

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

August 21, 2020

The Honorable Michael Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. State Department
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

We write to convey our serious concerns about the recent unrest in Ethiopia. Reports of security force abuses, ethnic and religious violence, and the departure from democratic norms are alarming and have led to a more dangerous and unstable environment. We urge you to engage with the Ethiopian government and all other stakeholders to prevent violence and protect civilians, to promote stability and better dialogue, and to support continued progress toward strengthening democratic institutions.

The killing of popular Oromo singer and Ethiopian activist Hacaaluu Hundeessaa on June 29th precipitated the current crisis, and the violence that followed underscores underlying and dangerous ethnic, religious, and socio-political tensions that could derail Ethiopia's democratic transition. The arrest of several prominent opposition leaders has raised concerns of politically motivated prosecutions and backsliding on the government's stated commitment to freedom of speech. While Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed advanced a vision of national unity early in his term by releasing political prisoners, unbanning many political parties, and promising free and fair elections, it is clear that there is still much to be done to accomplish the reform agenda he promoted when he took office.

Ethiopia has experienced a regression in democratic principles in recent months, including limitations on free speech, arrests of journalists and opposition officials, and restrictions on internet freedoms. These actions have been documented in the news and by human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Crisis Group. Importantly, concerns of democratic backsliding were outlined months before the June 29, 2020 murder of Hacaaluu Hundeessaa, suggesting that Ethiopia has been facing challenges in upholding democratic principles for some time.

The graphic reports of violence targeting ethnic and religious communities are extremely concerning, as are reports of excessive force by Ethiopian security forces against protestors. Elections, which are constitutionally required to take place this year, have been delayed indefinitely and freedom of expression is being increasingly stifled, after an opening of space for free speech was established in the first part of Abiy's tenure.

An unstable Ethiopia with violence, ethnic division, and politically motivated prosecutions will be a less reliable partner for the United States and will fail to project our democratic values. Ethiopia's current situation will create lasting and harmful instability if it is not addressed, undermining its future and U.S. interests.

Ethiopia's democratic opening and interest in partnering with the U.S. presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to support an enduring change. In light of recent events, we urge you to work with the Ethiopian government, as well as political opposition and local activists, to call for and advance respect for basic human rights and democratic principles in Ethiopia, including by encouraging the following:

- Dialogue with all political parties on a plan for rescheduling elections, and renewed efforts to ensure a free and fair pre-election environment;
- An open internet and full freedom of speech for citizens, opposition parties, and the press;
- A revision to the state of emergency measures to reflect international standards, to safeguard against abuse and ensure that they are time-bound and in force only as absolutely necessary;
- Respect for due process and a fair and fully transparent judicial process for all those arrested during the recent unrest;
- A transparent and independent examination of human rights abuses reported by leading international groups and the media;
- A denunciation of ethnic and religious violence across the country, including those who may have used the murder of Hacaaluu Hundeessaa as a pretext for targeting those from other communities;
- A transparent and independent investigation into the murder of Hacaaluu Hundeessaa.

Ethiopia is facing many challenges upholding the principles of democracy and human rights. It is imperative that the United States engages more constructively on these issues and calls for positive change. We respectfully request that you take steps to address this critical situation and report your progress to the Members of Congress listed below within 60 days.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Dean Phillips
Member of Congress



Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress



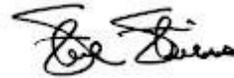
Karen Bass
Member of Congress



James P. McGovern
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
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Steve Stivers
Member of Congress



Tom Malinowski
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Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



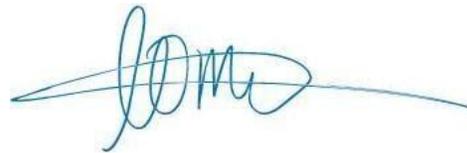
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