

Washington Update - June 12, 2017 - From Friends of Congressman Chris Smith

Representative Christopher Smith (R-NJ) has done more for Ethiopia, and taken a greater interest in Ethiopian human rights and democracy, than any American politician. He has traveled to Ethiopia several times to confront dictators, sponsored legislation that committed the United States to support democracy and civil society in Ethiopia, and held numerous hearings and press conferences about Ethiopia. In 2014 Rep. Smith helped get language included in the federal budget that prohibited the U.S. government from providing foreign aid to Ethiopia that supported the violation of human rights.

Some highlights of Rep. Smith's engagement with Ethiopia follow.

In 2005 Smith, who was Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations, called on Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to call off security forces, who had killed scores of peaceful protesters, wounded at least 100 others and jailed more than 400 Ethiopians protesting the results of the recent elections. "President Bush must take all necessary steps to persuade the Ethiopian government to immediately halt the state-sponsored violence in Ethiopia, which it has declared to be a strategic country for America's Africa policy," Chairman Smith said.

In August 2005, Smith traveled to Ethiopia and demanded a halt to the killing and imprisonment of innocent Ethiopians. "When I visited Ethiopia on a fact finding trip, then-Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was nonchalant about the shootings of peaceful demonstrators, arrests of innocents," Smith said. "The head of the main opposition party was refused medicine, threatening his life," said Smith. "I have remained in contact with the Ethiopian government in an effort to convince them to moderate their behavior toward their citizens," Smith continued. "Unfortunately this moderation has not taken place—if anything, the actions of the government of Ethiopia have intensified in its effort to shut down political opposition and critics in civil society." **"Ethiopia is an American ally, and its stability is in our national interest,"** said Chairman Smith. **"The war with Eritrea was ended in part on the promise to resolve the border dispute, and failure to respect the decision of the boundary commission could lead to renewed fighting. I also plan to discuss electoral issues – particularly growing frustration from voting rights violations that have the potential to cause wider social problems beyond the protests we've seen thus far."**

October 3, 2007 The U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 2003 (Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007) on a unanimous vote. Congressmen Chris Smith and Donald Payne delivered an impassioned speech on the floor of the House urging members pass the bill. They outlined the long train of human rights abuses that have taken place in Ethiopia over the many years. They said the people of Ethiopia deserve democracy and human rights and a government of their choice.

In February 2017, Smith held a press conference to introduce human rights legislation. He was joined by victims of torture at the hands of the Ethiopian

government, and denounced the actions of the oppressive government of President Mulatu Teshome. “For too long the government of Ethiopia has used violence, including the shooting of peaceful protestors, to snuff out any opposition,” said Smith, Chairman of the House Panel on Africa. “Simple conversations with the Ethiopian Government have proven to not be enough—the actions of the government have intensified rather than moderated.”

The legislation can be viewed

at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hres128/text>.

To keep the legislation moving forward, Ethiopian Americans should contact members of Congress who co-sponsored H.R. 128, as well as other

members of Congress. It is important to stress that this is a bipartisan effort. When you speak with members of Congress emphasize that the situation in Ethiopia is desperate, that political prisoners are being held under terrible conditions, and this is an opportunity for the United States to stand up for the values that American believe in.

Legislation Smith has introduced over the years includes:

In 2005 Smith introduced the Ethiopia Consolidation Act of 2005. It directed the President: (1) through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to revise the USAID country plan for Ethiopia to provide support for independent human rights monitoring and related training for government officials, and to provide support for training political parties on organization building, message development, and election monitoring; (2) through the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program of the Department of Justice, to provide training for Ethiopian police, security, and prison personnel in maintaining international standards for arrest and interrogation; (3) through USAID, to support programs to increase the independence and competence of the Ethiopian judicial system, and to provide assistance for development of Ethiopia's Nile and Awash River resources, including assistance to help Ethiopia with technology for the construction of dams, irrigation systems, and hydroelectric power that might prevent future famine; (4) provide financing for U.S.-Ethiopian commercial ventures; and (5) suspend joint security activities until a certification is made that Ethiopia is observing international human rights standards and enforcing the principle of the rule of law.

In 2006, Smith introduced the Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights Advancement Act of 2006. The bill stated that is U.S. policy to: (1) support human rights, democracy, independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, peacekeeping capacity building, and economic development in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia; (2) collaborate with Ethiopia in the Global War on Terror; (3) seek the release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Ethiopia; (4) foster stability, democracy, and economic development in the region; and (5) strengthen U.S.-Ethiopian relations. It directed the Secretary of State to take specified actions to support human rights and democratization in Ethiopia. It directed the President to provide assistance for the rehabilitation of Ethiopian torture victims, and to provide Ethiopia with economic policy assistance; financing for U.S.-Ethiopian commercial ventures; and resource policy assistance.

In 2007, Smith introduced the Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights Advancement Act of 2007, which was similar to the bill he had introduced in 2006.

In 2007 Smith also introduced the Global Online Freedom Act of 2007 which promoted Internet freedom and had specific provisions related to Ethiopia.

In February 2017, Smith introduced H.Res. 128: Supporting respect for human rights and encouraging inclusive governance in Ethiopia. The resolution condemns: (1) the killing of peaceful protesters and excessive use of force by Ethiopian security forces; (2) the detention of journalists, students, activists and political leaders who exercise their constitutional rights to freedom of assembly and expression through peaceful protests; and (3) the abuse of the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation to stifle political and civil dissent and journalistic freedoms. Calls on the government of Ethiopia to: lift the state of emergency; end the use of excessive force by security forces; investigate the killings and excessive use of force that took place as a result of protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions; release dissidents, activists, and journalists who have been imprisoned for exercising constitutional rights; respect the right to peaceful assembly and guarantee freedom of the press; engage in open consultations with citizens regarding its development strategy; allow a United Nations rapporteur to conduct an independent examination of the state of human rights in Ethiopia; address the grievances brought forward by representatives of registered opposition parties; hold accountable those responsible for killing, torturing, and detaining innocent civilians who exercised their constitutional rights; and 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. Calls on such government to repeal proclamations that can be used to harass or prohibit funding for organizations that investigate human rights violations, engage in peaceful political dissent, or advocate for greater political freedoms; prohibit those displaced from their land from seeking judicial redress; permit the detention of peaceful protesters and political opponents who legally exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association; and limit peaceful nonprofit operations in Ethiopia. Calls on: (1) the Department of State to review security assistance and improve oversight of U.S. assistance to Ethiopia; (2) the U.S. Agency for International Development to lead efforts to develop a strategy to support improved democracy and governance in Ethiopia; and (3) the State Department, in cooperation with the Department of the Treasury, to 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. It also supports the peaceful efforts of the Ethiopian people to exercise their constitutional rights.

There will be a fund raising event for Congressman Smith re-election campaign by Ethioians/ Ethiopian Amercans and Friends of Chris Smith
We will announce the time, date and place for the event soon.

Mesfin Mekonen