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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

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March 13, 2007

Ms. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice,

We are writing to you to express our strong concern about the continued detention of elected parliamentarians, human rights advocates, and independent journalists in Ethiopia. It has been reported that thousands of prisoners languish in prison across the country and many prisoners have been tortured. Some of these prisoners are senior citizens and are sick. We encourage you to use all means available to ensure that the Ethiopian government is participating fully in active negotiations for the prisoners' release.

We understand that Ethiopian security forces continue to harass, detain, torture people they consider opposition sympathizers and advocates of human rights. A number of journalists and human rights advocates have fled the country, fearing persecution. While Ethiopia is clearly a key ally of the United States, we hope that the U.S. would play a stronger role in ensuring that domestic conditions in Ethiopia improve.

In May 2005, the government of Ethiopia organized and conducted what were considered as the most open and competitive elections since it took power in 1991. Despite apparent improvement in the electoral process, preliminary election results announced by the government shortly after the May 15, 2005, elections were disputed by the opposition, leading to a serious political crisis in the country and raising important questions about the government's handling of the results and the legitimacy of the overall electoral process.

In June and November of 2005, 193 demonstrators were killed, thousands were detained, and hundreds of civilians were wounded by security forces. Parliament established a 10-member Commission of Inquiry to, "investigate the disorder and report to the House of People's Representatives so as to take the necessary measure."

The Commission was tasked with investigating whether government security forces used excessive force, caused damage to life and property, or showed a lack of respect for

human rights. The Commission was mandated to investigate the June 8, 2005, and November 1-10, 2005, violence in different parts of the country. Commission members visited several regions, reviewed police reports, met with prisoners and government officials, made 122 Radio and TV announcements to the public, examined 16,990 documents, and took testimonies from 1,300 people.

The Commission concluded that 763 civilians were injured and 193 killed. The Commission also reported that 71 police officers were injured and 6 killed. Damage to property was estimated at \$512,588.00. The Commission also reported that more than 30,000 civilians were detained, some were tortured, and prisoners in Kaliti were killed. According to the Commission, security forces fired 1,500 bullets at prisoners, killing 17 and injuring 53 prisoners. The Commission concluded that government security forces used excessive force against civilians.

Shortly after the Commission reached its decision, the government reportedly began to put pressure on Commission members to change their report. The Chairman of the Commission, a former Supreme Court President of the Southern Region of Ethiopia, was told by a senior advisor of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to call for an emergency meeting of the Commission in order to change the Commission's report.

The Commission was scheduled to give its report to Parliament on July 7, 2006, but Parliament was adjourned a day early. Several Commission members, including the Chairman and the Deputy Chair, left the country with the final report, other documents relevant to the investigation, and several video tapes of the Commission's deliberations.

The people of Ethiopia have suffered for far too long. We are sensitive to the fact that often in situations like this, the innocent victims are forgotten. Late last year, at a congressional briefing with members of the Commission of Inquiry, a young woman named Alemzuria submitted her testimony about what happened to her mother. Alemzuria's father was elected in May 2005 as Council Member of the capital Addis Ababa. This is her account of the fate of her family:

“As we were seated for lunch, armed federal and security forces stormed our house. They started beating my father as they took him away. My mother walked behind them saying that he was a peaceful man, not deserving of this. She then took a hit with a club to the side of the chest, and as she turned away, she was shot in the same spot, and she fell. As she was struggling to get up, they shot her again. I ran towards her and they started to shoot at me. It is only by God's mercy that I escaped. As my own mother's eyes seemed to be pleading for help, while she was fighting for her life, I was forced to run for mine and hid in a house in the neighborhood. They shot at my brother as he was trying to lift her up.”

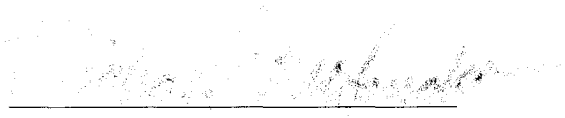
The Commission of Inquiry investigated the killing of Alemzuria's mother and confirmed beyond doubt what happened on that dreadful day. The security personnel who killed her mother are still serving in the Ethiopian security forces. Alemzuria's father still languishes in prison and as for Alemzuria, she is a refugee somewhere in Africa.

We were encouraged to hear in recent weeks that negotiations were underway to secure the release of the prisoners and to work toward reconciliation. We are hopeful something will materialize out of this effort for Ethiopia - its people desperately need peace and reconciliation. We support any

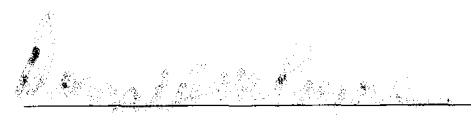
effort that is focused on the true reconciliation, and the release of political prisoners without conditions for the sake of peace and stability in Ethiopia.

We strongly urge you to insist the government of Ethiopia to unconditionally release these political prisoners, end arbitrary arrests, hold those security personnel who killed innocent civilians accountable, and institute reform so that history will not be repeated. The differences between the government and the prisoners currently on trial at Kaliti is best resolved through negotiations, perhaps with the committed involvement of a third party aimed at ensuring respect for their human rights and allowing for redress in a manner that is respectful of the concerns of both groups.

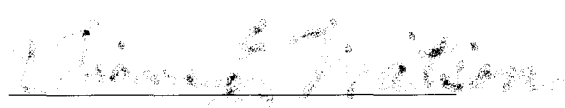
Thank you for your attention and efforts.



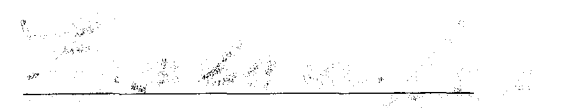
Michael M. Honda
MEMBER OF CONGRESS
Chair, Ethiopian American Caucus



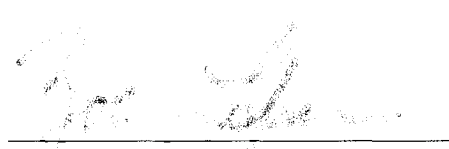
Donald M. Payne
MEMBER OF CONGRESS



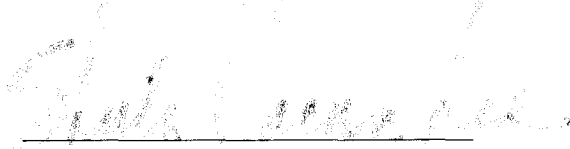
Diane E. Watson
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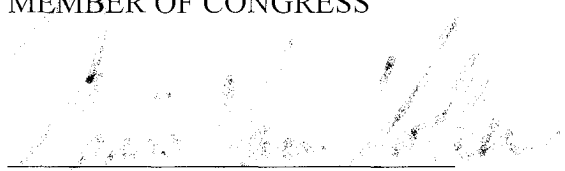
Barbara Lee
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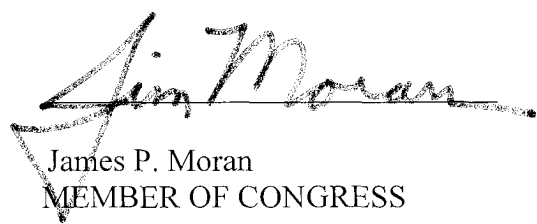
Zoe Lofgren
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