

Clone H.R. 5680 Everywhere!

**Prof. Alemayehu G. Mariam and
Obang Metho**

In all of the excitement surrounding H.R. 5680, it seems we have overlooked some simple but critical questions:

Are Ethiopian Americans the only group in the Diaspora who have the duty to defend and promote freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia?

Do Ethiopians living in Europe, Canada and Australia, and other democracies have a similar duty?

Are we all aware that while Armenian Americans were advocating for the Armenian genocide act (H.R. 390) in the U.S. Congress, their counterparts in France pushed and successfully passed in the lower house of the French parliament a bill that imposed severe criminal penalties for denying the occurrence of the Turkish genocide of Armenians at the turn of the last Century?

What is the Significance of H.R. 5680?

H.R. 5680 (Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights Advancement Act) has been an extraordinary vehicle to create international awareness about the ongoing and unrelenting human rights violations in Ethiopia. In H.R. 5680, the U.S. Congress reached a verdict on Zenawi and his regime: They are flagrant violators of human rights. They hold power illegitimately and without the consent of the people, indeed despite massive and unambiguous repudiation by the Ethiopian people. They steal elections because they can not win them honestly. They imprison their opposition because they are sore and vindictive losers. They persecute independent journalists and suppress the free press to cover up the truth and hide their crimes. They use bogus judicial processes because they can never survive the scrutiny of a fair system of justice.

While condemning Zenawi and his regime, H.R. 5680 was also Congress' way of extending a lifeline: "Zenawi, here is \$20 million. Take it and do the right thing. Choose the path of freedom, democracy and human rights. Stop your brutal repression. Release the prisoners of conscience. Respect the human rights and civil liberties of your people. Respect your own constitution. Let the free press fulfill its democratic functions. Let your people live free!"

Can H.R. 5680 be Cloned Everywhere?

Like all unreformed and arrogant tyrants, Zenawi and his regime have chosen against their own enlightened self-interest to mount a highly financed campaign to defeat H.R. 5680 using one of the most powerful lobbyists in Washington. So, Ethiopians in the Diaspora -- and not just in the United States -- must face some basic questions:

How do we respond to an arrogant tyrant who thumbs his nose on his own constitution and international law?

How do we guide a wayward and defiant tyrant find a path to freedom, democracy and human rights?

The answer is simple: Begin cloning H.R. 5680 in the parliaments and legislatures of every democratic country that has an economic or military aid relationship with Ethiopia.

Presently, in the peaceful struggle to advance freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia, all eyes are on H.R. 5680, and the United States Congress. It appears that Ethiopians living in Europe, Canada and Australia are waiting to see the final outcome of H.R. 5680 in the U.S. Congress, before they begin to do anything on their own. If this observation is even partially accurate, then the question arises whether it makes sense for Ethiopians in these other countries to fold their arms and anxiously await passage of H.R. 5680 before they begin to do their share of the heavy lifting.

Needless to say, legislative advocacy for freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia is not the “divine right of Ethiopian Americans”, nor should it be their monopoly. There is also no reason why the United States Congress should be the only legislative forum where such advocacy can be made. At best, Ethiopians in other Western democracies should regard H.R. 5680 as an illustrative example of what can be done when Ethiopians decide to use their democratic rights; and certainly, not the only thing that can be done legislatively.

The question is: Why has there not been an H.R. 5680 equivalent effort undertaken by Ethiopians in Europe, Canada and Australia? We believe the answer to this question is not nearly as important as the question of what can and should be done in the short- and intermediate terms to ensure donor countries demand accountability on the part of Zenawi and his regime if he wishes to receive aid from these countries. It is the duty of all Ethiopians to make every possible effort to clone H.R. 5680 in Europe, Canada and Australia and hold Zenawi and his regime accountable!

Some Lessons from the H.R. 5680 Experience

As we encourage Ethiopians to stand up for freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia wherever they may be, we would like to make their efforts a little easier by sharing essential lessons from our experiences in advocating for H.R. 5680. We realize that many of the lessons we have drawn from our recent experiences in H.R. 5680 are too simple and obvious to even talk about in a serious way. The reality is that the lack of attention to those simple facts at the beginning retarded our advocacy efforts later on.

We are also acutely aware of the diverse and complex circumstances in the various Western democracies that could make human rights advocacy in Ethiopia more or less difficult. Regardless of the problems and difficulties, we do not believe that “sitting

on one's hand" and doing nothing is an option when our people are grabbed out of their homes and from the streets and put in jails that are not even fit to be pens for animals. We have a moral duty of the highest order to be the voices of the millions of our people who yearn for freedom, democracy and human rights. Lest we forget, we could have been among those millions who live in fear and loathing in Zenawi's Ethiopia, but not for the grace of God. So we wish to share a few of the lessons we have learned in campaigning for H.R. 5680 with others who consider it their moral duty to help their homeland.

Lesson #1: You need not remain politically marginalized in the democratic countries in which you live. Be civically engaged at the local level and engage your local parliamentary or legislative representative in promoting freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia.

For the past three decades, the vast majority of Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans remained on the political periphery of American society. Few of us registered to vote, and even fewer participated in elections. Rarely did we run for elected office at any level. Few of us engaged in local party politics. Few of us engaged in interest group politics in the American legislative process, and even fewer started grassroots advocacy efforts to push for legislation that could help us in the United States, or our homeland. Except perhaps for a required college course in American government, most of us had little knowledge of the American Constitution or laws; and many of us were clueless about the dynamic interplay of issues in American politics. Sadly, few of us seemed to know or care about our fundamental constitutional rights guaranteed us in the American Bill of Rights as citizens or permanent residents.

We spent a great deal of the past three decades creating and nurturing our own little islands of individual achievement and prosperity in mainstream American society; and where we had a basis for collective action, we were limited to, and mired in, our own ethnic national politics. Often we engaged in "choir politics" and enjoyed preaching our messages only to those who agreed with us, while reserving scorn and contempt for those who disagreed with us. We managed to separate ourselves along ideological fault lines, ethnic and class lines, and mastered the art of political impotence. We would talk, criticize and undermine each other, but when it came to action and producing quantifiable results, we were severely challenged. We also built very few bridges to connect our little islands to important resources in mainstream American society. We let well-intentioned non-Ethiopians speak for us, about us.

We came of age in American national politics with H.R. 5680, and its predecessor legislation H.R. 4423. Not surprisingly, when the opportunity to work on H.R. 5680 suddenly manifested itself in the aftermath of the May, 2005 elections in Ethiopia, most of us were not prepared. Many of us did not have a good understanding of the congressional legislative process. We had difficulty digesting the legislative language, and we were not familiar with basic techniques of legislative advocacy at the grassroots levels. We did not understand the informal rules of grassroots advocacy or the simple mechanics of how to interact with and effectively advocate our issues to our Congressional representatives and their staff. If truth be told, it was a challenge for many

of us to pick up the phone and talk assertively to our congressional representative and share our concerns and issues. In our frustrations, we sometimes ended up being argumentative and quarrelsome with staffers and even some members, undermining our message and our credibility.

Others may be able to draw some practical lessons from our experiences in the U.S. political system as they mount their own campaigns to push for an H.R. 5680-type accountability legislation in their respective countries. The lessons are simple: Consciously avoid self-marginalization from the political process in your countries of residence or citizenship. Be civically engaged in your communities. Learn about the basic institutions and political processes, and work closely with members and leaders in the majority society on local and national issues. Those who are eligible to vote, register and vote; and vote regularly. Organize Ethiopians to vote as a bloc whenever possible. Engage in volunteerism, particularly in the areas of electoral participation, visit the local offices of your parliamentarians and write letters to them expressing your concerns. Where permitted by law make financial contributions according to your financial ability. Identify effective and articulate spokesmen and women who can explain your issues and concerns to policy makers and the public at large. But never marginalize your self in the societies in which you live. This must be done despite perceptions or realities of racism, discrimination or feelings of isolation and exclusion to the contrary.

Lesson #2: Narrowly focus on the critical issues of freedom, democracy, human rights and accountability in Ethiopia in your efforts.

We learned from our experiences in campaigning for H.R. 5680 that it is important to frame your message in the proper political context and clearly communicate our message. Clarifying the context of the issues: In pushing for accountability legislation in your respective countries, you should have a simple message for your lawmakers and parliamentarians. The message should say: Zenawi and his regime should not be rewarded with economic and military aid so long as they continue to flagrantly violate the human rights of their people and suppress their democratic aspirations. If Zenawi and his regime want to continue to receive aid, they must be held accountable for what they do or do not do to advance freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. Military and economic aid should NOT be provided to Zenawi's regime so that he can turn around and use this aid to oppress and brutalize his people. He must not be given a *carte blanche* to use aid, but rather his receipt and use of aid should be based on strict accountability measures. No Western government should use the tax dollars of its citizens to finance Zenawi's dictatorship and wholesale violation of the human rights of the Ethiopian people. That's it!

Make sure that everyone understands that you are not talking about humanitarian aid. This is critically important. The Ethiopian regime at one point tried to portray H.R. 5680, and its predecessor H.R. 4423, as a bill that will deny medical assistance to Ethiopian HIV victims and relief assistance to poor people who have been rendered famine victims, which incidentally persists because of the gross economic mismanagement and lack of planning by the Zenawi regime. At every opportunity, it is

important to highlight the fact that no one wants humanitarian aid cut off from Ethiopia. In fact, it should be stressed that you support massive increases in humanitarian aid to help Ethiopian AIDS and famine victims from public and private sources. When you talk about accountability, the issue is non-humanitarian aid; and that is precisely what H.R. 5680 states.

Clearly state the issues: The H.R. 5680 experience has taught us that to be effective we must be focused on the core human rights issues of the legislation and create wide public awareness of these issues among Ethiopians, Ethiopian Americans and others in the majority American society. The assumption that most Ethiopians, and for that matter non-Ethiopian supporters of H.R. 5680, share a common understanding of “freedom, democracy, human rights and accountability” is unwarranted. There is little understanding or consensus about these often used terms, particularly when they appear in legislative language.

As you plan out your advocacy efforts, you need to make it part of your grassroots advocacy language from the very beginning that when you talk about democracy in Ethiopia, you are not talking about “democracy” in the abstract. Break it down for your audience. Talk about Zenawi’s daylight robbery of the May 2005 elections, the need for clean elections without government fraud and manipulation, competitive political parties with full access to media resources, the immediate and unconditional release of opposition leaders imprisoned for no other reason but because they won parliamentary elections fair and square, an independent elections administration board which represents diverse political parties, and not just party hacks handpicked by Zenawi, fair election laws that can be enforced in an independent court of law, etc.

Similarly, human rights issues should not be discussed in the abstract. Talk about human rights in terms of the need for the immediate release of all political prisoners and universally recognized standards of due process. Talk about the current show trial of the Qaliti defendants. In classic kangaroo court style, the Qaliti defendants are charged with bogus crimes and jailed. But at trial, the prosecution has no credible evidence of their guilt. The so-called court grants one continuance after another to give the prosecution an opportunity to produce evidence. Now the case drags on month after month as government prosecutors run around town manufacturing and fabricating evidence against the defendants. In the meantime, the defendants languish in jail waiting for the fabricated evidence to make it to court. What a travesty of justice!

Talk about the need for freedom of speech and press and the free operation of independent journalists without direct or indirect government censorship, repeal of repressive press laws in the Ethiopian criminal code, freedom from arbitrary arrest and search and seizure so that Zenawi’s goons will not be able to break down the doors of private homes in the dark of the night and arrest people without probable cause or a proper warrant, an independent judiciary that has sufficient institutional integrity to protect the people from a lawless and arbitrary regime, etc. Talk about the need for Zenawi and his regime to respect their own constitution.

Emphasize accountability: Any legislative measure that does not have accountability provisions in it would be a joke. It would be a safe wager to bet that Richard Armev, the highly paid Ethiopian government lobbyist, would be the first to volunteer and carry the flag of H.R. 5680 and personally walk the bill to the floor of the House if we were to agree to removal of the accountability measures. No chance of that! It is very important to stress the importance of accountability provisions in any legislative measures you promote to advance freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. H.R. 5680 provides some illustrative accountability provisions, but there could be more. But you must be prepared to discuss specific performance requirements on the part of Zenawi's regime, time tables for implementation of legislative requirements, specific sanctions for noncompliance and plan for other contingencies.

It is also important to understand that there is a ready-made audience for the messages of freedom, democracy and human rights in many Western societies. Take advantage of the reservoir of passion and good will for human rights in your particular countries. Create alliances with local human rights and civil liberties groups. Local activists and human rights advocates can help you advance your cause much further than you possibly can on your own. You can multiply the resources available to you by using the support of other human rights and civil liberties organizations. Make every effort to participate in human rights rallies, conferences, discussions, media events, etc. and every chance you get, give profile to your cause as part of a larger movement.

Lesson #3: To effectively advocate for freedom, human rights and democracy in Ethiopia, you must expand your support and advocacy base to include members of the majority society, and you must put Ethiopian youth at the helm.

It would be foolhardy to think that the cause of freedom, democracy and human rights can be advanced in the national legislatures and executive offices of European and other democracies by voicing concerns that echo Ethiopian ethnic politics, or through the singular efforts of Ethiopians alone. There are two principal lessons to be drawn from the H.R. 5680 experience in terms of effective advocacy efforts: First, it is important to engage members and leaders of the majority community. One instructive example in this regard is our experience in Illinois when we learned that the Speaker of the U.S. House of representatives had bottled up H.R. 5680 in the International Relations Committee. Within days of becoming aware of the situation, members of the Coalition for H.R. 5680 were able to mobilize key segments of Hastert's constituency who made hundreds of telephone calls to his congressional and district offices. We were able to get on various local radio stations and mobilize the support of local community, religious, academic and community leaders who raised their collective voices on our behalf. Hastert's office was stunned by the constituency phone call blitz as they admitted to us openly. But as fortune would have it, in the midst of our campaign, Hastert found himself in a sea of troubles from his role in allegedly protecting or overlooking the potentially criminal conduct of a pedophile member of Congress.

The credibility of your issue advocacy is magnified manyfold when you engage and enlist the support of members and leaders of the majority society, as well as your neighbors, coworkers, classmates and congregation members. Oftentimes, the same message delivered by a leading member of the majority society carries more weight than the same message delivered in partisan advocacy. As we have learned in H.R. 5680, clergymen, local public officials, local business and community leaders, academicians and others in similar positions are given special consideration when they raise an issue with legislators.

The need to involve youth in the struggle to promote freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia must be of the highest priority. At the helm of the Coalition for H.R. 5680 are young people who are passionate about helping their people in the homeland. Many are professionals in various fields. They are dedicated to the cause and give generously of their time. They are open-minded and focused on the issues. They don't get easily distracted by extraneous issues. They don't bring baggage that holds back the advocacy effort. They are articulate and eager to develop their grassroots advocacy skills. They have a good understanding of the legislative and grassroots advocacy processes. Those in the older generation find youth involvement in H.R. 5680 the best hope of promoting freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. Keep your young men and women in the forefront of the campaign.

Lesson #4: You need to build an issue based coalition to push for an equivalent of an H.R. 5680.

One of the fundamental laws of politics is that numbers count. Politicians pay attention to a group or cause if they feel the group has the voting members, members who regularly or actively participate in the political process, understand the rules of the political "game" and know how to use their influence to mobilize local constituents. In pushing for an H.R. 5680-type of measure, it is important to build a coalition of existing civic, human rights and civil liberties organizations. The coalition should be open to any Ethiopian civic group or organization, and individuals who are committed to non-partisan advocacy. You should avoid giving the adversary any opportunity to claim that the human rights advocacy effort is sponsored by one or another of its opposing political parties.

There are several advantages to building a coalition with a narrowly defined purpose of promoting freedom, democracy and human rights. First, a narrowly issue-based organization can withstand any attack by the enemies of freedom and democracy. The lessons of H.R. 5680 show that the adversaries of H.R. 5680, including their lobbyists, have been unable to argue the merits of the bill itself. It is rather difficult to argue that Ethiopians do not deserve freedom, democracy and human rights. The enemies of democracy and human rights are at a double disadvantage because they can not defend their dismal human rights record documented in every major international human rights report. Rather, their strategy has been to try and divert the focus of the debate from human rights to such things as terrorism, regional instability and other geopolitical issues in the wider Middle Eastern region. Now they are spreading rumors of

war just to divert attention from their daily crimes. The Coalition for H.R. 5680 was able to anticipate early on such a “smoke and mirrors” strategy and took steps to take the wind out of these bogus arguments in the court of public opinion, and in the halls of the United States Congress.

Moreover, by being narrowly focused on these issues and building a coalition around the issues, you avoid problems internal to the Ethiopian community. The support base for H.R. 5680 shows that Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans from every ethnic group and social class and educational background have banded together for the single purposes of promoting freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. The Coalition for H.R. 5680 comprises of individuals, groups and organizations with diverse political orientations and ethnic affiliations who have joined forces together on the core political and human rights issues and challenges facing Ethiopia and Ethiopians today. This in itself may be one of the greatest lesson of H.R. 5680: The realization that Ethiopia’s problems arise not from ethnicity, language or region, but the absence of democracy, lack of human rights and accountability on the part of those who misgovern without the consent of the people; and that the best solutions can be found when Ethiopians work together to promote these values. The grassroots advocacy for H.R. 5680 was successful because the advocates, among other things, were able to build a coalition that transcended the divisive issues of ethnicity, region and language.

Lesson #5: Do not allow your adversary to define you or your message. Define yourself, your message and your adversary.

There are a few things you should expect from the adversary as soon as you begin any legislative efforts aimed at accountability. In phase one, you will most likely see representatives of Zenawi’s regime skulking and prowling about the parliamentary halls and executive offices purveying their usual litany: There is no need for accountability legislation because Ethiopia is a democracy. Ethiopia has free elections and the people are free to express themselves, Zenawi is part of a new breed of African leaders, blah, blah, blah....

In phase two, you should expect them to grovel: If aid is cut off, the people will starve, the economy will tank, the country will be plunged into chaos, and anarchy will take over. The opposition leaders are unreasonable and do not want a negotiated settlement. The sky will fall.... La-di-da...

In phase three, they will deploy their “blitzkrieg” strategy of ethnic character assassination: Any effort that aims to ensure accountability is surely the handiwork of malicious Amharas and Derg members who lost their privileged positions and/or disgruntled political operatives who were once members of their party. It is the rich fat cats in the West who use their money and influence in a conspiracy to destabilize the country and effect a coup from abroad and regain power. Zenawi is a true democrat and civil libertarian but his efforts are undermined by hardliners in his party. He should be given a chance to correct things. In their last act, they will manufacture a necessity to divert attention as they did with the terrorism issue in the U.S. Congress.

Don't fall for their diversionary tricks. Stay focused on your essential message: freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. In H.R. 5680, we were successful in correcting misperceptions among some members of Congress who had fallen for the diversionary disinformation; and as hard and time-consuming as the process of correcting the misinformation was, it was well worth the effort because once members learned the truth and were convinced that H.R. 5680 is about the issues of freedom, democracy and human rights, they were very willing to help out wholeheartedly, as the long roster of congressional co-sponsorship manifestly demonstrates. The critical lesson is to anticipate such a disinformation campaign by the enemies of freedom and human rights and proactively address your issues with your parliamentarians or lawmakers.

It is important to be factual when you define your message and the adversary. Let the human rights reports published by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, U.S. State Department, Genocide Watch and other international human rights organizations speak for you. Cite chapter and verse to reveal the true record of human rights violations of Zenawi's regime.

Keep in mind that most politicians in the advanced democracies are sophisticated and reasonably well-informed about general world and regional issues and events. They may not be very familiar with specific Ethiopian issues, but once you bring the issue to their attention, they have competent staff who can brief them and bring them up to speed.

The adversaries of freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia are clever and resourceful, but they are condemned by their own crimes and will never be able to successfully defend their record on human rights. Regardless of what Zenawi or his cronies say, do not depart from your core message: freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. You have nothing else to discuss!

Another major advantage of focusing on the core issues is related to lesson #2 above. The issues of freedom, democracy and human rights are universally recognized and widely appreciated particularly in democratic countries. Take advantage of the reservoir of passion for human rights in your countries to advance freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia.

Lesson #6: Learn how the legislative/executive policy making "game" is played in your particular country.

Every country has its own unique legislative process. There is no single prescription on the legislative or executive policy process that that applies to all countries. Unlike the United States where every member of Congress has the right to introduce legislation, individual parliamentarians in Europe and elsewhere may or may not have such a right. In some countries, individual parliamentarians are allowed to introduce only private bills, while public bills with wider policy implications such as foreign policy are left to government ministers. In other countries, white papers and green papers are drafted before legislation is even introduced.

As we have learned from our experiences in H.R. 5680, there is no substitute for a sound understanding of the national legislative process in each country. Our experience in H.R. 5680 has shown us that many supporters of the bill did not have a good understanding of the Congressional legislative process: how a bill is introduced in Congress, the sub-committee and committee hearing and mark-up process, calendaring and debate rules, requirements of bicameral action by the House and Senate and other critical aspects of the legislative process. Without a working knowledge of the legislative process in one's country, it is unlikely that an effective advocacy campaign can be implemented. It is important to get a complete understanding of the legislative process and practices in each country before beginning to push for accountability legislation.

One can learn a great deal from the recent successes of Armenian French in getting approval of a bill in the lower house of the French parliament that would criminalize denial of the Armenian genocide by the Turks at the turn of the last Century. The first lesson is that Armenians had a larger agenda to push their cause in any country that would provide them an opportunity to do so. They had the Armenia genocide bill (H.R. 390) pending in the U.S. House with commitment by the Speaker that he will take the bill to the floor before the October recess when they scored a major victory in the lower house of the French parliament which approved criminal sanctions for denial of the Armenian genocide. The second lesson is that the Armenian French worked with the opposition socialist party to get their bill passed much to the consternation of Chirac and his conservative allies. Is there any reason why the Armenian effort can not be duplicated for Ethiopia in France, Netherlands, Germany, Sweden....?

Lesson #7: Learn the techniques of grassroots advocacy, and teach it to others.

Our experience in H.R. 5680 showed us that many people interested in supporting the bill were not familiar with grassroots advocacy. They simply did not have opportunity to act by themselves or with other individuals to make demands on public officials at the Congressional level. Once supporters were engaged, they quickly learned that grassroots advocacy could be an effective method of getting heard by national policy makers, especially when one does not have \$600,000 to throw at powerful lobbyists in Washington. People learned that individual constituents could influence policy by communicating their ideas and opinions to legislators, without wining and dining public officials through highly paid lobbyists, or making large contributions. Grassroots advocates get heard by writing letters, making phone calls and in person visits to their representative's offices, and expressing their desires and demands.

As others contemplate the use of grassroots advocacy in legislative efforts, it is important to understand that grassroots programs or networks need not be huge enterprises. A core group of dedicated individuals in different geographical regions can work together and coordinate their efforts to advance the common cause. Such cooperative action provides the basis for a coalition where independent groups -- Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian -- can ally themselves to push for a common agenda. Grassroots coalitions have the potential to be far more powerful and more skilled than any single organization acting alone. When groups with different and often incompatible

agendas create coalition on a common purpose, they often prove to be very powerful. Their alliance sends a powerful signal to legislators and policymakers that they can have the combined impact of their constituents and voters. Try to work with grassroots groups and organizations with “unlike” agendas. You will be able to bring an irresistible synergy to your efforts, and you will be taken more seriously by lawmakers.

Grassroots advocacy requires certain skills in writing letters, email, phone calls and other communications. There are numerous resources online for those interested to learn about them.

Lesson #8: Understand the power of the media and use it to spread the word on the need for freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia.

It is important to understand that we advance the cause of freedom, democracy and human rights by telling the truth about repression and rampant violation of human rights in Ethiopia. At the same time, we must remain vigilant to expose the fraud, deception, misrepresentation, disinformation, misinformation and distortions of Zenawi and his regime. We don't have to lie or cheat like our adversary to win. We win by telling the truth and exposing the falsehoods of our adversary. Truth is our best weapon in the struggle to bring freedom, democracy and human rights to our homeland.

We found in H.R. 5680 that there are diverse media readily available to tell the truth about Zenawi and expose the lies and deceptions of his regime. We were able to expose Zenawi's false claims that he is a supporter of human rights. We publicized his dirty record of repression and brutality as documented in the various human rights reports. When he claimed he has an independent judiciary to administer justice, we exposed the fact that his judges were nothing more than EPDRF political hacks in robes. When Zenawi proclaimed to the world that he is the freely and duly elected representative of the people, we exposed him to be a shameless election thief. When he sought to avoid accountability under H.R. 5680 by raising the bogus issue of terrorism, we confronted him with the truth in the halls of Congress, even as he tried to hide in the ghastly shadows of Richard Armev. He sent out Dick Armev to fight the truth because he couldn't handle the truth himself. But we kept on strumming our song: Freedom, democracy, human rights for Ethiopia.

In the H.R. 5680, we found courageous web editors who were relentless and fearless in publishing the truth so that the people can make up their own minds. We found radio programs on the air and online, and talk show hosts who were determined to educate and increase public awareness among Ethiopians and Americans about the human rights situation in Ethiopia. We profoundly appreciate and thank these courageous individuals for their tireless efforts.

Our recent experiences in Speaker Hastert's congressional district may be instructive in the use of the media to promote freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. Through a network of human rights and civil liberties groups, organizations and leaders, we were able to access in a very short time vast local media resources. Radio

stations gave us up to 15 minutes during peak hours to help us deliver our messages to Hastert's constituency. We had access to university radio stations and public access channels to get our message out. We developed relationships with local reporters who were willing to write about our cause and inform Hastert's constituencies. It was a lesson in American democracy and the power of a free press.

The key lesson in the use of the media is that in many societies that have a free press is that such resources are available at little or no cost. These resources can be used to reach large numbers of the majority society and create public awareness, and generate support for the cause of freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia.

For those considering to advance an H.R. 5680-type of legislation elsewhere, it is important to have a solid media strategy from the beginning. You should identify articulate spokesmen who can give interviews and explain your efforts in a persuasive way. You should develop media kits (press packs) with basic information about your efforts, create good relationships with members of the media outlets, identify local celebrities and win them to the cause, organize local press conferences, contact radio and television stations and ask to be interviewed, send out press releases and organize events and invite the media. Be creative in the way you use the media. Once you create awareness and educate the local population, it is much easier to ask members of the majority society to help you in your grassroots efforts.

Lesson #9: Don't expect results overnight. The legislative process in democracies takes time, and expect delays and complications along the way.

One of the frequent questions we are asked by people in campaigning for H.R. 5680 is: "Why does it take such a long time to pass a law that seeks to promote freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia? It is not fair." It is important to appreciate that the making of laws is a political process. There are defined processes for studying and reporting on legislation, rules governing consideration and deliberation of a bill, internal and external forces attempting to shape the legislation and lobbyists working in the background to defeat or promote a bill. In H.R. 5680, those who were just being initiated to the ways of the Congressional legislative process, the whole thing may have appeared sound unnecessarily protracted and a waste of time. But that is the nature of the beast.

However, if we objectively look at our efforts in H.R. 5680, we have not done shabbily in getting Congressional action on H.R. 5680. We were able to get the legislation from draft to final committee action in less than 18 months. Compare this to the Armenian genocide bill (H.R. 390), which took nearly seven years, or the Korean bill which took as many years to get to final committee action stage. Any congressional old hand will tell you that we have done a stunning job in expediting H.R. 5680 for final floor action in the House. For the rest, see lesson #10.

Lesson #10: Never, never, never give up or give in. “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” Keep your eyes on the prize!

The most important lesson of all is never to keep our eyes on the prize: freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. In 1941, as the Nazi Luftwaffe rained bombs on London in the “Battle of Britain”, Churchill defiantly declared: “Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never -- in nothing, great or small, large or petty -- never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force. Never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

So, our Ethiopian brother and sisters, wherever you may be, Australia, Canada, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, Italy.... keep your eyes on the prize and “never yield to the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

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