

## Washington Update

May 5, 2009

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee today voted to approve the nomination of Johnnie Carson to be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. The full Senate is expected to confirm the nomination soon.

The Foreign Relations Committee held a confirmation hearing April 29 for Carson. In response to questions from the committee, Carson said that U.S. policy toward Ethiopia will change in the Obama administration. He said that he will speak out about corruption and bad governance in Africa. Regarding Ethiopia, Carson said the U.S. will press Meles to hold free and fair elections in 2010.

Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI), chairman of the Senate subcommittee on African Affairs, and Jonny Isakson (R-GA) its ranking member, quizzed Carson about Ethiopia. Feingold asked him about the human rights situation in Ethiopia and inquired about the steps he would take to improve the human rights situation in Ethiopia. Feingold asked him to read the State Department's 2008 human rights report on Ethiopia.

Carson said that if he were to be confirmed, he would ensure that the ideals and values of democracy in civil society are honored. He specifically pointed to the lack of freedom of the press today in Africa, and went on to state that the rule of law needs to be respected by African governments. Carson also said that corruption endemic in Africa needs to be ended. He will speak out against all this if and when and if he is confirmed.

The State Department and other branches of the Obama administration will brief Carson on the situation in Africa, including Ethiopia. He is certain to receive news reports misinforming that the political opposition in Ethiopia is "weak," but he will also receive reports from the ground about the enormous dissatisfaction with the Meles regime and the strong and growing enthusiasm for peaceful, democratic change. The upcoming elections will provide a decisive opportunity for U.S. foreign policy to demonstrate a break from the past, when the U.S. government supported dictators who promised stability. Authoritarian regimes that harass individuals engaged in peaceful political activities, that censor the press, and that keep the majority of their citizens in poverty, cannot provide

**stability.**

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