

Open Letter to US Secretary of State John Kerry

Shengo Press Release

April 22, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
US Department of State, Washington DC

Subject: Ms. Wendy Sherman's Wrongful and Harmful Statement on Ethiopia

Dear Mr. Secretary

The Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle (Shengo) joins millions of Ethiopians and independent human rights organizations such as Freedom House, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, International Rivers and others in expressing our disbelief and outrage concerning the untruthful, harmful and misinformed statements Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Department of State Wendy Sherman made while on official visit to Ethiopia on April 16, 2015.

As you know, the US Department of State has reported consistently over the past several years that human rights conditions in Ethiopia are replete with "arbitrary arrests, disappearances, torture and inhumane treatment of prisoners, deplorable prison conditions, suffocating political, social and religious space," human trafficking at a massive scale and other forms of human rights abuses. You witnessed the imprisonment of journalists and bloggers and had demanded that these prisoners be released.

Ms. Sherman's statement that "Ethiopia is a democracy that is moving forward in an election that we expect to be free, fair and credible and open and inclusive in ways that Ethiopia has moved forward in strengthening its democracy" is not shared by the vast majority of the Ethiopian people; and we do not believe that it is shared by the American people or the government of the United States. Despite the fact that opposition parties have been crushed and political space closed completely, her statement that "Every time there is an election it gets better and better" is groundless. It demeans the Ethiopian people and harms America's long-term interests not only in Ethiopia but also in the rest of Africa. Ethiopia's conditions are worse today than they were five years ago. Ms. Sherman's outrageous and fictitious statement is contradicted by the institution she represents that had reported on January 29, 2015 as follows: "In recent years, the Ethiopian government has taken steps to restrict political space for the opposition through intimidation and harassment, tighten its control over civil society, and curtail the activities of independent media."

Ms. Sherman legitimizes a repressive one party state that has criminalized freedom of expression, assembly, organization, movement and peaceful protest. There is no independent journalist left in the country. Civil society is virtually decimated. Leaders and members of opposition parties are harassed constantly and many are in jail. Officially, there are more than 400 political prisoners out of a prison population of 90,000.

The ruling party controlled Election Board has made it virtually impossible for multiethnic parties to operate freely in accordance with the Constitution. The Election Board disenfranchised these parties four months before the election. The police, electoral and judicial systems are all stacked up against the opposition. Whatever is left of the opposition is trying to advance the democratization process against these formidable odds.

Mr. Secretary

It is clear that the Tigray People's Liberation (TPLF) dominated Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) will once again win the election by running against itself. This is a mockery of the essence of competitive elections. It is tragic for the credibility of the government of the United States and more importantly harmful and demeaning to Ethiopia's 100 million people for Under Secretary Wendy Sherman to give America's stamp of approval to one of the most repressive governments in the world by stating "Ethiopia is a democracy. " This is a travesty that generations of Ethiopians won't forget.

The Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle calls on the United States Government not to be blinded by short-term gains of fighting terrorism and ally itself with a terrorist Government that has lost legitimacy among the vast majority of the Ethiopian people. We believe that American and Ethiopian relations that span over 110 years are more durable than U.S. Government relations with one of the most repressive governments in Africa.

We urge the Department of State to rescind MS. Sherman's statement at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

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