

## **EDF Commends Congressman Christopher Smith and the U.S. House Foreign Relations Committee for Advancing Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Ethiopia**

Ethiopian Americans, Ethiopians at home and in the Diaspora as well as people of good will across the globe commend Congressman Christopher Smith for spearheading a Resolution on Ethiopian Human Rights. On July 27, 2017, the Ethiopian Dialogue Forum (EDF), a non-governmental think tank registered in the United States, was delighted to learn that “The full House Foreign Affairs Committee voted to advance a resolution, authored by Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ), highlighting the human rights violations of the Ethiopian government, and offering a blueprint to create a government better designed to serve the interests of the Ethiopian people.”

We welcome and commend this encouraging development. We urge all Congresswomen and men, the U. S. Senate and the government of the United States to support H.R. 128 so that it become law. EDF wishes to record its appreciation to a network of human rights advocates that have shown consistency in calling on the global community to advance democratization and to desist from providing legitimacy to one of the most brutal regimes in the world. For more than a quarter of a century now, Human Rights Organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) etc., the U.S. Department of State, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as Ethiopian civic and human rights groups and activists have been engaged in providing a plethora of evidence concerning gross human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, arrests, tortures and other forms of cruel and inhumane punishment in Ethiopia; and in urging the donor and diplomatic community to do the right thing in Ethiopia.

EDF’s leadership appreciates and recognizes the extraordinary efforts of Congressman Christopher Smith and his colleagues; as well as members of the U. S. Senate who have been proactive in advancing the cause of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Ethiopia. The most recent “ Resolution, which passed without objection, also calls on the U.S. government to implement Magnitsky Act sanctions, targeting the individuals within the Ethiopian government who are the cause of the horrific abuses.” The draft resolution quotes the U.S. State Department’s latest human rights report on Ethiopia that notes rightly and appropriately that “The most significant human rights problems were security forces’ use of excessive force and arbitrary arrest in response to the protests, politically motivated prosecutions, and continued restrictions on activities of civil society and NGOs.” More than 1,000 lives were lost in the Oromia and Amhara regions alone.

EDF is gratified by Congressman Smith’s statement that “H. Res. 128, is like a mirror held up to the Government of Ethiopia on how others see them, and it is intended to encourage them to move on the reforms they agree they need to enact.. For the past 12 years, my staff and I have visited Ethiopia, spoken with Ethiopian officials, talked to a wide variety of members of the Ethiopia Diaspora and discussed the situation in Ethiopia with advocates and victims of government human rights violations. Our efforts are not a response merely to government critics, but rather a realistic assessment of the urgent need to end very damaging and in some cases inexcusable actions by the government or those who act as their agents.”

**The draft resolution H. Res. 128 entitled “Supporting respect for human rights and encouraging inclusive governance in Ethiopia”** comes at a most critical time in the history of an ancient nation with a promising future for all its people. Among other things, H.R. 128 “condemns the human rights abuses of Ethiopia and calls on the Ethiopian government to:

1. Lift the state of emergency;
2. End the use of excessive force by security forces;
3. Investigate the killings and excessive use of force that took place as a result of protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions;
4. Release dissidents, activists, and journalists who have been imprisoned for exercising constitutional rights;
5. Respect the right to peaceful assembly and guarantee freedom of the press;
6. Engage in open consultations with citizens regarding its development strategy;
7. Allow a United Nations rapporteur to conduct an independent examination of the state of human rights in Ethiopia;
8. Address the grievances brought forward by representatives of registered opposition parties;
9. Hold accountable those responsible for killing, torturing and detaining innocent civilians who exercised their constitutional rights; and
10. Investigate and report on the circumstances surrounding the September 3, 2016, shootings and fire at Qilinto Prison, the deaths of persons in attendance at the annual Irreecha festivities at Lake Hora near Bishoftu on October 2, 2016, and the ongoing killings of civilians over several years in the Somali Regional State by police.”

While EDF regrets that H.R. 128 “does not call for sanctions on the Government of Ethiopia,” we appreciate the fact that it “calls for the use of existing mechanisms to sanction individuals who torture or otherwise deny their countrymen their human and civil rights.” We hope that similar measures will be undertaken by Parliamentary bodies in the European Community, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and other Western democracies.

Finally, EDF calls on Ethiopian activists, the media, civil society and others to conduct a coordinated and sustained campaign at the local, state, regional and country level in support of the passage into law of H.R. 128.

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