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Mrs. Louise Arbour,
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Geneva

March 1, 2007

Dear Madam,

Allow us to express our sincere gratitude for your statement of concern in April 2006 over the situation of Human Rights in Ethiopia in general and the fate of the political prisoners in particular.

As you well know, on May 15, 2005, for the first time in their history, millions of Ethiopians turned out voluntarily to elect their political leaders. In an event that clearly demonstrated the peoples' strong desire for change and strong conviction in democratic process, more than 90 per cent of the registered voters turned out and said "NO" to the incumbent TPLF/EPRDF regime. Startled by the complete loss of all the 23 seats in Addis Ababa and strong indication of defeat in many parts of the country, the Prime Minister declared state of emergency, put the whole army and police under his direct command and ascribed victory to his party while more than half of the votes were still to be counted.

Thereafter, the party in power manipulated the election results and engineered the results to fit their prefabricated victory. The National Election Board whose President is the president of the Supreme Court and who is a loyal slave to the prime minister was ordered to ordain the election result manufactured in the offices of the ruling party. The European Union Election Observation Mission that monitored the whole process, however, denounced the way the election was handled by the government and concluded that the election *"...does not live up to international standards and the aspiration of the Ethiopian people for democracy..."*

In protest against the blatant manipulation of the electoral results, the public demonstrated peacefully for the respect of their votes. In June and November 2005, government security forces under the direct command of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi massacred no less than 193 innocent civilians and wounded more than seven hundred.

All the leaders of the victorious opposition party, the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), elected parliamentarians, supporters, journalists and publishers, civic association leaders, anti poverty campaigners, students and ordinary citizens young and old, men and women were rounded up in a brutal crack down that followed the demonstrations.

Opposition leaders, journalists, anti poverty campaigners and leaders of civic society have been charged with serious but absurd offences such as "treason", "outrage against the

constitution” and “attempted genocide”, which carry death penalty. Nonetheless, Amnesty International and other human rights groups regard the defendants as prisoners of conscience who have never used nor advocated violence.

On the other hand, a ten member inquiry commission, hand picked by the Prime Minister, established in response to the massive pressure from donors and rights groups, found out that the government forces have used disproportionate force to contain the peaceful demonstrations. Unbending to the continued intimidations and harassments from the Prime Minister and his security agents to reverse the commission’s findings, the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Commission risked their lives and slipped out of the country to publish the full report abroad.

Despite strong outrage and condemnations from governments, rights groups, aid agencies and the public; the kangaroo court proceedings continued and the Federal Special Court is set to make its final rulings on March 05, 2007. The special prosecutor had been falsifying documents confiscated from opposition party offices and private residents of the defendants, engineered video and audio recordings, and coached loyal false witnesses to build its unfounded charges. To the embarrassment of the prosecutor and the government, one of the prosecutor’s key witnesses, coached to testify against the defendants, told the court that he didn’t even know the defendants and none of them have caused any harm to him and the reason for his appearance in the court was to give false testimonies against them as instructed by the prosecutor.

While the whole world calls on the government to seek for a political solution, the Prime Minister in his interviews shamelessly deny the existence of any political prisoner in the country and often times pronounces his verdict that the defendants are criminals who tried to overthrow his government by force. It is these verdict that the hand picked TPLF/EPRDF loyalist judges are expected to endorse and condemn these prisoners of conscience to death and life imprisonment in the upcoming final hearing. Such a deliberation will undoubtedly lead to an endless bloodshed that destabilizes the already volatile region.

We appeal to you to request the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to drop its fabricated charges and release all political prisoners and engage in a constructive dialoged to seek for a political solution to the political crises.

Sincerely yours,

Mrs. Meseret Haile
Vice President