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Ana Gomes

Thank you for your letter dated 27 October in which you raised questions regarding the Human Rights Watch report entitled '*Development without Freedom: How Aid Underwrites Repression in Ethiopia*' and the Final Report of the EU Election Observation Mission on the May 2010 Elections in Ethiopia.

1. We take any allegations of misuse of aid programmes very seriously. The EU is also closely monitoring the human rights situation in Ethiopia and regularly raises concerns through our political dialogue with the government. As to the programmes the EU funds in Ethiopia, we keep under close review their systems and safeguards designed to ensure that aid is spent effectively and reach its beneficiaries. The existing safeguards are robust but we recognise the need for constant review and, where appropriate, revision.
2. In research conducted by the Donor Assistance Group in Ethiopia in response to earlier information received from Human Rights Watch, we did not find credible evidence of widespread or systemic political distortion. We found that all programmes in question have accountability systems in place that provide checks on distortion, including distortion for political gain, such as regular financial audits, independent evaluations, independently commissioned surveys and field visits to make sure aid reaches those who need it. We are confident that we have built in monitoring and safeguard mechanisms that give reasonable assurance that aid is being used for its intended purpose.
3. The Final Report of the EU Election Observation Mission states that "Different interlocutors to the EOM voiced allegations of abuse of power by public authorities, including the bartering of food aid in exchange for political loyalty, mainly using the "safety net" programme, especially in Tigray region. The EU EOM could not confirm these allegations". The EOM report also states: "Although opposition parties referred to a nation-wide strategy orchestrated by the ruling party, they also considered that these attitudes could be due to individually motivated actions of overzealous local politicians and administrators." While we cannot exclude that incidents of use of development aid for political gains have occurred, as mentioned above, our own research did not find credible evidence of widespread or systemic distortion of aid for political purposes.

4. I regret that it has not been possible to agree on a presentation of the final report by the EOM Chief Observer, Mr Thijs Berman, to the Ethiopian government in Addis Ababa in line with normal practice for EU Election Observations Missions. I also invited the Ethiopian government to draw on the report and consider carefully its recommendations. The final report was published in a press conference held by the Chief Observer in Brussels on 8 November instead.

5. Democracy is an essential element of a partnership that both Ethiopia and the EU have subscribed to, but the EU's relations with Ethiopia are not only defined by elections. The EU's commitment to poverty reduction, economic development and to peace and security in the region are equally important. The EU and Ethiopia have a strong desire to remain partners to make progress in these areas. With our aid, Ethiopia, one of the poorest countries in the world, is on track to meet MDGs by 2015, particularly with regard to extreme poverty and hunger, and universal primary education. Good progress is also being made regarding reducing child mortality and environmental sustainability.

We firmly believe that these positive results confirm the partnership approach we have chosen for delivering assistance to Ethiopia. This provides the basis on which the EU speaks out openly regarding human rights, democratic principles, good governance and the rule of law and making full use of our ongoing dialogue with the government. I am confident that the EOM final report offers useful elements to strengthen the dialogue in these areas.

I trust the above clarifications have been helpful.

Yours sincerely

Catherine Ashton

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