



---

## **GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY FROM ETHIOPIA'S AUTOCRATIC REGIME SHOULD BE A CONDITION OF CONTINUED AID**

**ETHIOPIA CHARGES NON-VIOLENT OPPOSITION LEADER WITH TERRORISM AFTER HE MET WITH  
MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

Press Release.  
March 1, 2017.

The EU, the US, the UK, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Norway and other Western democratic countries should not continue to give large amounts of aid to the increasingly authoritarian Ethiopian regime of the TPLF/EPRDF. In a time where global doors are closing to refugees, why should money from the West continue to prop up a dictatorship that leads to so much suffering and repression, driving many Ethiopians from their homes and country? Yes, Ethiopia is a sovereign country; yet, large amounts of aid from outside sources may be undermining the ability of Ethiopians to hold their own leaders accountable.

If massive aid to Ethiopia is to continue, donors should require— as a key condition of continued aid— greater accountability, meaningful democratic reforms, the release of all political prisoners, and a genuine dialogue leading towards a peaceful resolution of the deepening schism between the minority-led TPLF/EPRDF regime and the Ethiopian people.

On November 9, 2016, Merera Gudina, the Chairman of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) and a major Ethiopian opposition leader, met with members of the European Parliament (EP) in Brussels, Belgium. Two other Ethiopians had also been invited to the meeting: Berhanu Nega, leader of the opposition group, Ginbot 7, designated as a terrorist group by the government, and Ethiopian Olympic Silver Medal winner, Feyissa Lelisa. Their pictures were taken together at the meeting and circulated on the social media. Although Berhanu Nega has openly pledged to use “any means” to bring regime change, Merera Gudina has been a long-time advocate of seeking remedies for rampant injustice through a peaceful, non-violent movement for change.

On December 1, 2016, Gudina returned to Ethiopia from Europe and was met by security officials at the airport who arrested him. He was detained at the infamous Makelelawi Prison in Addis Ababa.

On December 14, 2016, European Parliament (EP) President, Martin Schultz, sent a [letter](#) to Ethiopian government officials seeking an explanation for the arrest of Merera Gudina. In that letter, President Schultz cited information he had received from the Ethiopian ambassador in Brussels that the arrest was linked to contacts Gudina had had with individuals “deemed as terrorists” by the government, probably referring to Ginbot 7’s leader, Berhanu Nega.

A court hearing was held in Addis Ababa on February 23, 2017, where Gudina was formally charged with terrorism, due to that association, and is now awaiting sentencing, possibly on March 3, 2017. He vehemently denies the charges and the association. Most Ethiopians would agree and see the charges as part of the regime’s effort to eliminate the leadership of any adversaries. This is especially the case when those leaders represent large groups that present a threat to the status quo. Gudina is of Oromo ethnicity and is a popular and well-respected leader.

The Oromo make up the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia and have been involved in large-scale, mostly non-violent, protests over the last 16 months. These protests became deadly when government security forces killed over a thousand people, wounded countless others and by their own claims, detained over 20,000 in order to “re-educate them.” Similar protests in the Amhara region, with a similar harsh crackdown from government forces, led to the declaration of a six-month State of Emergency in November 2016, which is still in effect.

**Ethiopia is a country with no opposition, civil society, or political space; all of which resulted in regime claims of winning 100% of the vote in the last national election. Now, under the State of Emergency, citizens’ rights are non-existent, including shutting down access to the Internet. During this time, regime actions, such as arrests, are permitted to be made without court order and detentions can be enforced until the end of the state of emergency. Persons are also restricted from any communication with any persons said to be terrorists or associated with terrorist groups.**

The presence of Berhanu Nega at the EP meeting appears to have been used to justify the wrongful arrest of Gudina and should be challenged once again by the EP as well as by others who are concerned regarding the regime’s severe consequences for freely speaking out, even in an esteemed place like the EP, where, as EP President Schultz writes: *“...the European Parliament is a House of democracy, where different voices can be heard, from foreign governments as well as representatives of opposition groups.”*

**Instead, this is a country that is a partner in the war on terror that has become expert in justifying their repressive actions by accusing most all regime opponents with terrorism. Utilizing the regime’s anti-terrorism law, the charge of “terrorism” is central to the regime’s “catch-all” strategy for silencing its opponents, among which are opposition leaders, journalists, dissidents, democratic activists, human rights defenders, religious leaders and members of civil society. It is worthy to note that killings, threats, intimidation, violence, and false charges, have been so intense that many have had to flee the country or exercise extreme caution and self-censor.**

Now, Gudina joins other members and leaders within his party, the OFC, including Bekele Gerba, OFC’s First Secretary, and Dejene Fita, OFC’s Secretary General, as well as many others who have dared to speak out against the repressive regime of the TPLF/EPRDF. No one should wonder why Ethiopia follows only Eritrea in being the second largest jailer of journalists in Africa. The real question to ponder is why Ethiopia’s deep infractions of justice have not resulted in more meaningful action from those providing for its support.

There should be concern regarding the increasing irrationality of the regime as they attempt to suppress, rather than respond to, the rising tide of discontent. We are among those deeply concerned by the regime’s lack of willingness to genuinely explore meaningful options for peaceful transition. Some questions must be considered. For example:

- **How can the state of emergency be lifted so it brings greater long-term peace and not an explosion of built-up resentment and anger?**
- **How can the financial system and economy recover, both of which are experiencing increased difficulties, exacerbated by the draconian restrictions imposed by the state of emergency?**
- **How can the country help the many Ethiopians who are already hungry from the famine?**

Donor countries should ask themselves why they should continue to provide money to a regime that arrests and charges people like Gudina for taking part in a meeting at the EP?

**Greater accountability for that support is critically important, especially now when pressure for democratic change is rising from within the country. The current state of emergency may be keeping things under control for the moment, but it is only a stop gap measure that is not sustainable. Those free countries who care about these things, should not heedlessly continue aid without considering how it may be used to stoke conditions for violence.**

Will the people of Ethiopia finally realize the solution of the country is to approach the problem as a national, systemic problem rather than the problem of an individual, an ethnic group or a political party?

The only way to win the struggle for all of us, including the TPLF/EPRDF, is to claim the country and move away from sectarian liberation movements. Using the same format as the ethnic-based TPLF, who are really in charge of everything, will not change the system and bring a lasting solution. They were not the first to adopt such a model, but let them be the last.

Finally, as a country that has a history of strong religious faith, what difference would it make to our future if we embraced the God-given humanity of every one of us— *putting humanity before ethnicity* or any other difference? If we were to genuinely do so, our accountability would not have to be enforced by donors or outsiders. We would instead be accountable to do what was right for each other. We would correct our own injustices and seek the good of our neighbors, better ensuring our own freedom and justice. Importantly, we cannot only look to our neighbor to make all the changes needed; this will require our own as well.

Ethiopia is in a crisis. The consequences of the State of Emergency on the country are great; yet, lifting the restrictions could also cause instability and violence. The TPLF/EPRDF has put themselves in a corner with decreasing options— most of which are unsatisfactory. Yet, ironically, this realization may become the necessary incentive for them to consider a different way out of this dilemma— with a better possible outcome for both themselves and others.

The people of Ethiopia also have choices; many of them dangerous and destructive; but other options exist if people are willing— options like genuine dialogue, reconciliation, meaningful reforms and the restoration of justice.

It is these options that promise the best future for all of us. Will all sides come together around a common vision and then do the hard work of building a new Ethiopia for all of us, not one for only a single ethnic group or a few elite? It is time to put that model in our history books of the past, not the future.

---

Please do not hesitate to email me if you have comments to: [Obang@solidaritymovement.org](mailto:Obang@solidaritymovement.org)