

Washington Update - February 16, 2009

The work that we do for Ethiopia and Ethiopians sometimes put us in contact with very interesting people from other areas of the globe. Recently we met with Rajmohan Gandhi, the grandson and biographer of Mohandas (Mahatma) Gandhi, the liberator of India. He was visiting DC from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where he lectures to promote his new biography - Gandhi: The Man, His People, and the Empire.

He wrote a magazine recently: "...Last year the National Press Club invited me to read from my new biography of Mohandas Gandhi. At one point, Mesfin Mekonen, the impressive Ethiopian who runs its restaurant tapped me on the shoulder and asked for a word with me. Leading me away from the table, Mekonen said, "There's a man here at the club, an old-timer, who wants to talk to you." A few minutes later Mekonen reappeared with John Cosgrove, former President of The National Press Club.

Cosgrove said, " I have been a journalist for many years. In 1948 a friend, a reporter named Alfred Wagg, gave me a gramophone recording of the speech given by Mahatma Gandhi to Asian leaders in April 1947." He went on and said "I still have that recording. Would you be interested in it?"

I wanted keenly to hear my beloved grand father's voice, but the old discs were too fragile to be played. the Press Club offered to have them digitized so that I, and the rest of the world, could hear him."

I bring this up as we too are engaged in a peaceful struggle for freedom in Ethiopia. We must learn from Gandhi's struggles to continue to persevere in our work to bring freedom, peace, and development to Ethiopia.

We in Washington, DC continue to make progress in getting the attention of the United States Congress, the new Obama Administration and the rest of the United States government to focus on the many crises in Ethiopia - Human Rights, Famine, and Development. We have been in direct contact with President Obama's new team including his transition chief, John Podesta. He was contacted during the weeks leading up to the Inauguration regarding these issues and has said that they will be taken very seriously by the new Administration.

We have continued to work closely with the career diplomats in the United States Department of State. We recently spoke directly with John Wysham,

Desk Officer for Ethiopia. He continues to express concern for human rights violations in Ethiopia. We told him "...we, as American citizens of Ethiopian descent are very concerned about the fact Hailu Shawel, president of All Ethiopia Unity Party was not included as invited opposition party guest at American Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to meet acting Deputy Secretary of States for African Affairs Philip Carter and Ambassador Donald Yamamoto to discuss the political situation in Ethiopia."

We reminded him that the All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP) is the major opposition group in Ethiopia with membership in all regions of Ethiopia with members of all religious, ethnic groups and membership over five million Ethiopians. Mr. Wysham apologized and said that this was a big mistake. We all need to contact The United States Embassy in Addis Ababa to see that this unfortunate oversight is quickly corrected.

We, of course, keep in direct contact with key members of Congress. On the Senate's Subcommittee on African Affairs we speak with Russ Feingold of Wisconsin, Chairman of the Committee, Johnny Isakson of Georgia, Ranking Member of the Committee, and Benjamin Cardin of Maryland.

In the House we stay in touch with the friends of Ethiopia, Donald Payne of New Jersey, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, Chris Smith of New Jersey, Ranking Member of Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. We encourage these distinguished members of Congress to reintroduce this year, 2009, in the new session "The Support for Democracy and Human Rights in Ethiopia Act of 2008", formerly known as H.R. 2003 (or S 3457) in the last Congress.

As most of you know a very stern letter was sent to Meles by top members of the United States Senate including Senators Feingold and Isakson and Leahy and Durbin.

Please recontact all your members of Congress to support this effort. As we previously wrote in an earlier Washington Update, "...United States national security will always cleave to long term American ideals, democracy, Human Rights, and free market economic development." Please remind them of this when you contact them.

This week on Sunday, February 22nd the Voice of Kinijit All Ethiopia Unity Party radio will be on the air again in Washington on WZHF 1390-am at the usual hour of 11:30 am EST. Our guests will be speaking direct from Ethiopia. Last week we were privileged to have with us on the air, direct from Addis Ababa, All

Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) Vice-President Shaleka Getachew Mengiste and All Ethiopian Unity Party (AEUP) Executive Committee member Ato Abate. you can locate this program, and earlier ones, on the Web site:
<http://www.andenetdemocracy.org/>.

To conclude, we have also been contacted by other individuals interested in the affairs of Africa. we have all observed the behavior of the dictator of Zimbabwe, Mugabe. Recently we talked to Justin Makaruse of The Zimbabwe Democracy and development Foundation. He is the American representative of Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the democratic forces in Zimbabwe. He told us that they are being very cautious in their dealings with the Zimbabwe regime. They are working in the right direction now, thought.

Mesfin Mekonen
