

Dear Sir,

Let me begin by extending the gratitude of mine and my friends here in Khinto prison for the concern you & your government expressed about our arrest.

Back in 2004, it was during the US Presidential election that I first came to know about you. Although I was little cognizant about US politics (or politics in general), I discussed about the campaigns and possible outcome of the electi with my schoolmates. Only after a few months, the historic 2005 Ethiopian National electi took place. This election differed from its predecessors in that, the process up to polling day was majorly democratic and this led many Ethiopians to hope for a witnessing the first democratic change of government in the country's history. But, it was not to be. After realizing the miscalculati of winning the electi without rigging, the true face of the regime reemerged. Unfortunately, the aftermath of the much hoped about electi was bloodshed of civilians and the arrest of thousands including journalists and oppositi leaders. As a seventeen year old back then, the electi provided me with the first serious experience of democratic practice I could grasp of the events. It also implanted in me an interest to follow and seriously consider political unfolding in the country.

It could be said that, it is the extenssion of this interest and care in me and my friends that led to the opportunity for us to find each other and form the blogger's and pro-democracy activists group we called Zone 9. All nine members of Zone 9 are young and passionate to contribute to the democratizati process in the country. It was under the aim of creating a platform for our fellow Ethiopian youth to discuss political, economic and social issues of the country that we launched our blog with the motto - "We blog because we care".

Although our arrest came almost after two years after the launchip of the blog, inherently alarmed by and independent voice, blocked our blog from being accessed in Ethiopia early on. Understanding this to be a not so surprising interference, ~~from the regime~~ we continued to share our views and campaigns on different issues via social media. Of course, finally, the regime took the drastic measure of arresting six of the Zoners and three journalists that have nothing to do with Zone 9. Whenever Ethiopians demand and exercise their constitutional rights openly, the regime resorts to its security

apparatus to silence them. This was what happened in our case. We are now facing fifteen years to life imprisonment or death penalty.

After ~~meeting~~ I met you at Addis Ababa University <sup>Having a progressive personality,</sup> the current Minister of Foreign Affairs of the FDRE invited me and a couple of other friends to his office for a free discussion in which I raised my concern about the regime's deliberate tactics employed to push young citizens as further away from participating in politics freely by making it a perilous engagement. I tried to highlight the negative impact this is inflicting on the political sphere. I told him that I was risking a lot by merely expressing my thoughts freely. At that time, my arrest was only an abstract possibility.

The absolutist regime, using its security apparatus, continues, still to day, to silence any form of dissent using the unconstitutional anti-terrorism law enacted in 2009. This has practically made it impossible for citizens to exercise their constitutional rights without risking a jail term or being forced into exile. Because of the repressive regime, the FDRE constitution is powerless to protect citizens from being abused ~~both~~ psychologically & physically.

It is quite common for the Federal Police and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) to use force to solicit confession from suspects being investigated; I and my friends fall victims of the abuse at the Federal Police Crime Investigation Sector (commonly known as Ma'ekelawi). The abuse they commit include beatings with electric wire (after forcing the suspect to be naked), forcing to do heavy physical exercise, investigating with minimal rest and keeping in a solitary confinement <sup>a two by two dark room,</sup> until suspects agree to incriminate themselves and others.

This happens to suspects regardless of the crime they are suspected of, their age, sex or health condition. The torture gets stronger at the NISS. I felt a great deal of agony when I learned three Oromo University students confessed of committing a particular crime all in an effort to save their lives. One of them allegedly committed suicide under NISS custody.

We spent the first 85 days of our arrest at the Federal Police Crime Investigation Sector where nine of us were kept separately in rooms that were locked all day without access to natural light. We were given twenty minute

toilet break twice a day. In case of emergency, one has to be lucky to get an understanding officer or sense himself in a bucket within the room. The ~~room~~ rooms were very crowded with suspects all over the country. We slept, ate and do whatever we have to do in the little space available. The suffocati was ~~was~~ sometimes unbearable. In the last decade, no independent humanitarian or ~~human~~ human rights organizati was granted access to visit the facility.

The overall investigati was ridiculous. I was, for instance, repeatedly asked what kind of relationship I had with you, how and why I was invited to the BBC's Hardtalk program and about the question I raised to you. Similarly, my engagements with the German Foreign Minister and ~~other~~ representatives of other countries and international organizati was also part of the investigati. My replies to the ~~inquiries~~ inquiries of the police is included in my statement to the police. I can't figure out its relevance in an investigati of a suspected terrorist.

To be honest with you, how much time I will be spending in prison is not what is on top of my mind right now. Rather, I am worried about the amount of additional sacrificati required until the international community, specifically your government, to assume a firm pragmatic stance in demanding fundamental progress in the democratizati process of the country against the billions of dollars pouring the regime's way. I don't want you to get me wrong here. It is not that I don't appreciate the earnest assistance being forwarded to the development process in my country. It is just that I strongly believe effective monitoring of such assistance can <sup>only</sup> be employed where there is a government accountable to its people. It is ironic that the world's top recipient of development assistance is without effective monitoring and accountability.

On top of this, I am certain you ~~share~~ share the view that international relationship should be built on values both sides adhere to if it is meant to be durable. In his book the Audacity of Hope, President Obama states the true test of what we ~~value~~ really value is where we invest the time, energy and money that we have. I understand the difficulty you face in striking a balance between maintain security and stability and promoting democri-

