OPEN LETTER

The Hon. Barack H. Obama

President of the United States of America

The White House

Washington DC

 November 29, 2012

Mister President,

In view of your long standing concern for Human Rights, the Rule of Law and the profound inequities prevailing around the World, I would like to bring to your attention the terrible plight of human and social economic conditions in Ethiopia.

The US State Department Human Rights 2011 report on Ethiopia states: “Human rights abuses reported during the year included unlawful killings, torture, beating, and abuse and mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters by security forces, especially special police and local militias, which took aggressive or violent action with evident impunity in numerous instances; poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly of suspected sympathizers or members of opposition or insurgent groups; detention without charge and lengthy pretrial detention; infringement on citizens' privacy rights, including illegal searches; use of excessive force by security services in counterinsurgency operations; restrictions on freedom of speech and of the press; arrest, detention, and harassment of journalists; restrictions on freedom of assembly and association; restrictions on freedom of movement; ruling party intimidation, threats, and violence during the elections; police, administrative, and judicial corruption; harassment of those who worked for human rights organizations; violence and societal discrimination against women and abuse of children; female genital mutilation (FGM); exploitation of children for economic and sexual purposes; trafficking in persons; societal discrimination against persons with disabilities and religious and ethnic minorities; forced labor and child labor; and government interference in union activities.” unquote.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Amnesty International, Genocide Watch and many other reputable organizations have reported irrefutably of these crimes. Since then and even after the change of leadership these conditions have not changed. In fact they have worsened due to the progressive faltering authority of the regime and growing discontent amongst the population. Coercive measures that pit ethnic, religious and cultural communities against each other are being deliberately carried out by interfering in their organizations and practices. For instance, Muslim communities are being harassed; their members arrested and persecuted.

Although some degree of economic development has been recorded, Ethiopia is still amongst the poorest countries in the World according the Human Development Index (HDI). The economy is largely dependent on foreign aid, and its development has caused enormous disparities of income and social disarray in a country where 98 percent of the people subsist on less than one dollar a day. Ethiopians have no rights to own property and are denied all fundamental legal rights and freedoms. The regime has total control of the economy and is in possession of all physical and material resources. The population on the whole is marginalized and confined to performing cheap labor and to other demeaning functions. Moreover, thousands have been displaced forcibly from their ancestral lands and made vagrant, to make space for foreign investors and associates of the regime. The dislocation of several million people from their land has been the cause of an immeasurable tragedy, social disarray and death. As reported by many institutions and NGO’s, populations dislocated from the Omo Valley, Gambela, Gura Ferda, Ogaden, Beny Shangul-Gumuz, Afar, Amhara regions are left without resources and means of survival. Corruption, nepotism, cronyism, mismanagement and inefficiency prevail over public affairs.

 Mister President,

American and Ethiopian relations date back over a century, during which they have developed and their relationships have flourished to the advantage of both nations. In the international arena, Ethiopia has stood with the US in matters of common concern, and in promoting peace and stability in the world. The US has been a major provider of financial and technical to Ethiopia particularly in giving food aid during famines as well as supporting Ethiopia’s demands from international financial institutions. At the individual level our community in America has grown exponentially, now going into second and third generations of Ethio-Americans. Unlike previous patterns of migration, thanks to modern advances of science and technology, as well as the globalization of world affairs, our relations and contacts with the homeland are close and frequent, hence strengthening further the relations of both countries and giving us a well informed insight about events and critical developments in Ethiopia.

In spite of the bad governance and criminal misdeeds perpetrated by the dictatorial regime on its own population, the United States has been providing political support and substantial economic development aid to Ethiopia, particularly in support of the anti-terrorist campaign that is being conducted in Somalia, the Horn and in Yemen. This US policy has created a lot consternation amongst the great majority of the population that wonders why the US is supporting a regime that acts contrary to the basic values and principles that are fundamental for the US itself. The majority of opposition parties and the public do not support terrorism in any form, nor have they expressed any demonstrable anti-American sentiments. To the contrary their demands are for freedom and justice and a freely elected democratic form of government, which are legitimate claims that the US should promote and support, morally and actively. Suggestions that a political space be made for the opposition parties is tantamount to condemn them and the population they represent to a permanent minority status to the rule of an ethnic cabal, and make them surrender to a rule of violence and terror.

Mister President,

The best formula to stabilize Ethiopia and avoid future crisis is to hold free and fair elections. Considering that a political landscape with 90 or more political parties with their sundry demands appears to be difficult and unmanageable, an equitable solution to these problems can be reached with good will and determination. The different Ethiopian ethnicities have lived and interacted together for a very long time. But for a few extremist factions the vast majority of the population is amenable to reasonable arrangements that guarantee their freedoms and their various rights under a democratic system of government.

The Horn of Africa and its geopolitical sphere, of which Ethiopia is a main component, is of major strategic interest for security and peace of the region, for Africa and the world. Therefore, it is incumbent for the United States to promote vigorously and actively the installation of a genuine democratic system of governance in Ethiopia and the region, and preempt unnecessary turmoil in the future. So far US policy has been mostly focused on security matters and to a lesser degree on Human Rights and the Rule of Law which are fundamental for a democratic and free nation. I believe that the present political situation in Ethiopia offers a good opportunity for the US to promote and support actively the democratization process. It is the fervent hope of millions of Ethiopians that, during this second tenure of your Presidency, the US endeavor in Ethiopia will be conducive to legitimate democratic governance.

 Respectfully.

 Imru Zelleke

(Ambassador of Ethiopia, Ret.)

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CC:

The. Hon. Hillary R. Clinton

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