



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Ana Gomes

Member of the European Parliament

Catherine Ashton

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs / Vice - President of the European Commission

Brussels, 06 May 2014

Subject: Renewed crackdown on press freedom and political dissent in Ethiopia

Dear Madam High Representative,

Recently, Ethiopian authorities arrested six bloggers and three journalists and charged them with working with a foreign organisation to incite public violence through social media, in one of the worst crackdowns against free expression in the country. According to Human Rights Watch, on the afternoon of April 25, police detained six members of a group known as the "Zone9" bloggers – Befekadu Hailu, Atnaf Berahane, Natnael Feleke, Mahlet Fantahun, Zelalem Kibret, and Abel Wabela – at their offices and in the streets. Tesfalem Weldeyes, a freelance journalist, was also arrested during the operation. Edom Kassaye, a second freelance journalist, was arrested on either April 25 or 26; the circumstances of her arrest are unclear but all eight individuals were apparently taken to Maekelawi Police Station, the federal detention center in Addis Ababa, the capital.

Furthermore, according to news reports, about 40 supporters of the opposition Blue Party were also arrested on April 24 and 25 when preparing for a demonstration. Twelve were subsequently released, including party chairman Yilkal Getnet, who said 28 party members remained in custody.

Upon his visit to Ethiopia, on April 29th, US Secretary of State John Kerry has publicly called for the release of the journalists and urged Ethiopian authorities "create greater opportunities for citizens to be able to engage with their fellow citizens and with their government by opening up more space for civil society."

The European Union, a major aid donor to Ethiopia, a State-Party to the Cotonou Agreement, remained silent on this crackdown. Not a word of condemnation of the arrests, or even a constructive appeal for the release of journalists was heard from the High Representative. This particular approach of turning a blind eye to human

Ana Gomes

European Parliament

Bât. Altiero Spinelli, 15G146, 60, rue Wiertz 60, B-1047 Brussels, Belgium

Tel. : +32 (0)2 284 58 24 Fax : +32 (0)2 284 98 24

anamaria.gomes@europarl.europa.eu



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Ana Gomes

Member of the European Parliament

rights violations in Ethiopia is not new, even though it contradicts clear policy guidelines of the EU Strategic Framework on Human Rights and Democracy, adopted in 2012, whereby "promoting and speaking out on human rights and democracy is a joint responsibility of the EU and its Member States" and "when faced with violations of human rights, the EU will make use of the full range of instruments at its disposal, including sanctions or condemnation." The use of these instruments, along with concerted diplomatic efforts on the ground, is paramount to press the Ethiopian government to create a space of public debate and greater respect for basic freedoms in the lead-up to the general elections of May 2015.

We must ask the question - what has this EU policy of subservience, of political and economic opportunism, of shameless disregard for our principles and values, produced?

Until when will the EU remain silent?

Sincerely,

Ana Gomes
Member of the European Parliament

Ana Gomes

European Parliament

Bât. Altiero Spinelli, 15G146, 60, rue Wiertz 60, B-1047 Brussels, Belgium

Tel. : +32 (0)2 284 58 24 Fax : +32 (0)2 284 98 24

anamaria.gomes@europarl.europa.eu