

Strasbourg, 16 April 2013

Dear President Barroso,

I am aware that you are meeting Hailemariam Desalegn, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, this week. I would like to share some concerns with you, in the hope that you will raise them with the Prime Minister.

As you know, in the last few years, the crackdown against the free media and civil society in Ethiopia intensified under the regime of Meles Zenawi. Journalists like Eskinder Nega and Reeyot Alemu continue to languish in prison, despite western praise of their work and independent assessment that their conviction violates international law (please see enclosed). Unfortunately, European diplomats concentrated on pressing for the release of the Swedish journalists, but neglected Ethiopian journalists and pro-democracy activists, who continue to be incarcerated. The hope for democratic transition and openness that we felt upon the new leadership of Mr. Desalegn fell void in recent months, since no groundbreaking reforms have taken place.

I believe that Mr. Desalegn himself would push for democratic change, but he alone has reduced margin of manoeuvre. It is important to stress, though, that any prospects of a peaceful democratic transition in Ethiopia must necessarily include the prompt release of all political prisoners. Therefore I would urge you to press for the release of political prisoners and highlight the need to amend the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, which has justified arrests of both journalists and members of the political opposition, along with the Charities and Societies Proclamation law (CSO law), which severely restricts the work of NGOs in the country.

Moreover, apart from the refusal to settle the border with Eritrea, the military interference in Somalia, the barbarous repression in the Ogaden and against other people in Ethiopia, I am particularly concerned with the fact that the Meles regime started meddling in the Muslim community and creating dangerous resentment which is threatening the harmony developed for centuries between Christianity and Islam in Ethiopia. It is my conviction that the repressive EPRDF regime in Ethiopia, however deviously smart, is not sustainable and will not ensure long term stability in the country and in the region. I would thus equally urge you to stress for greater openness in the political space and respect for constitutional rights, in particular the rights of minorities.

Thank you.

Best regards,

Ana Gomes