

20 February 2009

Engineer Hailu Shawl,  
And  
Mr. Michael C. Gonzales,

Agreed To Work Together

President Barack Obama's Administration Would Reassess  
USA Policy On Ethiopia

Engineer Hailu Shawul, Chairman of All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP), met with Mr. Michael C. Gonzales, Political/Economic Counselor of the USA Embassy in Ethiopia on 19 February 2009 in his office at the latter's request and had an extensive and fruitful discussion. Mr. Gonzales was interested to know AEUP's perception of the current political situation in Ethiopia.

Engineer Hailu indicated that political atmosphere in Ethiopia following the aftermath of the May 2005 election has been constantly deteriorating and has now reached a critical stage. Among other things, Engineer Hailu said, harassment and imprisonment of our party members, those of other opposition parties and members of the media have continued unabated. Furthermore, religious conflicts are erupting even in our capital city right under the Government's nose, without yet any obvious action being taken to put the situation under control, he added.

Unless the seven-point demands of the Ethiopian Government by Kinijit following the aftermath of the 2005 national election are satisfied, Engineer Hailu concluded, the AEUP believes that the democratic condition in general and the people's ability to express themselves freely, the human rights situation and the rule of law as enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution cannot take hold in Ethiopia. He then enumerated the seven-point demands as follows.

1. Free all political prisoners without any further delay and precondition by the Ruling Party and Government;
2. Respect freedom of the Press and the Media and stop any infringement on the rights by the Ruling party and Government;
3. The National Election Commission should be reorganized as a neutral body free from any form of influence from the Ruling Party and Government, and its bills re-decreed to serve the interest of the Ethiopian people reflecting the freedom enshrined in the Ethiopian Constitution;
4. The Judiciary, comprising the Public Prosecution and the Courts should be separated from the Executive Branch in accordance with the dictates of the Ethiopian Constitution and the officers must be able to execute their duties and responsibilities freely without any influence, fear and reprisal from the Ruling Party and Government;

5. Our Armed Forces and the Police Force must operate to defend our people and land against external aggression and help keep peace and order within the country in accordance with the Ethiopian Constitution and the Ruling Party and Government should stop using them against the law to suppress public, opposition parties and those of other civil societies dissent;
6. Our people's freedom to organize in any civil society and political party of their choice without interference or prohibition by the Ruling Party and Government must be respected as proclaimed in the Ethiopian Constitution; and
7. The absolute right of our people and any civil society to express their opinions against the Government freely in the form they deemed necessary in a peaceful manner should be respected;

Engineer Hailu feared that continued disregard for these demands and continuing along the present trend would further weaken the democratic forces and strengthen the Ruling Party and Government, which will not augur well for the country as a whole. He, however, believed that his Party is confident to count on the Ethiopian people and the traditional friends of Ethiopia to reverse the prevailing bad political situation in Ethiopia.

Mr. Gonzales concurred and expressed that all concerned have to work together in order to reverse the situation. The new US Government under Mr. Barack Obama as President, although only less than a month in office is eager to reassess its policy on Ethiopia, one of the most important countries in the Horn of Africa, Mr. Gonzales said. He added that the security concerns of both our two countries must be balanced with conditions of social and economic development in Ethiopia, with the ultimate objective of building democracy in general and strengthening of freedom of expression, the rule of law and good governance in Ethiopia. Mr. Gonzales expressed his hope that the opposition parties and the Ethiopian Government would positively work hard together in order to ensure the success of the forthcoming election in 2010, lest he felt it is dangerous for the Ethiopian people, the Ethiopian Government, the Horn of Africa and the World at large.

The meeting was held in a very cordial atmosphere and ended with the two officials agreeing that the USA Embassy in Ethiopia would work hard with other international communities and All Ethiopia Unity Party and other opposition parties in order to bring about positive outcome in the strengthening of freedom of expression, the rule of law and good governance in Ethiopia in general and for the opposition parties to participate successfully in the forthcoming 2010 election.