

Washington Update  
November 29, 2018

1. House resolution 128 passed this year. The resolution identifies a long list of crimes committed by the Ethiopian government against the Ethiopian people, notes that it has held sham elections, and has stifled dissent and free speech by outlawing non-governmental organizations and blocking Internet access. Importantly, the resolution states that the Ethiopian government's cooperation with the U.S. in battling terrorism does not justify its abuses.

The resolution seeks to put teeth into its calls for the Ethiopian government to adhere to basic standards of decency. It calls on the Secretary of State to conduct a review of security assistance to Ethiopia in light of recent developments and to improve transparency with respect to the purposes of such assistance to the people of Ethiopia. It also calls on the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development to immediately lead efforts to develop a comprehensive strategy to support improved democracy and governance in Ethiopia. It seeks to have the U.S. government apply appropriate sanctions on foreign persons or entities responsible for extrajudicial killings, torture, or other gross violations of internationally recognized human rights committed against any nationals in Ethiopia.

To keep the legislation moving forward, Ethiopian Americans should contact members of the Senate, especially the Senate Majority leader to encourage leadership to schedule a vote as soon as possible on Senate Resolution 168, a resolution supporting respect for human rights and encouraging inclusive governance in Ethiopia

2. Crackdown on corruption in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian people have suffered from massive corruption because one group, dominated by Tigrayans, has held power for 27 years. Lack of democracy, accountability and rule of law has created a culture of impunity in which government officials have engaged in embezzlement, corruption and human rights violations. These have included the killing and jailing of journalists.

One of the most obvious examples of corruption involves the state owned Metal & Engineering Corporation (MetEC). Created in 2010 as a military industrial enterprise, MetEC includes about 70 state-owned enterprises in the engineering sector, as well as seven military hardware manufacturing entities.

It employs 12,500 employees. Largely run by senior military officers, including, its CEO Brigadier General Kinfe Dagne, MetEC has obtained lucrative government contracts. Its government-funded mega projects include fertilizer manufacturing plants, the assembly of various trucks and locomotives for light rail, and hydraulic dams. In the process, it subcontracts huge projects to other enterprises. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's government has arrested Kinfe Dagne. This action is correct and strenuous efforts to stamp out corruption should be continued.

In addition to Kinfe Dagne, Ethiopian police in Addis Ababa recently announced the arrests of over 400 people on corruption and human rights violations.

We have discussed the problems of corruption in Ethiopia for a long time and it is time to eradicate this contagious disease.

3. In preparation for free and fair election in Ethiopia we welcome the Ethiopian parliament's approval of Birtukan Mideksa, a former judge and opposition party leader, as the new chairperson to lead the National Electoral Board of Ethiopia. In a recent Parliament meeting, Prime Minister Abiy said that "conducting a democratic election comes first, then winning comes next. Free and fair elections are the cornerstone for a democratic system. The people of Ethiopia must stand firm so that the next election will not be rigged."

4. According to a U.S. Department of State press release, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of African Affairs Tibor P. Nagy will travel to Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya, and Germany from November 27 to December 8, 2018. During his trip, Assistant Secretary Nagy will focus on promoting stronger trade and commercial ties between the United States and Africa, harnessing the potential of Africa's youth, advancing peace and security through partnerships, and underscoring the United States' enduring commitment to the people and nations of Africa.

In all stops, Assistant Secretary Nagy will conduct bilateral meetings with government officials. In addition, in Addis Ababa, he will participate in the United States - African Union High-Level Dialogue and in Djibouti, he will meet with the Executive Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Throughout his visit, the Assistant Secretary will also engage with business leaders and alumni of the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI). The final stop on the trip will be Stuttgart, Germany, where

Assistant Secretary Nagy will have meetings with the United States Africa Command.

5. Tadias.com reports: "Day's after the two leaders of two of the most powerful institutions in the country were charged Abiy's cabinet approved draft legislation on the establishment of a National peace and Reconciliation Commission with the objective of healing the deep social wounds left by years of repressions under previous Ethiopian government."

We welcome the draft legislation on the establishment of a National peace and Reconciliation Commission.

Eskinder Nega, journalist, human rights and democracy activist, and Mesfin Mekonen, initiated and delivered to Prime Minister Abiy during his recent visit to the United States a declaration calling for Ethiopia to move forward with a truth and reconciliation project animated by the spirit that propelled change in South Africa.

The goals are clear: peace, justice, respect for human rights, democracy, and prosperity. Achieving these basic goals will require a process of truth telling, particularly about human rights abuses, achieved through testimony from both victims and perpetrators, coupled to a pledge of reconciliation. The declaration was signed by prominent Ethiopians. Its recommendations must be implemented to avoid ethnic cleansing and other human rights abuses in Ethiopia.

We are encouraged that the Ethiopian government took this issue seriously and is ready to implement this project.

6. The Addis Standard reported on November 23 that Ethiopia is preparing new bill to curb hate speech.

"The Office of Attorney General is preparing a draft bill aiming to curb hate speech and bring accountability towards public speeches and every other discourse, which is deemed to ignite hate and ethnic tensions in the country.

"The rise of irresponsible social media activism and fake news in recent times is being blamed as the catalyst especially for ethnic related violence in various parts of the country.

'There are growing concerns about hate speeches and uncensored activism in the country. The need to have a legal ground in bringing upon accountability towards these is not to be left for time,' Zinabu Tunu, communications head at the office of the Attorney General told *Addis Standard*.

"As part of the single-page plan [100 days], the ministry is drafting the bill with a 'no time spirit'," Zinabu says, pointing on activities that accelerate conflicts on the basis of race, nationality and the public good to be priority circles considered in the upcoming bill, which is expected to be finalized soon as part of the ambitious 100 days plan. It is not to leave out posts and speeches on the social media, which ignite conflict and hate speeches through popular individuals, according to Zinabu.

"Narratives seem to change on the social media. This, however, will be tested as the government cannot jail ideas, but people,' Seyoum Teshome , a social media savvy activist and lecturer of Business Management at Ambo University, told *Addis Standard*.

"Censoring posts on social media and bringing accountability will hardly be successful, and it is yet another law to restrict the freedom of speech and right to criticize Abiy's administration," Seyoum, who claimed to receive over 200 intimidating messages within an hour after his social media post requesting the release of rights lawyers Mikael Melak and Henock Aklilu who were arrested in Addis Abeba a few weeks ago.

7. Last Sunday at a gathering at the Debre Genet Medhane Alem Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church in Temple Hill, Maryland, \$70,000 was donated for Lake Tana restoration in partnership with Global Coalition for Lake Tana Restoration. In addition, \$20,000 was donated for assistance for burned Ethiopia orthodox churches in Jiggiga. These kinds of noble causes must be supported by all peace loving Ethiopians.

Mesfin Mekonen