



Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front Support Forum
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The Honorable Senator Russell Feingold
Washington, DC
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-4904

Dear Senator,

We appreciate your concerns on the challenges facing Ethiopia and the region as a whole. However, a well-balanced U.S. policy needs to be based on factual on ground information and not on propaganda by few who are determined to destabilize the region as a whole. US policy on the region should also not be based on information from partisan groups who have access to the US lawmakers.

Senator, as you have said yourself, Ethiopia sits in the roughest neighborhood in the world bordering a failed state of Somalia that was on the verge of becoming a terrorist safe haven until the timely intervention by Ethiopia. The other is the Eritrean regime which conducts a proxy war on all its neighbors and currently under consideration to be listed as a terrorist sponsoring state. Only Ethiopia where close to eighty million Christians, Muslims and Jewish population have lived together peacefully for millennia remains wise and vigilant to protect its people and take the lead in stabilizing the region.

Senator, we strongly believe the misinformation you have received is from groups with two motives that are working so hard to see US-Ethiopian relation deteriorate, and have all their sympathizers lobbying hard right here in Washington DC.

The first group attempts and works on the takeover of the Horn of Africa region by Extreme Jihadists, it is a group that believes the US-Ethiopian relation is a threat to its agenda. The second is a conglomeration of armed groups based in Eritrea that includes splinter Ethiopian opposition groups who have abandoned the peaceful democratic political discourse and have joined the Eritrean based armed groups. Though the motives of these groups differ from each other, their misinformation campaign efforts are coordinated and systematic. The vast majority of Ethiopians and the silent majority Diaspora Ethiopian-Americans dread both groups for their alliance and shortsighted vision for Ethiopia and the region.

Senator, we do not claim the Ethiopian government has done everything right, but despite all the negative and concerted pains and challenges, Ethiopia believes democratization is a necessity and not an option. Moreover, the fact remains that Ethiopia is going forward with its economic development agenda, its successful poverty reduction policies and appreciates the US support. Ethiopia has taken major steps forward to improve human rights and speed the establishment of democratic institutions to strengthen the political system.

Contrary to the misinformation you have received, here are some facts:

- The Ethiopian government does not portray political dissent as a “terrorist uprising”. Yes, government has called those who resort to violence and attempt to incite ethnic violence and those who burned Mosques and Churches to foment religious violence as extremists.
- Ethiopia has released and pardoned all those detained during the 2005 election. Emphasis here is on all, including those who claimed they were on peaceful protest but burned and looted public and private properties.
- Ethiopia has already reformed parliamentary rules and procedures to give opposition parties greater legislative responsibility and approved a new media law that meets international standards.



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- Contrary to assertions that Ethiopia is a source of instability in the region, Ethiopia is nothing but a source of stability. Such suggestions will only embolden rouge governments such as Libya, Eritrea and the global anti-secular Jihadist movements that finance armed groups in the region. In this regard, it is sufficient to see the 2006 UN Security Council Report that announced that Libya, Eritrea, Iran etc. as some of the financers of the radical Islamist insurgency attacking Somalia and Ethiopian military in Mogadishu via Eritrea. Moreover, now Libya and Eritrea have turned around to claim to be peacemakers in Somalia, Sudan and Chad although they are the culprits to all the terrorist actions in the Horn of Africa. In fact, Ethiopia's efforts in peace keeping from Darfur to Liberia are undermined. In spite of this, Ethiopia is being penalized by false allegations as a source of instability when the reality demonstrates otherwise.
- US Policy on Ethiopia should by no means be construed as support "for one man" and his party, but a support for millions of Ethiopians who support the current government and happen to advocate for EPRDF's policy.
- While it is true that the Ogaden region has been neglected for a long time, it has come a long way in the last 15 years. The region only needs peace to develop. The situation in the region, however, should not be viewed as just a small rebel group that is standing up for the Ogadeni people. The vast majority of Ogadeni's and Ethiopians at large view the group as a threat to stability. The Ogaden movement that has started with vision of "Greater Somalia" with a plan to annex Eastern Ethiopia and parts of Kenya has now become an instrument for the anti-secular government groups surrounding Ethiopia.
- Just like the Iraq war, all wars appear to be worthless. As you may well know, Ethiopia went to war in Somalia because of a public declaration of "fattwa" against Ethiopia by the Islamic Court Union. There was also a video decree issued by Al-Qaida. While that threat was averted, Ethiopia is the sole peace keeping force while still waiting for the African union peacekeepers to replace it.

Finally, we urge you to see the coordinated campaign of Islamic fundamentalists, Ogaden rebels, Eritrea, and other Ethiopian armed opposition groups who now share a common objective and a common enemy. Their goal is nothing but to see the breakup of Ethiopia. Punishing Ethiopia fails to address the issue and will not end the threat to the region. Punishing Ethiopia also fails to recognize the considerable progress achieved, the growing democratic political space established, and the outstanding competitive economic development thus far attained.

It is therefore imperative for the congress to lift the language of sanctions imposed on Ethiopia on the recently passed FY 2008 Foreign Affairs Appropriation. We also urge you to oppose the pending H.R. 2003 legislation in your office.

With this letter, we kindly request access to your staff for further details, exchanges, and questions that may arise.¹

Sincerely,

EPRDF-SF Board members

¹EPRDF-SF is a private non-profit 503c membership organization of Ethiopian-Americans and Ethiopian-Canadians with regional chapters in US and Canada.