

Brussels, 08 DEC. 2009
HD/fb - D(09)1085 - A(09)2638

Dear Ms Gomes, Ms Joly and Ms Hautala,

Thank you for your letter regarding the human rights situation and the forthcoming elections in Ethiopia.

I share your concern over the arrest of Ms. Birtukan Mideksa and the adoption of the Charities and Societies Proclamation. The Commission is closely following this situation and has, with the Member States repeatedly voiced its preoccupation to the Ethiopian authorities both as EU and as part of the larger donor community. These issues have most recently been raised in the context of the EU-AU Ministerial in October and the EU article 8 dialogue of 18 November. The Commission will continue to put human rights issues and concerns over the electoral environment high on the agenda for dialogue.

Ethiopia is an important partner for the EU and considerable funding is channelled in support of poverty eradication and growth. This funding is yielding good results but the strengthening of a sound political governance environment is an important ingredient for Ethiopia's perspectives to become a prosperous and stable country. This is yet another reason why I will continue to pay particular attention to the case of Ethiopia.

The aftermath of the 2005 general elections has engendered a testing environment for Ethiopia's democratisation process. The EU is therefore paying particular attention to the parliamentary elections of May 2010. The EU has received a request from the Ethiopian Government to observe these elections and will send an Exploratory Mission in January, after which a decision can be taken whether or not to deploy an Election Observation Mission.

I value and look forward to your inputs into the discussion on election observation and the democratisation process in Ethiopia and I feel that such a discussion would be most productive once the inputs from the Exploratory Mission are available.



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