

United States Senate

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July 10, 2007

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
c/o Ambassador of Ethiopia
3506 International Drive, N.W.
Washington, DC 20008

Your Excellency,

As a member of the United States Senate with a deep interest in issues relating to the Horn of Africa, I would like extend my greetings. I represent the state of Minnesota, which is home to a large community of Ethiopian immigrants. I am also a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, and I have been a strong supporter of efforts to bring stability to the Horn of Africa region where Ethiopia plays a very important role.

Today I am writing with respect to a specific issue that I am concerned may not be given the proper attention in broader bilateral discussions between the U.S. and Ethiopia. The state of Minnesota is home to a large population of African immigrants from all over the region, including a community of Ogaden who hail from the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. I have long listened to concerns over the treatment of the Ogaden population in Ethiopia, which has driven many of them to resettle in places such as Minnesota. I respect the challenges that your government faces in governing a multi-ethnic state, and with that understanding I would like to offer a few comments for your consideration.

It is through my contact with the Ogaden community of Minnesota that I have long heard reports of discrimination and other complaints by the Ogaden people against the Government of Ethiopia. While I understand that there are specific elements in the Ogaden region who are not addressing their grievances against your government through peaceful means, the majority of the population in the Ogaden has a desire to live in peace. I would therefore urge you to ensure that the Ethiopian military makes a clear distinction between combatants and civilians, and prohibit the targeting of Ogaden civilians as it addresses the conflict with the Ogaden National Liberation Front. Again, I understand that the nature of the conflict is complex, but believe that more can be done to ensure that the innocents of the Ogaden region are protected. I also respectfully urge you to take actions that demonstrate the commitment of the Government of Ethiopia to respecting the rights of the Ogaden people.

Beyond the importance of the respect for human rights in the Ogaden region, I believe it is also important that the freedom of press be upheld there as well. To this end, all media should be allowed free access to the Ogaden region, as well as all areas of Ethiopia. Such freedom of movement for the press would be consistent with your government's commitment to placing Ethiopia on a path towards progress. I was alarmed to hear of the detainment of three New York Times employees in May who were investigating the situation in the Ogaden, especially as freedom of the press is greatly valued here in the U.S. I was relieved by the subsequent release of the New York Times employees, and hope that the case of the New York Times reporters is not representative of the overall treatment of journalists in Ethiopia.

Your Excellency, I appreciate the steps that your government has taken to strengthen bilateral relations with the U.S. and provide key support in the War on Terror. It is because I would like to continue to strengthen the relationship with Ethiopia that I humbly offer my advice. Freedom and the respect for human rights are of fundamental importance to policymakers here in the U.S., and I would encourage you and your government to demonstrate a similar commitment to these ideals through actions. It is my view that the Ogaden, and all ethnic groups living within Ethiopia, should be treated with respect and dignity.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of my input.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Norm Coleman". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Norm Coleman
United States Senator