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To all MEP signatories of the letter on the EU Response to the Human Rights situation in Ethiopia

Dear Colleagues,

I would hereby like to thank you for your letter of 7 July 2017 regarding the human rights situation in Ethiopia. I fully share your concerns about the domestic situation and reported human rights violations under the ongoing State of Emergency (SoE), including the death sentence of Andy Tsege.

The European Commission and External Action Service (EEAS) have been closely following the situation in Ethiopia, especially in the most concerned regions of Oromia, Amhara, and SNNPR, since the beginning of the unrest in 2015 and even more so since the imposition of the SoE in early October 2016. During our regular dialogues with Ethiopian authorities, as well as in several of our statements<sup>1</sup>, we stress the need to address the grievances of the population and to respect political and civil rights as the foundations for a democratic system.

My visit to Addis Ababa in March 2017 was an opportunity to personally discuss political developments with Prime Minister Hailemariam. I emphasised on the imperative of respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms under the SoE, as well as having a credible political dialogue with the opposition.<sup>2</sup> I equally met with the opposition to discuss their concerns and means for the EU to support independent voices in the country.

Ethiopia is an important partner and the EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement is the right framework to address and follow issues of concern. In June 2016, both sides signed a Joint Declaration "*Towards an EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement*", committing to an annual Ministerial Meeting and to six sectoral dialogues. It is important to note that the first sectoral dialogue held under the agreement was the first ever dialogue on Governance and Human rights in the presence of the EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis during his visit to Addis Ababa in early April 2017.<sup>3</sup> The concerns highlighted in your letter were discussed more extensively with the authorities, including the need for independent investigations and accountability for allegations of torture and mistreatment. The EUSR also called for the release of opposition leaders and the prompt lifting of the State of Emergency. We are now working on

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<sup>1</sup> (1) [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/8576/statement-spokesperson-recent-violent-clashes-ethiopia\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/8576/statement-spokesperson-recent-violent-clashes-ethiopia_en); (2) [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/11111/statement-spokesperson-recent-events-oromia-region-ethiopia\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/11111/statement-spokesperson-recent-events-oromia-region-ethiopia_en); (3) [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/11509/statement-by-the-spokesperson-on-ethiopias-announcement-of-a-state-of-emergency\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/11509/statement-by-the-spokesperson-on-ethiopias-announcement-of-a-state-of-emergency_en).

<sup>2</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/22980/hrvp-federica-mogherini-meets-ethiopian-prime-minister-hailemariam-desalegn\\_fr](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/22980/hrvp-federica-mogherini-meets-ethiopian-prime-minister-hailemariam-desalegn_fr)

<sup>3</sup> [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ethiopia/24515/european-union-special-representative-human-rights-stavros-lambrinidis-visits-ethiopia-launch\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ethiopia/24515/european-union-special-representative-human-rights-stavros-lambrinidis-visits-ethiopia-launch_en)

concrete follow-up, in particular on strengthening independent civil society, establishing a strong political dialogue, and improving the Rule of Law and of conditions in detention centres.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has reported to the Parliament on its findings on the violence that led to the current SoE. Despite the shortcomings mentioned in your letter, the recommendation that security personnel responsible for excessive use of force be held accountable is a welcomed element. We have encouraged the EHRC to work with independent civil society organisations and human rights defenders, notably the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, and to publically share all of their reports. We also welcome the recent visit of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Al Hussein to the country and strongly encourage Ethiopia to cooperate with UN Special Procedures.

The opposition faces a very difficult situation in the country. We have repeatedly urged the release of the opposition leadership, activists and journalists, as well as supported calls for independent investigations into all acts of violence and accountability. The EU Delegation and EU Member States present in Ethiopia continue to monitor the situation, including trials under the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation in the wake of the protests, and regularly meet with Human Rights Defenders and Ethiopian civil society. On the specific case of Andy Tsege, we support the United Kingdom's efforts to defend his rights and have discussed his situation with the relevant authorities.

As to the situation of women in Ethiopia, the EU actively works towards the elimination of gender-based violence through development assistance and political dialogue. The EU supports a number of interventions with civil society organizations - mainly under the EU's Civil Society Fund - that include work on combating all forms of sexual violence. The EU has equally discussed those topics with the Minister of Women and Children Affairs in the framework of the political dialogue of the EU+ Gender Taskforce, in which EU Member States are active members.

We remain convinced that targeted development assistance, coupled with a strong dialogue, is an essential component of our work promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms. The aim of our cooperation and financial support is to support the Ethiopian people and civil society in promoting sustainable human and economic development. In particular, the Civil Society Fund, which has the status of a local fund, allows the EU to support Ethiopian civil society organisations and charities, including those working on human rights issues.

The visit of the EUSR and the launch of the dialogue on governance and human rights under the EU-Ethiopia Strategic Engagement prove that the human rights situation will remain at the centre of our bilateral relations with Ethiopia. The press release following his visit clearly highlights, in a public manner, the main concerns of the EU on the human rights situation in Ethiopia. It notably mentions our support for calls for independent investigations, accountability for allegations of torture and mistreatment, and the release of opposition leaders.

Yours sincerely,



Federica Mogherini