

November 19, 2005

The Honorable Secretary of State
US Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Rice:

We are a non-profit organization in Minnesota, set up, among others: (1) to expose human rights violations against the Oromo people, and (2) to influence the United States' policy towards Ethiopia. In this endeavor, we believe, we represent the aspiration of more than 15 thousand Oromos in the Twin Cities area in Minnesota, and more than 50 thousand living in different cities of the U.S.

We are writing you regarding the crisis that is unfolding in Ethiopia, a crisis that has already claimed more than 100 innocent lives. As we write this, thousands of Oromo students are languishing in prisons throughout Oromia. Because Oromia is basically rural this is not adequately reported in the international media.

The recent massacre in the Ethiopian capital is only symptomatic of a much bigger political problem. Even though the past May election in Ethiopia was hailed as a step forward in many corners, when it comes to the Oromos, who constitute not less than 40 per cent of population, it was a sham election. Because the Oromo people did not have real choices in this election, it did not mean much to them. Election without a real choice is not an election. As long as they are disenfranchised and marginalized, the Oromos will naturally try to change this state of affair through different mechanisms. And this will inevitably lead to instability if the government tries to stop them from exercising their God given right. The current government is ruling over the Oromos against their consent. Our major worry at this time is, unless this is resolved, and resolved to the satisfaction of all the major contending forces, the crisis could spin out of control and lead to a full-blown civil war, which could destabilize the whole of Horn of Africa. This should be stopped from occurring.

The continuation of human rights violation in Ethiopia had been partly possible because the international community had chosen to turn a blind eye to what is happening in Ethiopia. This problem was exacerbated since Ethiopia jumped on the bandwagon of anti-terrorism. It is our firm belief that Ethiopia supported the anti-terrorism coalition, precisely to get a soft treatment from other coalition forces regarding her human rights violation issues. We believe human rights issues should not be traded off for the fake support one gives to anti-terrorism forces.

The international community should in an unequivocal manner tell the Ethiopian government that it should stop the killings and hold free and fair elections. Because the May election had not been free and fair, rather than leading to stability and creating legitimacy for the government, it had created chaos and had even further alienated the

government from the population. The acute problems that the May election brought to open could only be cured by invalidating the result of that election and by calling another one in the near future where all major organizations could participate under neutral arbiter and the watchful eyes of the international observers. Given the circumstances, we believe, at this moment, it is only the concerted effort and pressure from the international community under the leadership of the United States that could lead to that eventuality. The utmost pressure should be exerted on the Ethiopian government to enter into a dialogue with all the major political and civic organizations to avert the impending crisis by holding another election.

We understand the price for every hour of delay. We are reminded of how the international community's inaction in Rwandan crisis led to all the mayhem and genocide. We are humbly suggesting for your prompt engagement to avert further crisis in Ethiopia. We believe the involvement of the United States would hasten the advent of peace. To that effect we offer our partnership. When the current Ethiopian government came to power in 1991 under the auspices of the United States' government, the US government promised that any support would be contingent upon democratization. We hope that promise will be honored.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Oromo-American Citizens Council (OACC)
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CC: Senator Richard Lugar
Senator Norm Coleman
Congressman Chris Smith
Congresswoman Betty McCollum

<http://www.oromoamerican.org/news.htm>