



The Honorable Mr. Kevin McCarthy, Majority Leader,
The House of Representatives, Washington D.C.

Via email: joe.ticcozi@mail.house.gov

From; The Consortium of Ethiopian Civil Society Organizations (TIBIBIR)

Subject: **Passage of H.Res. 128**

March 26, 2018

Dear Honorable Kevin McCarthy,

TIBIBIR is deeply concerned about the deepening and broadening of the Ethiopian crisis; and wishes to bring to your attention the latest escalating assaults on the civilian population, especially rural families and young people in the Oromia and Amhara regions. We are particularly worried this escalation of conflict might lead to civil war and to the Balkanization of Ethiopia. In the event, irredentist, extremist, terrorist and fundamentalist forces will emerge triumphant. Ethiopia will be the next Somalia. This dreadful scenario must be prevented by internal and external stakeholders, including the United States.

The approval of H.R. 128 will therefore send a powerful signal to the government of Ethiopia and the country's 110 million people that the U.S. stands on the side of the rule of law, respect for human rights and the establishment of a genuine democratic system in Ethiopia.

We summarize critical incidents that support our appeal to the Congress of the United States. In Oromia in Southern Ethiopia, scores of people were killed through extrajudicial measures led by Ethiopian defense, special military unit and security forces. As a consequence, tens of thousands of girls, pregnant women, the elderly as well as able bodied farmers were forced to flee their

homes and properties and settle in refugee camps in Kenya. Ethiopia's unresolved crisis has now spilled over to its neighbors most notably Kenya. Last week, the government of South Sudan informed the government of Ethiopia that it is no longer credible or trustworthy to provide security services to the Sudan.

In a similar and ominous manner, Ethiopia's defense, special and security forces have begun to use the new State of Emergency that the Government of the United States questioned in the strongest terms, and had asked the government of Ethiopia to rescind, as a pretext and a blunt instrument of imposing a state of siege on 110 million Ethiopians. These military units that are commandeered exclusively by the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) are now free to go house to house, arrest, physically and mentally injure, in some cases kill and jail hundreds of innocent civilians, especially youth. This scale of recurrent assault on human rights, freedoms and civil liberties is unprecedented in Ethiopia's long history. This senseless and brutal assault on the civilian population is pushing Ethiopia to the brink of a failed state with potential adverse consequences not only for the country; but also for the Horn and Eastern Africa.

Earlier this year, the Ethiopian regime launched an armed attack against innocent people who were engaged in the celebration of the Christian Epiphany, one of the Holiest celebrations of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith. Innocent civilians including children were murdered.

In mid-January, 2018, the world community commended the government of Ethiopia for the release of scores of political prisoners including journalists. Exactly one month later, the same regime rearrested about a dozen of those released. Those rearrested over the weekend include:

1. Eskinder Nega, Journalist
2. Temesgen Dessalegn, Journalist
3. Fekadu Mahitemewolde, Journalist
4. Andualem Aragie, Political leader
5. Addisu Getaneh, Democratic Activist
6. Zelalem Workagegnehu, Blogger
7. Mahlet Fantahun, Blogger
8. Befekadu Hailu, Blogger
9. Woinshet Molla, Democratic Activist

10. Yidnekachew Addis, Democratic Activist
11. Sintayehu Chekole, Democratic Activist
12. Teffera Tesfaye, Democratic Activist

The individuals are among the democratic voices that the governing party feared and continues to fear in a country where freedom of the press and independent civil society organizations are, for all practical purposes criminalized. According to the Voice of America that reported these rearrests on March 25, 2018, the reason for their unfortunate redeployment to Ethiopia's notorious torture chambers is that they participated at a celebration event in honor of their release where the "old Ethiopian flag" had replaced the flag of the governing party at a private residence. Even celebrating one's release from torture and other cruel and inhumane treatment is deemed as a threat to the dictatorial state and government of Ethiopia.

A few days earlier before the rearrests of the above democratic voices, a group of Ethiopian Professors, journalists, engineers, business people, youth and others who were granted a permit to meet, discuss and form a new political party in the city of Bahir Dar of the Amhara region were detained. Despite the permit; and at the conclusion of their Convention, Ethiopian security personnel arrested and jailed the following individuals as they gathered to eat dinner in Bahir Dar.

1. Dr. Dessalegn Chanie, Professor at Bahir Dar University and President of the Tana Lake Conversation Commission
2. Mr. Gashaw Mersha, civilian activist
3. Mr. Yusuf Ibrahim, Former Lecturer, Wollo University and now a Lawyer in Bahir Dar
4. Mr. Temesgen Tessema, Lecturer, Wollo University
5. Mr. Belete Molla, Lecturer, Addis Ababa University
6. Mr. Negatu Asres, Reporter, Amhara Radio and Television
7. Mr. Belete Kassa, Former Editor-in-Chief, Kelem Qend
8. Mr. Daniel Abebaw, Civilian Activist
9. Mr. Mengstie Tegenie, Civilian Activist
10. Mr. Bogale Aragie, Civilian Activist
11. Mr. Kassu Hailu, Lecturer, Enjibara University
12. Mr. Tessema Kassahun, Civilian Activist

13. Mr. Dirssan Berhanie, Civilian Activist
14. Mr. Berihun Assefa, Civilian Activist
15. Mr. Fikru Kassaw, Civilian Activist
16. Mr. Temesgen Berhanu, Civilian Activist and
17. Mr. Sisay Altaseb, Civilian Activist

These rearrests and the new detentions of peaceful citizens, including university professors sends a chilling message to Ethiopians that they must submit to an environment of fear, ethnic polarization and submission to a repressive and intolerant government. The Ethiopian people deserve better. They seek more freedom than security assistance or food aid or any other largesse that is often diverted to punish them; rather than to empower them to be self-sufficient and self-reliant.

In a recent debate on Ethiopia's poor and repressive governance in the United Kingdom, a Parliamentarian lamented that 120,000 Ethiopian children "do have one month to live" because of poverty, malnutrition and poor health. Close to 4 million Ethiopians depend on emergency food aid. Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian migrant workers suffer in the Middle East; and tens of thousands are stuck in Yemen. Yet, the government of Ethiopia raised its defense budget by \$50 million, now exceeding \$400 million per year. This huge budget allocation to defense, special military units and security forces in a country with one of the lowest per capita incomes in the world poses a moral dilemma for the donor and diplomatic community. The government of Ethiopia uses lethal force to silence innocent civilians especially youth.

Mr. Majority Leader

Ethiopia does not yet have a new Prime Minister. The reason for the stalemate is that the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that is still dominated by the minority TPLF is unable and unwilling to agree on the "appropriate and acceptable person" to lead Ethiopia as Prime Minister. While TIBIBIR does not wish to dwell on the ongoing saga of choosing a new Prime Minister, we wish to flag to you unequivocally that Ethiopia continues to suffer from lack of good governance and democratic leadership. In the long-run, this deficit can only be filled through free and fair elections.

Altogether, these atrocities against innocent civilians have worsened the situation and deepened anger, resentment and frustration among the population.

As you know, this deterioration in Ethiopia would, in the long-term affect US interests in the Horn of Africa and the entire region. New state actors such as

Turkey, Gulf countries, China and Russia have begun to project their military presence in the Horn of Africa; and turmoil in Ethiopia will strengthen this new influence.

We thank the United States Congress, especially the 99 members of Congress highlighted on the attached list that co-sponsored and championed H. Res. 128. With your and their support, we feel confident that H.Res. 128 will be approved.

TIBIBIR is willing, ready and able to provide more information to your office and to others at a moment's notice. In this connection, Dr. Aklog Birara, chairman of our advocacy and foreign relations team in Washington D.C. and Mr. Mesfin Mekonnen who is well known to Congressional staff are available for further consultation in person.

We reiterate our strong belief that passage of H.Res. 128 will go a long way in advancing freedom and the long-term interests of both the American and Ethiopian people. We therefore urge the Honorable Majority Leader to do all in your power to pass this legislation.

Finally, like millions of Ethiopians, we are convinced that only a truly democratic Ethiopia will serve as a beacon of freedom, prosperity and as a bastion against all form of extremism, fundamentalism and terrorism that a corrupt, cruel and repressive dictatorship cannot deliver.

We thank you in advance for your attention and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Betru Gebregziabher, Chairman

CC:

Aklog Birara (Dr.), Advocacy and Foreign Relations Chairman