

# United States Senate

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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON AGING

February 12, 2007

The Honorable Jendayi Frazer  
Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary Frazer,

As a Senator with a deep interest in issues relating to the Horn of Africa, I would like to applaud your diplomatic efforts to address the numerous issues we currently face in the region. Our diplomatic engagement is critical to dealing with some very macro-level problems that have recently moved to the forefront of our international agenda.

Today I am writing with respect to a specific issue that is often unaddressed in our broader discussions with leaders in the Horn of Africa. As you know, Minnesota is home to a large population of African immigrants from all over the region, including a community of ethnic Oromo who have ties to both Ethiopia and Somalia. I have long listened to concerns over the treatment of the Oromo population in Ethiopia. Indeed, it is their persecution that has driven many of them to resettle in places such as Minnesota. Many Oromo have also fled to Somalia, and there is a sizable number of refugees residing there.

Specifically, I am concerned over allegations of abuse by the military of Ethiopia that have recently been brought to my attention by the Oromo American Citizen Council of Minnesota. The Oromo community has been informed of human rights abuses committed against the Oromo refugees in Somalia by the Ethiopian forces that entered the country to combat the Council of Islamic Courts. Among other things, these alleged human rights abuses include arbitrary detention and harassment of Oromo refugees.

It is my understanding that Oromo refugees have long lived peacefully in Somalia, especially when compared to the experience of the community in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the entrance of Ethiopian forces into Somalia seems to have brought the discrimination of the Oromos along with it. It is my strongly held view that the Oromo community in both Ethiopia and Somalia should be treated with dignity and afforded the same protection by security forces as other citizens receive.

Given the high level of engagement that exists with Ethiopia, as well as the substantial amount of aid provided by the U.S., I believe it is our responsibility to use our influence to ensure that human rights are respected by the Ethiopians. The Oromo community, or any other group in the Horn of Africa, should not live under the fear of persecution.

As you continue to engage with the Ethiopians and Somalis to address significant issues in the Horn of Africa, I respectfully request that you include respect for human rights as a top priority in your discussions. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norm Coleman". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "N" and "C".

Norm Coleman  
United States Senate