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Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle (Shengo)

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Date: February 27, 2015

U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer of New York
Federal Government Office
780 3rd Avenue #2301
New York, NY 10017

Subject: Support Human Rights & Free and Fair Elections; Speak out Against the Decimation of Independent Opposition Parties by Ethiopia's Election Board

Dear Honorable Senator Charles E. Schumer:

"The right to vote is the wellspring of our democracy, and it is one of the most cherished attributes of citizenship."

Senator Charles E. Schumer

"Preventing voter deception and intimidation should not be a partisan issue - we can all agree that candidates should take office through free and fair elections, or not at all."

Senator Charles E. Schumer

These are monumental statements that were made on June 7, 2007 when you and Senator Obama introduced the Deceptive and Voter Intimidation Act of 2007. As one of your constituents, your deep commitment and advocacy for democracy, equality, economic fairness, social justice and the right to vote are truly remarkable.

Throughout time, other notable Senators and political leaders have shown a fervency for human rights and legislating policies favorable to both those here in

the United States and across the globe, resulting in historical achievements that serve to underscore the United States, the oldest Democracy, as the leading power in spreading Democracy and securing peace worldwide.

Though not all places in the world are fortunate enough to experience the benefits of a democratic state or an environment where peace freely exists. I am speaking specifically about Ethiopia, where for the past 23 years its 100 million citizens have existed in a repressive state without democracy or the respect of the Rule of Law, all brought on by a one-ethnic-based, totalitarian government that continues to go unchallenged by the international community and its leadership.

The foundation for any Democratic regime is to implement free and fair elections. On behalf of Shengo, the Ethiopian People's Congress for United Struggle, a coalition of more than a dozen political parties, civic society organizations and prominent individuals, I, a member of the Foreign Relations and Diplomatic Committee, am respectfully asking that you help support the free and fair election in Ethiopia that is scheduled to take place in May 15, 2015, and is currently under a hostile environment of relentless and gross human rights violations.

Shengo believes Ethiopia's 100 million people demand and, more importantly, deserve a free and fair election. However, the machinations by the ruling party of dismantling competitive opposition parties and replacing them with politically manufactured pseudo-opposition groups that are completely loyal to the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) that dominates the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) is reprehensible and totally unacceptable.

This machination will potentially lead to civil unrest and instability immediately after the ruling party declares victory. Over the past several months, the TPLF/EPRDF has used the country's Election Board as a political tool to penetrate, harass, subvert and dismantle multi-ethnic opposition parties with countrywide appeal.

The All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP), the Unity, Democracy and Justice Party (UDJ) and the new youth-led Blue or Semayawi Party are victims of this deliberate and well-calculated dismemberment and disenfranchisement campaign. The TPLF/EPRDF has used an Election Board that dominates, operating to establish pseudo replacements that are subservient and adjunct to the ruling party. It is largely these parties and the TPLF/EPRDF that will participate in the election. The outcome is, therefore, predictable. This is a sham. Here is why. You will agree that free and fair elections matter just as much to other societies.

In 2005, Ethiopians enjoyed the right to vote by having a massive turn out of 26 Million people. 24 million or 92% of the registered voters voted for the most prominent multiethnic ethnic opposition parties namely, the Coalition For Unity and Democracy (CUDP) and for the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF). People spoke at the polls by rejecting the ruling party; however, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his ruling party unjustly reversed the overwhelming victory of the majority of the people. On June 7, 2005 the peaceful demonstrators went in public to protest against the alleged vote rigging in front of the African Union Office (AU), but the government security officers opened fire and killed 237, wounded 700 people and jailed 45,000 including the entire CUDP leaders. Ethiopians lost confidence in the electoral system. In 2010 election the TPLF/EPRDF run solo and declared itself a winner by garnering 99.6% of the Parliamentary seats. Ethiopia cannot afford a repeat of 2005 and 2010.

As part of the power consolidation process before the election next May, peaceful protests allowed under the Constitution and initiated by the UDJ and Semayawi have been suppressed and disbanded. Peaceful protestors including the elderly, girls and boys, party leaders and members have been whipped and beaten in broad daylight in front diplomats. Many are in jail. Federal and municipal police maimed a 70-year-old mother attending church service.

Shengo expresses its outrage concerning this recurrent abrogation of human rights, the rule of law and justice at a time when the country should be preparing to listen to alternative political voices.

Dear Senator Schumer, we would like to ask you to join hands with the Ethiopian people to say “Never Again” as the last 23 years have been remembered as an era of ethnic cleansing, genocide and human rights violations. Please see the link below for the 69-page documents submitted to the UN on November 3rd, 2014 titled “Urgent Appeal for Investigation: Gross Human Rights Violations in Ethiopia.” <http://www.amharatimes.com/?p=1051>.

The ongoing onslaught is intended to pave the way for a total electoral win by the TPLF/EPRDF. Sadly, for the Ethiopian people, the competition will be confined to the ruling party and its pre-screened, vetted and anointed parties. In effect, the TPLF/EPRDF will compete against itself. The goal is 100 percent victory.

Shengo urges the donor and diplomatic community to reject the ruling party's pretentious position that there will be a free and fair election in Ethiopia and that there are independent parties willing to compete. This is entirely untrue.

A free and fair election is untenable because genuine opposition parties have been decimated. Journalists have been incarcerated on terrorism charges for expressing their democratic rights. Some have been sentenced on treason charges; some have been sentenced for up to 18 years, while others have fled the country in order to survive. The implementation of the 2009 anti-Terrorism Proclamation law No. 652/2009 results in criminalizing the exercise of fundamental human rights. The international community must repudiate Ethiopia's action to use terrorism laws to silence political dissent. Civil societies and civil liberties also have been restricted or crushed ever since the 2009 draconian law has been in effect. In Ethiopia, in the critical election of 2015, there is no viable NGO human rights organizations or independent media coverage to ensure human rights compliance and monitor human rights manifestations. The party and state dominate the media.

As Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Oakland Institute, the Committee to Protect Journalists and others have shown, the level of repression is unprecedented. Please see the 76-page assessment of Human Rights watch report dated January 20, 2015, titled "Journalism is not Crime" detailing how the Ethiopian government has curtailed independent reporting & gross human rights violation since, 2000. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2015/01/20/journalism-not-crime>.

The hope that there will be a greater political space after the passing of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the strongman and one of the richest Prime ministers with a net worth of \$3B, who led Ethiopia for more than 20 years, has been shattered. <http://www.worldsrichpeople.com/10-richest-prime-ministers.html>.

Ethiopia is more polarized today than it was during the 2005 elections. Public confidence in the electoral and institutional processes has reached an all-time low. Most professionals, including the majority (80%) of Ethiopian-trained physicians, leave the country each year due to political prosecution or lack of stability. According to UNFPA/2014, 70% of the Ethiopian population are below the age of 35. Of that 70%, 80% are unemployed youth. This is a waste of human capital that could otherwise be invested toward developing the country. A staggering 35,000 young women, men and children are being trafficked to the Middle East every month due to harrasment, destitution, unemployment,

hunger, unlawful imprisonment, and ethnic-based problems. Most of the women and the children are victims of sexual exploitation and forced labor involving domestic work. Both men and women are in forced labor, oftentimes receiving beatings, tortures, arrests, sometimes ending in death. These victims are kept in debt bondage and working in slave-like conditions.

The U.S. State Department 2014 report titled “Ethiopia: Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons” has investigated and made some serious recommendations to the government to absorb the 163,000 Ethiopians deported by Saudi Arabia in November 2013 and improve regulatory and constitutional amendments to take place in order to protect the citizen but to no avail.

The State Department’s report stated that “the central market in Addis Ababa is home to the largest collection of brothels in Africa, with girls as young as 8-years-old involved in prostitution”.

<http://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/countries/2014/226721.htm>

The depth and extent of the human rights violations have exasperated poverty, homelessness and ethnic conflicts due to, the displacement of over a quarter of a million farmers from their indigenous land. The blue print of the government land policy grants arable land in the amount ranging from 600,000 acres up to 4 million acres, to Saudi Arabia, India and China based on a 99-year lease so that these countries can fight food insecurities in their respective countries while Ethiopians have no right or access to develop their land to fight against the plagues of poverty. “Land giveaway fails to meet the other set of criteria”- ie., employment. “One Hectare of commercial farm generates 0.005 employment or a tenth of a person” according to the book called “The Great Land Give Away”, by Dr. Aklog Birrara.

Though Ethiopia is the largest food aid recipient in the world, it remains, poor. Three quarters of its population live on one meal a day. Despite, Ethiopia being known as the water tower of Africa, which covers a land mass of 7,444 sq. km, coupled with rich biodiversity, only 19% of the arable land is in use.

Bad governance, government controlled repressive land policy and the implementation of oppressive ethnic apartheid Federal policy cripples 81% of its farmers population from engaging in the development of sustainable agriculture for sustainable future and self reliant economy.

Due to, the existing ethnic apartheid policy that citizens have no freedom to invest anywhere in the country but only in areas within in their ethnic borders,

plus, the land allocation is disproportionate to the population growth and does not take climate change into account.

Farmers are not entitled to have subsidies or fertilizers unless they support the government's ethnic party. If not, it will result in farmers losing their lands, imprisonment, beatings or tortures and killings. The urban areas have an estimated 9 million homelessness. 67% of the population are subjected to malnutrition or under nutrition based on FAO report. An estimated 11 million people are in desperate need for food assistance according to Oxfam. A deteriorating health care system could not handle the pandemic and transmittable diseases. The average life span still remains 52 years of age. One should ask why a country such as, Ethiopia where per head per capita is \$470 annually would spend 12.6% of its GDP on defense and "security operations" (based on CIA 2104 report)? Unfortunately, the Government spent less than 1.2% on education and a lot less on health care and safe drinking water. Currently, 65% of the people have no access to clean water, according to the Ethiopian parliament, Ethiopian Television(ETV) dated July 4th, 2013. Despite some significant growth that the economic wellness of the people has not improved. Consequently, the UNDP 2014 Human Development Index ranked Ethiopia 173rd out of 187 countries. The UNCTAD 2014 report has listed Ethiopia as one of the 48 members of "The Least Developed Countries" (LDCs) based on three criterias focused on problems associated with "Per Capita Income", "Human Assets" and "Economic Vulnerability". In addition, Ethiopia has lost its historical Massawa and Assab ports under the ethnic based government leaving the country land locked and vulnerable, an issue that continues to challenge the national interests of the country and the national economy at large.

In the absence of a bilateral general budget support in Ethiopia, large multi-donor programs have been put in place to support the government. The Development Assistance Group (DAG) report summary of 2013-14 indicates that "DAG members provided a total of \$3.1 Billion in grants and concessional financial" to Ethiopia. The Ethiopians abroad also transfer foreign remittance in the amount of \$3.7 Billion annually into a corrupt economy that is marred by inflation, where the majority of mothers cannot afford the basic essentials for their families. We cannot have development-driven, people-centered, and an inclusive sustainable economy by depending on foreign aid and foreign remittance. The lack of accountability and continued corruption of the government and its inability to address human rights violations, food security, poverty eradication, safety nets, education, healthcare and freedom of speech, freedom of religion and the overall participation of the people in the economic, political and social aspects is a

prelude to disaster as discussed in following article titled “Soveriegn bond or sovereign Bondage” by Shengo.

<http://ethioshengo.org/index.php/u-s/151-ethiopia-s-sovereign-bond-or-sovereign-bondage>

In Shengo’s estimation, this recurring repression and suffocation of basic human rights inflicted on all segments of Ethiopian society will not stop the popular momentum for justice, genuine equality under the law and representative governance in Ethiopia. On the contrary, Ethiopia’s youth is more determined and committed to democratic change today than it was 5 years ago. Harassments, jailing’s, killings, persecutions, forced migration, etc., are not likely to stop the momentum.

Equally, opposition parties that have been disbanded will use the current opportunity as a game changer and will emerge stronger. In short, the TPLF/EPRDF is most likely to contribute to the formation of a more cohesive, durable, purposeful, wise, strategic and collaborative and nationally oriented opposition. We, therefore, urge opposition groups within and outside Ethiopia to set aside minor differences, reach out and help support one another and focus on the future of the country and the prosperity of all Ethiopians.

Shengo believes that the TPLF/EPRDF is not capable of resolving Ethiopia’s myriad of problems---the high cost of living, unemployment and underemployment, income and social inequality, the misuse of the country’s natural resources including farmlands and waters, mineral resources, the plight of women, bribery, nepotism, corruption and illicit outflow of capital, etc.

These national problems can be solved only through a just and fair rule of law, one based on democracy in which all stakeholders have a say. It will take all Ethiopians to solve these intractable problems and propel the country to peace and prosperity.

Given Ethiopia’s high dependency on foreign development and humanitarian aid, the donor and diplomatic community has a special moral responsibility to advance a democratic alternative rather than to continue shoring up a government that has lost legitimacy among the vast majority of Ethiopians. Shengo believes genuinely that Ethiopia’s interests and the interests of the global community are compatible. A just, democratic, unified and prosperous Ethiopia is in the interest of Western and African democracies. It will serve as a beacon of hope not only for the Horn but also for the rest of Africa. But, this won’t happen

unless there is a concerted and genuine effort on the part of the global community.

In light of the dire situation facing Ethiopia and its 100 million people, we urge you and the members of the United States Congress to use your leverage by urging the Ethiopian government to take the following actions immediately. We believe that implementation could create a favorable environment for free and fair elections in 2015 in Ethiopia. We would like to recommend writing a letter to Secretary of State, John F. Kerry, so as to avert a volatile and dangerous human disaster from taking place. Your interacting in timely manner to condemn rather lawless atrocities by the Ethiopian regime and help adapt the appropriate legislation to affect the US policy to include the human rights abuse as part and parcel of any development assistance to dictators and human rights abusers. In this connection, it would be advisable for you to engage the Ethiopia-based development Assistance Group (DAG), and USAID in the proactive implementation of our recommendations on these concrete and urgent issues:

1. Free all political prisoners including journalists, bloggers and democratic, social and political activists and leaders and members of the opposition without preconditions and without delay. Currently, there are an estimated 90,000 political conscious prisoners, including some 10,000 who remain in solitary confinement according to Amnesty International and civil liberties. Among the prisoners are the award winning journalist, ESKINDER NEGA, Temesgen Desalegn and Melaku, including the young and vibrant party leaders, Habtamu Ayalew, Abereha Desta, Yeshiwas Assefa, Daniel Shebeshi, and the unjustly abducted British Citizen from Yemen, Andargachew Tsege, and many others in similar circumstances. It is imperative that the prisoners are released in order to restore public confidence in the electoral process and mitigate risks. It will also avert civil conflict.
2. Establish an independent commission consisting of notable Ethiopians and foreign expert advisors to investigate government crackdowns, recent killings, unwarranted arrests and persecutions of peaceful dissenters throughout the country and bring those responsible for “crimes against humanity” and other killings to justice
3. Open political space for all opposition groups and allow opposition parties to move freely, raise funds, establish offices, campaign and present their programs to constituents without harassment and intimidation

4. Speak out both in private and in public against Election Board interferences in the electoral process and the legitimate functioning of multiethnic opposition parties
5. Reconstitute the Election Board and ensure that it is free, impartial and independent of governing party control
6. Free the judiciary system from party control and empower it to perform its functions impartially and independently
7. Provide opposition parties free and equal accesses to government-controlled media
8. Disallow federal police, security and defense forces from interfering in the electoral process
9. Urge the Ethiopian government to allow foreign and Ethiopian human rights groups to operate in Ethiopia freely
10. Ask the Ethiopian government to accept and engage international and domestic election observers to monitor the electoral process and resolve electoral disputes consistent with international standards, and
11. Urge the Ethiopian government to extend the election by several months to give opposition groups to reconstitute themselves, establish offices and campaign vigorously.
12. To exert pressure on the Ethiopian government to form a National Reconciliation and Unity with the Oppositions political organizations at home and abroad and Civil societies to avoid the ignited ethnic conflict. Instead, we will all focus in how to build a broad based Multi ethnic Democratic party & pave the road for an inclusive Democratic regime to flourish and be able to build a sustainable future and a secured East Africa.

“We see it as fundamental to our own interests to support a just peace around the world—one in which individuals, and not just nations, are granted the fundamental rights that they deserve.”

May 2010 National Security Strategy

“The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people, but the silence over that by the good people”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

My colleagues and I look forward to your support and would like to make an appointment to further discuss this matter at your earliest convenience. In the meantime, please let me know if I could provide you with additional information.

Sincerely,

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Stefan E. Schweinfest, Dir, UN, Statistics Division, The Dept. of Eco. & Soc.
NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)
Amnesty International
Human Rights Watch
Freedom House
The Oakland Institute
The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
Obamg Meto, Chair, Solidarity Movement For A New Ethiopia
Ethiomeia.com

Associated Press

Al-Jazeera

The Nation Magazine

PBS

WBAI 99.5 FM

Huffington Post

Ethiopianpatriots.com

Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT)

Global Alliance For The Rights of Ethiopians in Saudi Arabia

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