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Ms Ana Gomes MEP
European parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Ms Gomes,

Thank you for your letter of 6 May concerning the renewed action on press freedom and political dissent in Ethiopia.

Please note that on that same day, the EEAS Spokesperson released a statement on the situation in Ethiopia, expressing our concern about the recent arrests of bloggers, journalists and opposition members, and calling "on the Ethiopian authorities to ensure that proceedings are carried out according to Ethiopian law and respecting international and regional norms, including granting access to legal counsel and family, as well as the right to apply for bail".

The statement also reiterated "the importance of protecting space for genuine political dialogue and creating an environment in which divergent voices from all parts of society can express their views freely in a constructive manner, be it through internet and other media, or public demonstrations and associations, as assured by the Ethiopian Constitution".

We are therefore by no means silent, and continue to follow the human rights situation in Ethiopia closely, particularly the restrictions on political space and on freedoms of speech, association and the press. The EU Delegation has been monitoring the recent arrests and the court proceedings, and has raised its concerns directly with Ethiopian authorities. Due to the gravity of the situation, a statement was deemed necessary.

The EU will continue to raise its concerns with the Ethiopian authorities, notably in following up the statement, and to react publicly when the situation so requires.

However, in Ethiopia as in other African countries, the EU believes that the best way to improve the human rights situation is through constructive dialogue with the Government and through targeted development assistance.

The EU's regular political dialogue with the Ethiopian authorities (in accordance with Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement) continues to be honest, robust and regular. Human rights concerns are repeatedly raised, including in the meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn which took place on 5 March 2014. This constructive engagement with the Government has had some positive results, such as the use of the EU Civil Society Fund to fund non-governmental organisations working on human rights in Ethiopia, despite the very restrictive Charities and Societies Proclamation. We are also constantly raising our concern regarding the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation and its use to stifle dissent.

As regards development cooperation, the EU uses a mix of instruments and channels to improve the human rights situation. This includes support through international organisations, NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs). The EU also co-chairs the civil society working group, thereby facilitating dialogue between Government and CSOs.

Rest assured that the EU will not cease to closely follow the human rights situation in Ethiopia and to take action as needed.



Catherine Ashton