

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 31, 2015

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to you to express our ongoing concern over efforts by the Ethiopian government to restrict freedom of speech and association in Ethiopia. We are particularly concerned in light of Ethiopia's upcoming national elections this May.

The Department of State's most recent Human Rights Country Report on Ethiopia documents severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association, as well as harassment and intimidation of political opposition members and journalists. In recent months numerous media publications have closed amid widespread harassment and the Ethiopian government continues to control most television and radio broadcasting content. According to Human Rights Watch, Ethiopia not only has the second largest number of journalists in exile but, in light of Eritrea's recent release of 7 detained journalists, it now also has the largest number of imprisoned journalists and bloggers in all of sub-Saharan Africa. The Zone 9 Bloggers, for example, were arrested last year on dubious terrorism-related charges, and their trial has been adjourned nearly two dozen times.

In addition to these concerns about media freedom, we are also concerned by the manner in which security forces are responding to citizens in the Ogaden and Oromia regions and to the country's Muslim communities. In past years, the Department of State has reported on unlawful detentions and abuses by security forces, including the detention of more than one thousand Muslims participating in Eid al-Fitr celebrations in August 2013 and the killing of dozens of unarmed protestors in Oromia in May last year. By many accounts, these abuses and arbitrary detentions continue against members of these communities.

We understand the valuable strategic relationship that the United States has with the Government of Ethiopia, but the United States also has a responsibility to promote good governance and human rights as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. The administration's commitment to fight insecurity and instability, including throughout the wider region, should be done in a fair and balanced manner if it is to have a sustainable impact. Ethiopia's role as a security partner cannot come at the expense of these rights, particularly with the upcoming elections on the horizon.

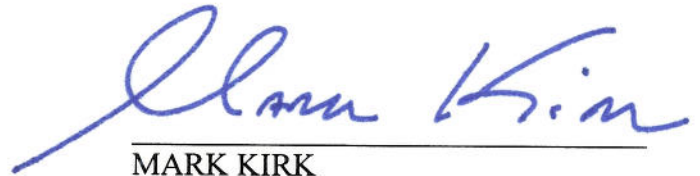
We urge you to intensify pressure on the Ethiopian government to respect the rights of all its citizens. Please keep us updated as to how the Department of State is engaging with Ethiopia on these critical human rights and democracy concerns, and how we are supporting free, fair, and transparent elections in Ethiopia.

Thank you for your leadership on this matter.

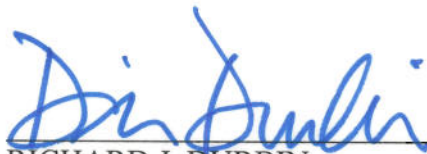
Sincerely,



BENJAMIN L. CARDIN  
United States Senator



MARK KIRK  
United States Senator



RICHARD J. DURBIN  
United States Senator



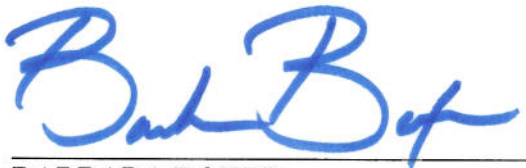
MARCO RUBIO  
United States Senator



ROBERT MENENDEZ  
United States Senator



CHRISTOPHER A. COONS  
United States Senator



BARBARA BOXER  
United States Senator



EDWARD J. MARKEY  
United States Senator