

**SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE FOR ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL PRISONERS – CANADA
(SOCEPP-CAN)**

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**Canadian Parliamentarians expressed Solidarity with the struggle for
the respect of human and democratic rights in Ethiopia**

On May 05, 2007, SOCEPP Canada hosted a successful public meeting in the presence of over 100 invited guests, parliamentarians and virtual participants of the Assimba Pal-Talk community.

The main agendas of this meeting held at the Algonquin College Campus, included the following four items by the same number of panelists:

- 1) "The Role of SOCEPP Canada and the Ethiopian Diaspora Community in Defense of Human Rights". (Mr. Aklilu Wendaferew, MSW, Chair - SOCEPP Canada)
- 2) "The Current Political Situation in Ethiopia and the Prospect of Human Rights". (Dr. Getachew Begashaw, Associate Professor in Economics and Department Head, Harper College - Chicago)
- 3) "Election Issues in Ethiopia (1993-2005), What the Future Holds, and what can be done?" (Dr. Paulos Milkias, Professor, Concordia University, Montreal (Canada); and
- 4) "Crisis, Dissolution, War, and Tragedy in the Horn of Africa and why such Unspeakable Mess". (Dr. Mammo Muchie, Prof. of Philosophy and a Researcher, London (UK).

Mr. Solomon Workneh, the event's chair and board member of SOCEPP Canada, opened the meeting with a welcome speech thanking everyone for coming and by introducing the agenda as well as the panelists. Following this brief introduction, he invited two Members of Parliament: Hon. Paul Dewar, MP for Ottawa Center, and Hon. Maria Minna, MP for Beaches and East York (Toronto), who could not be there due to prior engagements but sent her assistant to read her solidarity message. Both guests started their speech by crediting SOCEPP Canada for taking a lead role in creating awareness about the plight of the Ethiopian people among lawmakers and politicians in Canada and expressed their frustrations against the TPLF/EPRDF regime with the second speaker even going as far as calling it - a cruel dictatorship. The guests ended their speeches by promising to continue working with SOCEPP Canada and other human rights groups until Ethiopia finds herself a government that respects human and democratic rights.

Seven other members of parliament sent solidarity letters to SOCEPP Canada. The chair read six of them during the meeting between intervals and the seventh letter, which came late, is appended to the records of this event. The following outline

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provides the main themes of the speeches with focus on the human rights situations in Ethiopia:

(1) Mr. Aklilu Wendaferew:

- Told the meeting about the founding of SOCEPP Canada in 1998 as a not-for-profit and non-partisan human rights organization registered in Canada.
- Provided a background discussion about the role SOCEPP Canada played in Canadian foreign policy consultations vis-à-vis Ethiopia in alliance with other Canadian human rights, peace, and democracy promotion groups.
- Highlighted the areas of human rights concern in Ethiopia talking about the various violations the TPLF/EPRDF government committed against Ethiopians over the past 16 years: against the EPRP leadership, the CUDP leadership, the November 2005 massacres, the detention of over 50 thousand members and supporters of the CUDP and UEDF, members of the free press, civic leaders and others.
- Recognized the role played by the Diaspora community encouraging them to continue getting involved by lobbying parliamentarians to support the cause of human rights issues in Ethiopia, and
- He concluded calling upon the government of Canada to continue suspending the direct budgetary support it used to provide to the TPLF/EPRDF regime in Ethiopia and calling for the unconditional release of all political prisoners and the accounting of those detained and subsequently “disappeared”.

(2) Dr. Getachew Begashaw:

Dr. Getachew made a highly acclaimed presentation, which highlighted the following key areas:

- Openly declared that the TPLF/EPRDF regime is one of history’s greatest human rights abusers by citing various examples for its behaviors:- the repression against members of the EPRP and the OLF, the killings of democracy demonstrators, the de-facto detention of CUDP leadership, and the detention of thousands of peace and justice activists.
- Identified the following three factors as the *raison d'être*, which helped the TPLF/EPRDF regime to stay in power. These are: 1) the fact that all the essential resources (economic, military and politico-judiciary) are under its full control; 2) that it has the support and backing of the West, and 3)

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that the opposition is divided, hence, giving the regime its relative strength.

- Succinctly argued that the ruling group can be defeated only if the opposition were to come together in a united front thereby narrating the various attempts made by the UEDF as well that of the two Civic Organizations – the Ethiopian Teachers Association (ETA) and that of the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFPJA).
- Called upon the Ethiopian people and the Diaspora community to support those who pursue Ethiopia's dreams and, in the process, give their lives for her salvation, on the one hand; and to censor those who betray them (the likes of Mr. Lidetu Ayalew and Dr. Beyene Petros), on the other.
- He concluded his speech by unequivocally stating that any talk about national reconciliation, makes sense only after all jailed political prisoners are released without any conditions; and after the ban on political parties is lifted, the persecution of members has stopped and freedom of the press respected.

(3) Dr. Paulos Milkias:

Dr. Milkias' presentation, which focused on the erratic political behavior of the TPLF/EPRDF regime as to influence the outcome of the May 2005 election, highlighted the following themes:

- Extensively talked about the dirty political intrigue the TPF/EPRDF cadres played prior to and during the 2005 election by pressuring the citizens to vote for its functionaries.
- Compared and contrasted the election time's undemocratic and illegal behavior of the TPLF/EPRDF, on the one hand; and the democratic behavior of the opposition parties (CUDP and UEDF), on the other.
- Unequivocally told participants that the opposition won the election and yet the TPLF/EPRDF usurped political power by force of arms followed by the blessing of the West, one way or another, and
- Adding that political prisoners of CUDP leadership and others should be released without any preconditions, he concluded by stating that the TPLF/EPRDF regime should be held responsible for the atrocities committed against the Ethiopian people.

(4) Dr. Mamo Muchie:

Dr. Muchie's presentation format and content was a bit different from the other three for his alternative to peace making and conflict resolution takes a macro

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level/regional/Horn of Africa approach. He argues that by enabling cultural conversation between 4-5 Horn of Africa countries, the problems in Ethiopia will sooner or latter be addressed. Irrespective of whether or not we think this is a palatable political alternative as a solution for the present Ethiopian dilemma, the following were his thesis' main themes presented to his audience in good will:

- He argues that there is a common culture of aggression and rebelliousness among these nations and communities;
- He also argues that through mobility of people from one nation to the other through educational and/or cultural exchange programs, by working together in joint research endeavors, and through exchange of knowledge: peace, love, prosperity, tranquility, and even some kind of loose confederation are possible.
- Admitting that his theory is in a development stage requiring further research and the willingness of parties to work together, he is convinced however that it would work in the end. He cites some encouraging signs of his own research endeavor he spearheads in the UK and Kenya with research associates (example: one from Somalia) with whom he completed a three year research clearly registering attitudinal changes towards neighbors with a history of animosity.

Once the four panelists presented their assigned topics and the chair read the remaining four solidarity letters sent to SOCEPP Canada from members of parliament, a transition took place to a Q&A period. Many people (both from the floor and from the virtual Assimba Pal-talk Community) asked a number of questions and freely expressed their opinions. The majority of the questions raised were relevant, respectable, and straightforward; and a few were deliberately destructive. We encourage any interested party to go to the www.Assimba.org and listen to the full meeting proceedings.

Thank you the Assimba Pal-talk Admin for posting the complete clips! That is great public Service!

SOCEPP Canada thanks all those who made this event possible including the guest speakers, parliamentarians and the public. More result-oriented events focusing on human rights advocacy will continue in the coming months!

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Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., M.P.
Beaches - East York

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May 5th, 2007

I am sorry I was unable to join you today in your discussions on democracy in Ethiopia.

The state of democracy in Ethiopia is, as you know, tragic.

In a country where free elections are held under the careful watch of international observers, one would have a glimmer of hope that Ethiopia is a flourishing democracy.

However, when we consider that opposition parties are silenced, arbitrary political imprisonments are taking place, and the right to association and assembly is denied, it is clear that the Ethiopian people are living under a cruel dictatorship.

This cannot be tolerated.

As former Minister of International Cooperation, I have seen first hand the good work Canada can do in promoting good governance and peace. This government can and must do more to ensure that Ethiopia become a true social democracy.

The people of Ethiopia are living in fear of their government and its arbitrary use of force. The international community has a responsibility to these people to ensure that they can live in peace.

I have lobbied this government to look into human rights abuses taking place in Ethiopia and to take action. I will continue to pressure the government to ensure that the freedom and democratic rights of the people of Ethiopia are protected.

We cannot turn a blind eye to the human rights abuses that are presently going on in Ethiopia. I wish you great success with your roundtable discussions today and look forward to continue working with you to promote true democracy in Ethiopia.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maria Minna".

Hon. Maria Minna, P.C., M.P.
Beaches- East York

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House of Commons



Hon. Navdeep Singh Bains, P.C., M.P.
Mississauga – Brampton South

OTTAWA
May 3, 2007

Akilu Wondaferew
Chair
Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners – Canada
P.O. Box 413, Station E
Toronto, ON
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Dear Akilu,

I thank you for your letter (mail), dated April 18, 2007, regarding your public meeting entitled “the State of Human Rights in Ethiopia”.

I thank you for inviting me to participate in your event. Unfortunately due to previous engagements in my home riding I am unable to attend.

Ethiopia suffers from numerous allegations of human rights violations. These include breeches of democratic rights, personal security and the rule of law. These issues are pressing and require careful observation and engagement on the part of the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada must maintain a dialogue with the Government of Ethiopia and pressure them to ensure that they are living up to their international obligations under the United Nations declaration on human rights.

I support you in your efforts to raise awareness and respect for human rights in Ethiopia. Please accept my best wishes for a successful event.

Yours Sincerely,

The Hon. Navdeep Singh Bains, P.C., M.P.

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Omar Alghabra

M.P. for Mississauga—Erindale



OTTAWA, Ontario

May 5th, 2007

*Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners-Canada
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State Political Rights in Ethiopia

It gives me great pleasure to extend my warmest personal greetings to all those attending the panel discussion the "State of Political Rights in Ethiopia" hosted by the Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners-Canada.

Canada has become a role model for the rest of the world in building a strong nation that is based on ideals of fairness, justice and equality. We each have a responsibility to promote these values, and your efforts here today demonstrate your commitment to that responsibility. Your discussions during this conference will advance these values and promote principles of equality and justice.

I want to congratulate the organizers and their volunteers and supporters in planning a successful panel discussion.

Yours truly,

*Omar Alghabra, M.P.
Mississauga-Erindale*



Bill Siksay

Member of Parliament
BURNABY-DOUGLAS

Ottawa
2007-05-04

Aklilu Wondaferew, MSW
Chair
SOCEPP Canada
P.O. Box 413 Station E
Toronto, ON M6H 4E3

Dear Aklilu Wondaferew,

Thank you for your invitation to attend the panel discussion on the *State of Political rights in Ethiopia* May 5, 2007. Unfortunately, I have to be in the riding over that weekend and am unable to attend.

Ethiopia continues to suffer human rights violations. Allegations of election fraud, as well as the arbitrary arrest, detention and murder of civilians by security forces emphasize the need for the Canadian government to continue pressure on the Ethiopian government to uphold the UN declaration on human rights and promote good democratic governance. Having said that, Canada must continue to provide humanitarian funding to meet the on-going needs of the Ethiopian people.

Canada must continue to work for human rights, social justice and democracy and find solutions to conflicts around the world.

Thank you for all your hard work in support of promoting human rights in Ethiopia. Good luck with the conference.

Yours sincerely,

Bill Siksay, MP
Burnaby-Douglas

WLS/lm

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O T T A W A

May 3, 2007

Aklilu Wendaferew
Chair, Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian
Political Prisoners - Canada
P.O. Box 413 Station E
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Dear Aklilu Wendaferew:

Thank you for your letter and invitation to participate in your event entitled *State of Political Rights in Ethiopia* in Ottawa on May 5th.

I must congratulate you for your efforts to promote human and democratic rights in Ethiopia. It is apparent to the international community that the justice system in Ethiopia is in desperate need of reform in order to prevent the arbitrary arrest, abuse and wrongful detention of human rights activists. Democracy will only flourish when authorities are required to respect the rule of law and human rights are upheld.

Unfortunately I have to attend several constituency functions in Toronto and regretfully I will be unable to participate in the event. I look forward to working with you in the future to assist the people of Ethiopia realize their basic human rights.

Sincerely,



Yasmin Ratansi, MP





Judy
Wasylycia-Leis



MP for Winnipeg North

May 3, 2007

Aklilu Wondaferew, MSW
Chair
SOCEPP Canada
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Dear Aklilu Wondaferew,

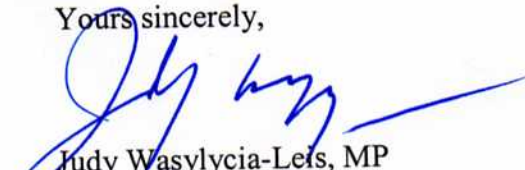
Thank you for your invitation to attend the panel discussion titled "State of Political rights in Ethiopia" on May 5, 2007. I regret I will not be able to attend the event due to previous commitments in my home riding of Winnipeg.

Ethiopia continues to suffer human rights violations. Allegations of election fraud, as well as the arbitrary arrest, detention and murder of civilians by security forces emphasize the need for the Canadian government to continue to be engaged on this issue. The Government of Canada needs to maintain pressure on the Government of Ethiopia to uphold the UN declaration on human rights and promote democratic good governance. However, it is also important that Canada continue to provide humanitarian funding to meet the on-going needs of the Ethiopian people.

My NDP Caucus colleagues and I will continue to call on the government to pursue diplomatic initiatives and engage civil society in order to safeguard the principles of democratic good governance and find enduring resolutions to conflicts.

Thank you for all your hard work in speaking out against the violation of human rights in Ethiopia. Good luck with your event on May 5th.

Yours sincerely,



Judy Wasylycia-Leis, MP
Winnipeg North

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Minister of Public Safety
and Emergency Preparedness



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04 MAY 2007

Mr. Aklilu Wendaferew, MSW
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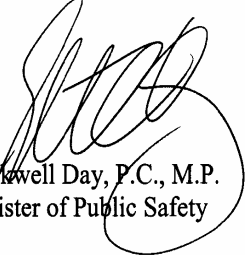
Dear Mr. Wendaferew:

Thank you for your correspondence of April 18, 2007, inviting me to participate to an Ottawa public discussion concerning the "State of Political Rights in Ethiopia", on May 5th.

I regret that my schedule does not permit me to join you at this event, but I salute your dedication to the cause of democracy and respect for human rights in Ethiopia.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely,



Stockwell Day, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Public Safety

Canada