

Washington update
February 17, 2017
Mesfin Mekonen

Representatives Chris Smith (R-N.J.) has introduced a resolution that puts the U.S. Congress on record as condemning the Ethiopian government's abuses of human rights and democracy. House resolution 128, Supporting respect for human rights and encouraging inclusive governance in Ethiopia, can be viewed at <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/115/hres/128/text>.

Anyone who cares about human rights, democracy and freedom in Ethiopia should contact their congressional representative and demand that they support House resolution 128.

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.

The resolution includes a list of demands that the Ethiopian government must meet. These include:

lift the state of emergency;

end the use of excessive force by security forces;

conduct a full, credible, and transparent investigation into the killings and instances of excessive use of force that took place as a result of protests in the Oromia and Amhara regions and hold security forces accountable for wrongdoing through public proceedings;

release dissidents, activists, and journalists who have been imprisoned, including those arrested for reporting about the protests, for exercising constitutional rights;

respect the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and guarantee the freedom of the press and mass media, in keeping with Articles 30 and 29 of the Ethiopian constitution;

engage in open and transparent consultations with citizens regarding its development strategy, especially those strategies that could result in the displacement of people from their land;

allow a rapporteur appointed by the United Nations 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;

repeal proclamations that can be used as a political tool to harass or prohibit funding for civil society organizations that investigate human rights violations, engage in peaceful political dissent, or advocate for greater political freedoms; prohibit or otherwise limit those displaced from their land from seeking remedy or redress in courts, or do not provide a transparent, accessible means to access justice for those so displaced; allow for the arrest and detention of peaceful protesters and political opponents who legally exercise their rights to freedom of expression and association; and prohibit or otherwise limit peaceful nonprofit operations in Ethiopia;

and investigate 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 federal and regional police, and publically release a report on such investigations in an expedient manner;