

## Washington Update – October 10th, 2008

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I have recently been in direct contact with members and staff of the United States Senate; amongst them Senators Leahy, Feingold, and Obama in helping us to amend and improve S 3457 (formerly H.R. 2003). The amendment that we seek should include several items specifically:

Language was needed in support of hydroelectric projects for the Blue Nile and Awash rivers. These projects would naturally create irrigation ready for agricultural development. It should also include language condemning the complicity of the regime in human rights violations in Ethiopia, particularly the participants in the June and November 2005 massacres.

We have strongly recommended inclusion in the bill language supporting an independent judiciary.

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We feel that these four are the main changes needed to deliver a meaningful bill. In the senatorial staff discussions we received a good and positive reception.

Meetings also took place with the United States State Department. I was accompanied in these visits in Washington by Abayeneh Berhanu, Vice President AEUP. I first met at the State Department with The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), State's people responsible for Human rights. Then Ato Abayeneh Berhanu and I met with the African Affairs section. Our agenda included:

1. a briefing regarding the current situation in Ethiopia; emphasizing the importance of American support for human rights and democracy in Ethiopia and noting the observations by Ethiopia watchers – foreign and domestic – that the Meles regime believes itself to have solid support from the United States, and has little hesitation to so suppress legitimate political opposition.
2. Presenting a compact disc from Ethiopia that explained the recent General Assembly meeting in Ethiopia held by the All Ethiopia Unity Party, formerly Kinijit, and welcome reception for President Engineer Hailu Shawel.
3. We stressed the importance of United States support for the eight point plans that were presented by the All Ethiopia Unity Party. The key points are: an independent electoral commission, an independent judiciary, a free press, freedom of expression and assembly, and release of all political prisoners. U.S. support must be more than just words but must include pressure on the Meles regime.
4. We further discussed the senatorial support for S3457 (US Support Human Rights and Democracy in Ethiopia Act of 2008, which was introduced by Senator Feingold of Wisconsin and cosponsored by Senator Leahy of Vermont.

I later met with US Ambassador to Ethiopia, Donald Yamamoto and discussed a wide range of topics. The Ambassador was open and did tell me that the US food aid to Ethiopia was 800,000 metric tons and it came to \$627,000,000 in the last year. Most of the distribution is overseen by non-governmental agencies. He assured me that only those for whom aid was intended received it. Prevention of famine, or potential famine, was the big issue.

We discussed the position of the All Ethiopia Unity Party, formerly Kinijit, as the only truly national Ethiopian opposition party. We sought assurances of support for free and fair elections, which by definition would include US support for the eight point plan including an independent election board, an independent judiciary, freedom of the press, freedom of speech and assembly, and freedom from voter intimidation and fraud. He said that the United States would support that.

For members of the Ethiopian-American community it is essential that you continue to contact your United State senators and continue to urge them to support S 3457. Financial support for the All Ethiopia Unity Party, formerly Kinijit, is critical now as the regime is committing millions in lobbying efforts to block the bill.

There will be a meeting here in Washington open to all members of support group of the All Ethiopia Unity Party, formerly Kinijit, on Friday, October 17<sup>th</sup>. The location and time will be posted soon.

Ethiopians! We have come a long way in this legislation; we are almost there! Keep it up!