



DEPUTADA AO PARLAMENTO EUROPEU

Brussels, 16 November 2009

His Excellency
EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid
Karel De Gucht

Dear Commissioner,

In view of the upcoming elections in Ethiopia, we would like to call your attention to the highly disturbing fact that one of Ethiopia's key opposition leaders has been in prison since December 2008. Ms. Birtukan Medeksa, leader of the Union for Democracy and Justice (UDJ), the main opposition party represented in Parliament, was re-arrested and sentenced to life on claims that she violated the terms of her 2007 pardon. Her 'crime' was to speak, in Sweden, about the negotiations that preceded the pardon that she was forced to sign to be released from prison, where she had been sent to following the May 2005 election and subsequent massacres.

Only one week after she was re-arrested, on 6th of January 2009, the Ethiopian Parliament enacted a new law (known as Charities and Societies Proclamation), which, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW) and other credited sources, criminalises most human rights work in the country.

We are generally concerned with the appalling human rights situation, in Ethiopia, which set the wrong political context for the general elections, foreseen for May 2010. Moreover, according to a recent report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), there is potential for a violent eruption of conflict ahead of the 2010 election because of rising ethnic tensions and dissent.

We, therefore, urge you to use the European Commission's clout and to indeed do all you can to put pressure on the Ethiopian government to release Ms. Medeksa and thousands of other political prisoners. You have the full support of the European Parliament, which has adopted, last year, a resolution demanding Ms. Medeksa's immediate and unconditional release.

We would also like to invite you to an informal meeting with interested MEPs to discuss the EU's involvement in the upcoming elections, namely the decision on whether or not to send an EU Election Observation Mission (EOM). We are at your disposal to engage in any form of dialogue that you may consider appropriate.

Best regards,

Ana Gomes, Chief of the EU Election Observation Mission to Ethiopia (2005)

Eva Joly, Chairwoman of the Committee on Development

Heidi Hautala, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Human Rights