \$20 million to undertake democratic institution building, including strengthening of the electoral process, legislative bodies, political parties and civil society organizations. It also provides resources to help develop an independent judiciary, professionalize prosecutorial agencies, and foster the growth of independent private journalism. In sum, the bill ensures respect for and observance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other long-standing and widely recognized international human rights conventions by the ruling regime.

I respectfully request you support for AJR 12 by co-sponsoring the resolution with Majority Leader Bass, or in the alternative, vote for it on the floor.

I will follow up with a telephone call to your office in the next week. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Your name, address, and phone #

**Please mail a copy of this letter and/or copy and paste the letter in an email message to:**

The Honorable Karen Bass, Majority Leader  
State Capitol  
California Assembly  
Room 319  
Sacramento, CA 94249-0001  
**Email: [Assemblymember.Bass@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Bass@assembly.ca.gov)**

# California Assembly Member Roster

(Senate Roster follows)

You can also find your California State Legislative Representatives (Assembly Member and Senator) by **Entering YOUR street address, city, zip code** in the form at:

<http://192.234.213.69/amapsearch/framepage.asp>

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**Mailing Address**

**[Insert Name of Assembly Member]**  
**State Capitol**  
**California Assembly**  
**[Insert Room Number]**  
**Sacramento, CA 94249-0001**

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## Assembly Mailing, Telephone, and Email Address

[Adams, Anthony](#), Rep, 59<sup>th</sup>, Room, 4015, (916) 319-2059  
[Assemblymember.Adams@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Adams@assembly.ca.gov)

[Aghazarian, Greg](#), Rep, 26<sup>th</sup>, Room 4167, (916) 319-2026  
[Assemblymember.aghazarian@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.aghazarian@assembly.ca.gov)

[Alarcon, Richard](#), Dem, 39<sup>th</sup>, Room 5119, (916) 319-2039  
[Assemblymember.Alarcon@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Alarcon@assembly.ca.gov)

[Anderson, Joel](#), Rep, 77<sup>th</sup>, Room 2111, (916) 319-2077  
[Assemblymember.Anderson@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Anderson@assembly.ca.gov)

[Arambula, Juan](#), Dem, 31<sup>st</sup>, Room 2141 (916) 319-2031  
[Assemblymember.arambula@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.arambula@assembly.ca.gov)

[Bass, Karen](#), Dem, 47<sup>th</sup>, Room 319, (916) 319-2047  
[Assemblymember.Bass@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Bass@assembly.ca.gov)

[Beall, Jim Jr.](#), Dem, 24<sup>th</sup>, Room 5016, (916) 319-2024  
[Assemblymember.Beall@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Beall@assembly.ca.gov)

[Benoit, John J.](mailto:Assemblymember.benoit@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 64<sup>th</sup>, Room 4114, (916) 319-2064  
[Assemblymember.benoit@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.benoit@assembly.ca.gov)

[Berg, Patty](mailto:Assemblymember.berg@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 1<sup>st</sup>, Room 4146, (916) 319-2001  
[Assemblymember.berg@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.berg@assembly.ca.gov)

[Berryhill, Tom](mailto:Assemblymember.Berryhill@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 25<sup>th</sup>, Room 4116, (916) 319-2025  
[Assemblymember.Berryhill@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Berryhill@assembly.ca.gov)

[Blakeslee, Sam](mailto:Assemblymember.Blakeslee@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 33<sup>rd</sup>, Room 4117, (916) 319-2033  
[Assemblymember.Blakeslee@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Blakeslee@assembly.ca.gov)

[Brownley, Julia](mailto:Assemblymember.Brownlie@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 41<sup>st</sup>, Room 6011, (916) 319-2041  
[Assemblymember.Brownlie@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Brownlie@assembly.ca.gov)

[Caballero, Anna M.](mailto:Assemblymember.Caballero@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 28<sup>th</sup>, Room 3132, (916) 319-2028  
[Assemblymember.Caballero@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Caballero@assembly.ca.gov)

[Calderon, Charles M.](mailto:Assemblymember.Calderon@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 58<sup>th</sup>, Room 2117, (916) 319-2058  
[Assemblymember.Calderon@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Calderon@assembly.ca.gov)

[Carter, Wilmer Amina](mailto:Assemblymember.Carter@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 62<sup>nd</sup>, Room 2175, (916) 319-2062  
[Assemblymember.Carter@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Carter@assembly.ca.gov)

[Cook, Paul](mailto:Assemblymember.Cook@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 65<sup>th</sup>, Room 5126, (916) 319-2065  
[Assemblymember.Cook@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Cook@assembly.ca.gov)

[Coto, Joe](mailto:Assemblymember.Coto@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 23<sup>rd</sup>, Room 2013, (916) 319-2023  
[Assemblymember.Coto@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Coto@assembly.ca.gov)

[Davis, Mike](mailto:Assemblymember.Bass@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 48<sup>th</sup>, Room 2160, (916) 319-2048  
[Assemblymember.Bass@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Bass@assembly.ca.gov)

[De La Torre, Hector](mailto:Assemblymember.DeLaTorre@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 50<sup>th</sup>, Room 3173, (916) 319-2050  
[Assemblymember.DeLaTorre@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.DeLaTorre@assembly.ca.gov)

[de Leon, Kevin](mailto:Assemblymember.deLeon@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 45<sup>th</sup>, Room 4140 (916) 319-2045  
[Assemblymember.deLeon@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.deLeon@assembly.ca.gov)

[DeSaulnier, Mark](mailto:Assemblymember.DeSaulnier@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 11<sup>th</sup>, Room 4162, (916) 319-2011  
[Assemblymember.DeSaulnier@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.DeSaulnier@assembly.ca.gov)

[DeVore, Chuck](mailto:Assemblymember.Devore@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 70<sup>th</sup>, Room 4112 (916) 319-2070  
[Assemblymember.Devore@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Devore@assembly.ca.gov)

[Duvall, Michael D.](mailto:Assemblymember.Duvall@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 72<sup>nd</sup>. Room 4117, (916) 319-2072  
[Assemblymember.Duvall@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Duvall@assembly.ca.gov)

[Dymally, Mervyn M.](mailto:Assemblymember.Dymally@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 52<sup>nd</sup>, Room 6005, (916) 319-2052  
[Assemblymember.Dymally@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Dymally@assembly.ca.gov)

[Emmerson, Bill](mailto:Assemblymember.Emmerson@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 63<sup>rd</sup>, Room 4158, (916) 319-2063  
[Assemblymember.Emmerson@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Emmerson@assembly.ca.gov)

[Eng, Mike](mailto:Assemblymember.Eng@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 49<sup>th</sup>, Room 6025, (916) 319-2049  
[Assemblymember.Eng@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Eng@assembly.ca.gov)

[Evans, Noreen](mailto:Assemblymember.Evans@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 7<sup>th</sup>, Room 3152 (916) 319-2007  
[Assemblymember.Evans@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Evans@assembly.ca.gov)

[Feuer, Mike](mailto:Assemblymember.Feuer@assembly.ca.gov), Dem , 42nd, Room 4005, (916) 319-2042  
[Assemblymember.Feuer@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Feuer@assembly.ca.gov)

[Fuller, Jean](mailto:Assemblymember.Fuller@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 32<sup>nd</sup>, Room 3098, (916) 319-2032  
[Assemblymember.Fuller@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Fuller@assembly.ca.gov)

[Gaines, Ted](mailto:Assemblymember.Gaines@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 4<sup>th</sup>, Room 2002, (916) 319-2004  
[Assemblymember.Gaines@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Gaines@assembly.ca.gov)

[Galgiani, Cathleen](mailto:Assemblymember.Galgiani@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 17<sup>th</sup>, Room 2170, (916) 319-2017  
[Assemblymember.Galgiani@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Galgiani@assembly.ca.gov)

[Garcia, Bonnie](mailto:Assemblymember.Garcia@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 80<sup>th</sup>, Room 4009, (916) 319-2080  
[Assemblymember.Garcia@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Garcia@assembly.ca.gov)

[Garrick, Martin](mailto:Assemblymember.Garrick@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 74<sup>th</sup>, (916) 319-2074  
[Assemblymember.Garrick@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Garrick@assembly.ca.gov)

[Hancock, Loni](mailto:Assemblymember.Hancock@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 14<sup>th</sup>, Room 4126, (916) 319-2014  
[Assemblymember.Hancock@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Hancock@assembly.ca.gov)

[Hayashi, Mary](mailto:Assemblymember.Hayashi@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 18<sup>th</sup>, Room 2188, (916) 319-2018  
[Assemblymember.Hayashi@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Hayashi@assembly.ca.gov)

[Hernandez, Edward P.](mailto:Assemblymember.Hernandez@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 57<sup>th</sup>, Room 4112, (916) 319-2057  
[Assemblymember.Hernandez@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Hernandez@assembly.ca.gov)

[Horton, Shirley](mailto:Assemblymember.Horton@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 78<sup>th</sup>, Room 2174, (916) 319-2078  
[Assemblymember.Horton@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Horton@assembly.ca.gov)

[Houston, Guy S.](mailto:Assemblymember.Houston@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 15<sup>th</sup>, Room 2130, (916) 319-2015  
[Assemblymember.Houston@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Houston@assembly.ca.gov)

[Huff, Bob](mailto:Assemblymember.Huff@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 60<sup>th</sup>, Room 4098, (916) 319-2060  
[Assemblymember.Huff@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Huff@assembly.ca.gov)

[Huffman, Jared](mailto:Assemblymember.Huffman@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 6<sup>th</sup>, Room 4139, (916) 319-2006  
[Assemblymember.Huffman@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Huffman@assembly.ca.gov)

[Jeffries, Kevin](mailto:Assemblymember.Jeffries@assembly.ca.gov), Rep, 66<sup>th</sup>, Room 5128, (916) 319-2066  
[Assemblymember.Jeffries@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Jeffries@assembly.ca.gov)

[Jones, Dave](mailto:Assemblymember.Jones@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 9<sup>th</sup>, Room 3146, (916) 319-2009  
[Assemblymember.Jones@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Jones@assembly.ca.gov)

[Karnette, Betty](mailto:Assemblymember.Karnette@assembly.ca.gov), Dem, 54<sup>th</sup>, Room 2136, (916) 319-2054  
[Assemblymember.Karnette@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Karnette@assembly.ca.gov)

[Keene, Rick](#), Rep, 3<sup>rd</sup>, Room 2158, (916) 319-2003  
[Assemblymember.Keene@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Keene@assembly.ca.gov)

[Krekorian, Paul](#), Dem, 43<sup>rd</sup>, Room 5135, (916) 319-2043  
[Assemblymember.Krekorian@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Krekorian@assembly.ca.gov)

[La Malfa, Doug](#), Rep, 2<sup>nd</sup>, Room 4164, (916) 319-2002  
[Assemblymember.Lamalfa@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Lamalfa@assembly.ca.gov)

[Laird, John](#), Dem, 27<sup>th</sup>, Room 6026, (916) 319-2027  
[Assemblymember.Laird@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Laird@assembly.ca.gov)

[Leno, Mark](#), Dem, 13<sup>th</sup>, Room 2114, (916) 319-2013  
[Assemblymember.Leno@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Leno@assembly.ca.gov)

[Levine, Lloyd E.](#), Dem, 40<sup>th</sup>, Room 5136, (916) 319-2040  
[Assemblymember.Levine@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Levine@assembly.ca.gov)

[Lieber, Sally J.](#), Dem, 22<sup>nd</sup>, Room 3013, (916) 319-2022  
[Assemblymember.DeSaulnier@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.DeSaulnier@assembly.ca.gov)

[Lieu, Ted W.](#), Dem, 53<sup>rd</sup>, Room 4016, (916) 319-2053  
[Assemblymember.Lieu@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Lieu@assembly.ca.gov)

[Ma, Fiona](#), Dem, 12<sup>th</sup>, Room 2176, (916) 319-2012  
[Assemblymember.Ma@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Ma@assembly.ca.gov)

[Maze, Bill](#), Rep, 34<sup>th</sup>, Room 5160, (916) 319-2034  
[Assemblymember.Maze@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Maze@assembly.ca.gov)

[Mendoza, Tony](#), Dem, 56<sup>th</sup>, Room 5144, (916) 319-2056  
[Assemblymember.DeSaulnier@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.DeSaulnier@assembly.ca.gov)

[Mullin, Gene](#), Dem, 19<sup>th</sup>, Room 2163, (916) 319-2019  
[Assemblymember.Mullin@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Mullin@assembly.ca.gov)

[Núñez, Fabian](#), Dem, 46<sup>th</sup>, Room 219, (916) 319-2046  
[Assemblymember.Nunez@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Nunez@assembly.ca.gov)

[Nakanishi, Alan](#), Rep, 10<sup>th</sup>, Room 5175, (916) 319-2010  
[Assemblymember.Nakanishi@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Nakanishi@assembly.ca.gov)

[Nava, Pedro](#), Dem, 35<sup>th</sup>, Room 2148, (916) 319-2035  
[Assemblymember.Nava@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Nava@assembly.ca.gov)

[Niello, Roger](#), Rep, 5<sup>th</sup>, Room 6027, (916) 319-2005  
[Assemblymember.Niello@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Niello@assembly.ca.gov)

[Parra, Nicole](#), Dem, 30<sup>th</sup>, Room 5155, (916) 319-2030  
[Assemblymember.Parra@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Parra@assembly.ca.gov)



[Plescia, George A.](#), Rep, 75<sup>th</sup>, Room 3141, (916) 319-2075  
[Assemblymember.Plescia@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Plescia@assembly.ca.gov)

[Portantino, Anthony J.](#), Dem, 44<sup>th</sup>, Room 2003, (916) 319-2044  
[Assemblymember.Portantino@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Portantino@assembly.ca.gov)

[Price, Curren D. Jr.](#), Dem, 51<sup>st</sup>, Room 2179, (916) 319-2051  
[Assemblymember.Price@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Price@assembly.ca.gov)

[Richardson, Laura](#), Dem, 55<sup>th</sup>, Room 3126, (916) 319-2055  
[Assemblymember.Richardson@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Richardson@assembly.ca.gov)

[Runner, Sharon](#), Rep, 36<sup>th</sup>, Room 5158, (916) 319-2036  
[Assemblymember.Runner@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Runner@assembly.ca.gov)

[Ruskin, Ira](#), Dem, 21<sup>st</sup>, Room 3123, (916) 319-2021  
[Assemblymember.Ruskin@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Ruskin@assembly.ca.gov)

[Salas, Mary](#), Dem, 79<sup>th</sup>, Room 2137, (916) 319-2079  
[Assemblymember.Salas@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Salas@assembly.ca.gov)

[Saldaña, Lori](#), Dem, 76<sup>th</sup>, Room 5150, (916) 319-2076  
[Assemblymember.Saldana@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Saldana@assembly.ca.gov)

[Silva, Jim](#), Rep, 67<sup>th</sup>, Room 3149 (916) 319-2067  
[Assemblymember.Silva@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Silva@assembly.ca.gov)

[Smyth, Cameron](#), Rep, 38<sup>th</sup>, Room 4153, (916) 319-2038  
[Assemblymember.Smyth@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Smyth@assembly.ca.gov)

[Solorio, Jose](#), Dem, 69<sup>th</sup>, Room 2196, (916) 319-2069  
[Assemblymember.Solorio@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Solorio@assembly.ca.gov)

[Soto, Nell](#), Dem, 61<sup>st</sup>, Room 3091, (916) 319-2061  
[Assemblymember.Soto@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Soto@assembly.ca.gov)

[Spitzer, Todd](#), Rep, 71<sup>st</sup>, Room 5164, (916) 319-2071  
[Assemblymember.Spitzer@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Spitzer@assembly.ca.gov)

[Strickland, Audra](#), Rep, 37<sup>th</sup>, Room 4208, (916) 319-2037  
[Assemblymember.Strickland@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Strickland@assembly.ca.gov)

[Swanson, Sandre R.](#), Dem, 16<sup>th</sup>, Room 6012, (916) 319-2016  
[Assemblymember.Swanson@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Swanson@assembly.ca.gov)

[Torrice, Alberto](#), Dem, 20<sup>th</sup>, Room 3160, (916) 319-2020  
[Assemblymember.Torrice@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Torrice@assembly.ca.gov)

[Tran, Van](#), Rep, 68<sup>th</sup>, Room 4130, (916) 319-2068  
[Assemblymember.Tran@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Tran@assembly.ca.gov)

[Villines, Michael N.](#), Rep, 29<sup>th</sup>, Room 3104, (916) 319-2029  
[Assemblymember.Villines@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Villines@assembly.ca.gov)

[Walters, Mimi](#), Rep, 73<sup>rd</sup>, Room 6031, (916) 319-2073  
[Assemblymember.Walters@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Walters@assembly.ca.gov)

[Wolk, Lois](#), Dem, 8<sup>th</sup>, Room 3120, (916) 319-2008  
[Assemblymember.Wolk@assembly.ca.gov](mailto:Assemblymember.Wolk@assembly.ca.gov)

## California Senate Roster

-----  
**Mailing Address**

**[Insert Name of Assembly Member]**  
**State Capitol**  
**California Senate**  
**[Insert Room Number]**  
**Sacramento, CA 95814**

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### **Senate Mailing, Telephone, and Email Address**

**Aanestad, Sam, Room 2054, (916) 651-4004**  
[Senator.Aanestad@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Aanestad@senate.ca.gov)

**Ackerman, Dick, Room 305, (916) 651-4033**  
[Senator.Ackerman@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Ackerman@senate.ca.gov)

**Alquist, Elaine, Room 5080, (916) 651-4013**  
[Senator.Alquist@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Alquist@senate.ca.gov)

**Ashburn, Roy, Room 3063, (916) 651-4018**  
[Senator.Ashburn@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Ashburn@senate.ca.gov)

**Battin, James, Room 3056, (916) 651-4037**  
[Senator.Battin@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Battin@senate.ca.gov)

**Calderon, Ron, Room 4088, (916) 651-4030**  
[Senator.Calderon@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Calderon@senate.ca.gov)

**Cedillo, Gilbert, Room 5100, (916) 651-4022**  
[Senator.Cedillo@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Cedillo@senate.ca.gov)

**Cogdill, Dave, Room 3048, (916) 651-4014**  
[Senator.Cogdill@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Cogdill@senate.ca.gov)

**Corbett, Ellen, Room 3086, (916) 651-4010**  
[Senator.Corbett@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Corbett@senate.ca.gov)

**Correa, Louis, Room 4062, (916) 651-4034**  
[Senator.Correa@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Correa@senate.ca.gov)

**Cox, Dave, Room 2068, (916) 651-4001**  
[Senator.Cox@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Cox@senate.ca.gov)

**Denham, Jeff, Room 3076, (916) 651-4012**  
[Senator.Denham@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Denham@senate.ca.gov)

**Ducheny, Denise, Room 5035, (916) 651-4040**  
[Senator.Ducheny@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Ducheny@senate.ca.gov)

**Dutton, Bob, Room 5094, (916) 651-4031**  
[Senator.Dutton@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Dutton@senate.ca.gov)

**Florez, Dean, Room 5061, (916) 651-4016**  
[Senator.Florez@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Florez@senate.ca.gov)

**Hollingsworth, Dennis, Room 5064, (916) 651-4036**  
[Senator.Hollingsworth@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Hollingsworth@senate.ca.gov)

**Kuehl, Sheila, Room 5108, (916) 651-4023**  
[Senator.Kuehl@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Kuehl@senate.ca.gov)

**Lowenthal, Alan, Room 2032, (916) 651-4027**  
[Senator.Lowenthal@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Lowenthal@senate.ca.gov)

**Machado, Mike, Room 5066, (916) 651-1511 & (916) 651-4005**  
[Senator.Machado@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Machado@senate.ca.gov)

**Maldonado, Abel, Room 4082, (916) 651-4015**  
[Senator.Maldonado@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Maldonado@senate.ca.gov)

**Margett, Bob, Room 3082, (916) 651-4029**  
[Senator.Margett@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Margett@senate.ca.gov)

**McClintock, Tom, Room 3070, (916) 651-4019**  
[Senator.McClintock@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.McClintock@senate.ca.gov)

**Migden, Carole, Room 5114, (916) 651-4003**  
[Senator.Migden@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Migden@senate.ca.gov)

**Negrete McLeod, Gloria Room 2059, (916) 651-4032**  
[Senator.McLeod@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.McLeod@senate.ca.gov)

**Oropeza, Jenny, Room 4074, (916) 651-4028**  
[Senator.Oropeza@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Oropeza@senate.ca.gov)

**Padilla, Alex, Room 4032, (916) 651-4020**  
[Senator.Padilla@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Padilla@senate.ca.gov)

**Perata, Don, Room 205, (916) 651-4009**  
[Senator.Perata@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Perata@senate.ca.gov)

**Ridley-Thomas, Mark, Room 4061, (916) 651-4026**  
[Senator.Ridley-Thomas@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Ridley-Thomas@senate.ca.gov)

**Romero, Gloria, Room 313, (916) 651-4024**  
[Senator.Romero@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Romero@senate.ca.gov)

**Runner, George, Room 5097, (916) 651-4017**  
[Senator.Runner@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Runner@senate.ca.gov)

**Scott, Jack , Room 2082, (916) 651-4021**  
[Senator.Scott@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Scott@senate.ca.gov)

**Simitian, S. Joseph, Room 2080, (916) 651-4011**  
[Senator.Simitian@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Simitian@senate.ca.gov)

**Steinberg, Darrell, Room 4035, (916) 651-4006**  
[Senator.Steinberg@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Steinberg@senate.ca.gov)

**Torlakson, Tom, Room 5050, (916) 651-4007**  
[Senator.Torlakson@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Torlakson@senate.ca.gov)

**Vincent, Edward, Room 5052, (916) 651-4025**  
[Senator.Vincent@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Vincent@senate.ca.gov)

**Wiggins, Patrica, Room 4081, (916) 651-4002**  
[Senator.Wiggins@senate.ca.gov](mailto:Senator.Wiggins@senate.ca.gov)

**Wyland, Mark, Room 4066, (916) 651-4038**

Senator.Wyland@senate.ca.gov

Yee, Leland, Room 4048, (916) 651-4008

Senator.Yee@senate.ca.gov

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**LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN TO PRESIDENT BUSH  
TO CONTINUE UNTIL PASSAGE OF H.R. 5680**  
**(Special Update to be Released Shortly)**



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**LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN TO PRESIDENT BUSH  
TO CONTINUE UNTIL PASSAGE OF H.R. 5680**

The Coalition thanks the thousands of Ethiopians and others who have contacted it over the past couple of days regarding the 100,000 letters campaign.

The Coalition for H.R. 5680 announces the continuation of the 100,000 letter campaign until passage of H.R. 5680. The original and abbreviated letters are available at the following links:

**Original Letter posted at:**

[http://ethiomeia.com/articles/letter\\_to\\_president\\_bush.html](http://ethiomeia.com/articles/letter_to_president_bush.html)

[http://www.ethrev.com/2007/feb/02202007\\_letter\\_to\\_bush\\_campaign.html](http://www.ethrev.com/2007/feb/02202007_letter_to_bush_campaign.html)

[http://www.abugidainfo.com/pdf/Bush\\_Letter\\_Feb\\_19.pdf](http://www.abugidainfo.com/pdf/Bush_Letter_Feb_19.pdf)

[http://addisvoice.com/article/february\\_20.htm](http://addisvoice.com/article/february_20.htm)

**Abbreviated Letter:**

February xx, 2007

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

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing to ask your support for human rights in Ethiopia and passage of H.R. 5680, also known as “The Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Act.”

As you are aware, Mr. President, following the May 2005 parliamentary election in Ethiopia, the human rights situation has deteriorated significantly. Over the past year and half, hundreds of thousands of political opponents have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured and killed. An official Inquiry Commission set up by the leader of the ruling 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.

Human rights, democracy and justice remain as elusive as ever in Ethiopia. Leaders of the opposition parties, human rights defenders and civic leaders remain in detention today facing trial in a kangaroo court. They are shuttled back and forth to court endlessly, and told their matter has been continued. This has been going on now for nearly a year and half.

The human rights situation in Ethiopia has now reached a critical stage. It requires America’s urgent attention.

In your second inaugural speech, 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.” Today, Ethiopians the world over are standing for liberty, and we ask you to stand with us.

Mr. President. I believe there are those enemies of freedom who seek to chain the unholy cause of terrorism to the holy cause of liberty and human rights. But please be not misled because, as you know very well, the devil can quote Scriptures.

The truth is Ethiopians know all too well the scourge of terrorism that has been unleashed on the world. We 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.

Mr. President, I echo your words when I say the fight for human rights is fundamentally a fight against terrorism; and I believe the "world beyond terror" that you spoke of so eloquently 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.

Mr. President, you have said, "When America gives its word, it keeps its word." Now is the time to stand up with the Ethiopian people and 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!"

Mr. President, show us you stand for liberty, for democracy and for human rights in Ethiopia. Support H.R. 5680.

This bill, Mr. President, provides for a comprehensive scheme to advance democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. It demands the release of all prisoners of conscience in Ethiopia, including opposition party and civic leaders. It provides ample resources to undertake democratic institution building, including strengthening of the electoral process, legislative bodies, political parties and civil society organizations. It aims to help in the development of an independent judiciary and professional prosecutorial agencies, and fosters the growth of independent private journalism.

Mr. President I ask you to support H.R. 5680 because we know that you firmly uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I am equally confident in my knowledge that you will support our efforts to build a democratic society in Ethiopia 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: I ask you to support H.R. 5680. I ask you to demand the release of all political prisoners, and opposition leaders and human rights defenders. I ask you to stand with us and demand a stop to human rights violations in Ethiopia.

God Bless America.

Sincerely,

[Your Name and address]

[Optional]

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