

Washington update - January 25, 2018 - Woldiya Massacre Ethiopia:

The recent massacre of peaceful demonstrators in Woldiya, Ethiopia by Ethiopian regime security forces is a tragic reminder of the need for the United States and the international community to continue to pressure the Ethiopian government to respect human rights. Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, denounced the killings at a recent press briefing.

"We are extremely concerned by the use of force by security officials against worshippers celebrating the Ethiopian Orthodox festival of Epiphany this weekend that left at least seven people dead and a number injured," Shamdasani said. "The incident, in Woldiya City in Amhara Regional State on 20 January, reportedly took place when the security forces tried to stop people from chanting anti-government songs and allegedly opened fire on them. Protesters reportedly later blocked roads and destroyed a number of properties."

Shamdasani added that the UN is calling on Ethiopia "to undertake the necessary legal and policy reforms, along with guidance and training, to create the conditions for law enforcement officials to operate in line with international standards."

The senseless killings are especially disappointing because they came after the Ethiopian regime took the welcome step of releasing political prisoners, including Dr. Merera Gudina. They raise questions about whether real change is being implemented, or if the releases were a one-time effort to dissuade the U.S. from attempting to punish the regime for its transgressions. The U.S. government sent Acting Assistant Secretary of State Donald Yamamoto to visit Addis Ababa in December. He met with senior leaders of the Ethiopian government and of the African Union. In addition to continuing discussions on bilateral issues, he talked with both the Ethiopian government and AU officials about regional concerns, including food security, peacekeeping and refugee matters.

The killings in Woldiya also highlight the importance of the U.S. Congress enacting House Resolution 128, Supporting respect for human rights and encouraging inclusive governance in Ethiopia. A House vote on HR 128 has been delayed by recent political turmoil in Washington.

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