

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 16, 2008

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister, Ethiopia
c/o Embassy of Ethiopia
506 International Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

We write to express our concern about several recent developments in your country, which we fear could make the important partnership between the United States and Ethiopia more difficult. We are deeply troubled that these events together appear to indicate an erosion of political freedom and the rule of law in Ethiopia.

First, we are concerned by the re-arrest of Unity for Democracy and Justice Party leader Birtukan Midekssa and reports that her life sentence in prison has been reinstated. As you know, a political opposition with the right to freedom of speech, press and association is essential to any vibrant democracy. We worry that Birtukan's re-arrest signals your government's waning commitment to those democratic principles. This is a disappointing signal in advance of your country's elections next year, which we believe have great potential.

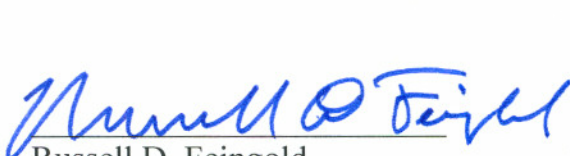
Second, we were disappointed to learn of the passage of your government's law restricting civil society groups receiving more than 10 percent of their funding from sources outside Ethiopia from doing any work related to human rights, gender equality, the rights of the disabled, children's rights or conflict resolution. While we respect your government's right to regulate non-governmental organizations operating within Ethiopia, we fear that as written, this law will undermine the important work done by many organizations in those respective fields. We hope you will ensure that the broad discretionary powers granted to the government by this law are not used as a political tool to impede the independence of civil society.

Third and finally, we are concerned by reports over the last year that several civil society leaders and traditional elders in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia have been detained for extended periods without charge and then tried without due process. Many of those arrested have reportedly been involved in important and much needed peace efforts in the region. We appreciate the fact that Ethiopia has legitimate security concerns in the Ogaden, but fear that this pattern of arrests, if true, risks exacerbating local grievances and contributing to radicalization rather

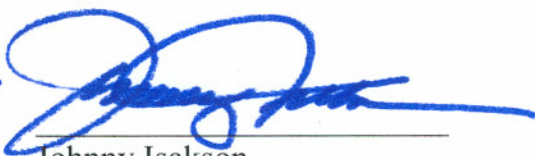
than effective counter-insurgency and stabilization. As you know, civil society is a critical partner in the work of building peace, and we urge you to work with it as much as possible.

We feel strongly about the importance of our countries' partnership and hope it will continue in the years ahead. That is why we are writing to you now to raise our concern about these troubling developments in your country that risk undermining democratic progress and the rule of law. If these trends persist, we believe they will have adverse impacts on our close relationship. We hope this is not the case and look forward to working together toward our shared goals of peace and prosperity.

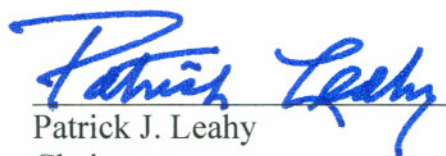
Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold
Chairman
Subcommittee on African Affairs
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate



Johnny Isakson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on African Affairs
Committee on Foreign Relations
United States Senate



Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman
State & Foreign Ops Subcommittee
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate



Richard J. Durbin
Chairman
Human Rights & the Law Subcommittee
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate

CC: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice
U.S. Ambassador to Ethiopia Donald Yamamoto