

# Medrek Conducts Successful Campaign in North America

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These days, in Ethiopian communities around the world, the upcoming Ethiopian elections are hot news; and Medrek has all the headlines. If what Medrek has achieved so far is any indication, it threatens to be a permanent fixture there for some time to come. Medrek, the biggest coalition of opposition parties in Ethiopia, has been steadily gaining momentum and has now recharged the Ethiopian public both inside and outside of the country as the Ethiopian elections draw near.



Just this week, Medrek party leaders, Ato Gebru Asrat, Engineer Gizachew Shiferaw, Dr. Negasso Gidada, and Ato Seeye Abraha concluded a successful two-week campaign in North America. The Medrek delegation spent its two-weeks crisscrossing the United States and conducting lively discussions with the Ethiopian Diaspora. It also held consultations with United States government officials and members of congress on wide ranging issues that have both domestic and regional implications.

The tour, which started in Seattle on the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, was marked by a spirit of national unity and renewed hope for democratic change in Ethiopia. This optimism and a new vision of a unified and democratic Ethiopia continued as the delegation made its stops in San Jose on April 12, Las Vegas on April 14, Atlanta on April 17, Washington DC on April 18, Los Angeles on April 24, and finally in Boston on April 25. The discussions, deliberations, and debates hit a crescendo at the meeting in Washington DC, home to the largest concentration

of Ethiopians outside of Ethiopia. There, a diverse gathering of Ethiopians gave an enthusiastic support to Medrek and acknowledged what has been achieved so far in such a short time in transforming the political landscape of the nation.

During the tour, the delegation held discussions with Ethiopians on the upcoming national elections, the dire socio-economic situation, and the narrowing political space in the country. The success of the town hall meetings was amply reflected in the diverse group of Ethiopians the discussions attracted and how, for the first time in Ethiopian political dialogue, the leadership dealt with the substantive issues surrounding ethnic and religious tensions, viability of peaceful political change, party leadership accountability, and the strength of the Medrek coalition to stay united in the face of tremendous pressure from the ruling regime. The question and answer sessions were lively but always civil and educational. The meetings were exemplary lessons in the practice of democracy rarely seen in Ethiopian politics.

# Diplomatic Progress



The Medrek delegation spent a significant amount of its time consulting with US administration officials, Senate staffers, and US House members in the capital. On April 19<sup>th</sup>, the delegation briefed Mr. David Ramseur, the Chief of Staff and Mr. Matt Payne-Funk, the Administrative Director to Senator Mark Begich (D-AK) on regional security, democratization, and economic assistance to Ethiopia. Mr. Seeye Abraha led the discussion by giving an overview of the overall

political atmosphere in Ethiopia and the narrowing political space in the country. During the meeting, Senate staffers acknowledged the predicament of the opposition in Ethiopia and solicited guidance on how to better align US actions with the reality on the ground. The Medrek leaders urged the Senate to take a strong and unequivocal stance on human rights, the rule of law, freedom of the press, and denounce, in the strongest of terms, Zenawi's dictatorial rule. The Medrek delegation also called on the United States to closely observe the upcoming elections.

Later that day, the delegation met with Mr. Donald Yamamoto who is currently serving as the Principal Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the US State Department. Also present was Mr. Joel R Weigert who is the Ethiopian Desk Officer at the Office of East African Affairs in the State Department. The delegation highlighted the continuing imprisonment of Birtukan Mideksa and other political prisoners as its primary concern. Discussion also included the severe restrictions on the few remaining independent media, the jamming of the VOA broadcasts to Ethiopia, the

lack of strong repudiations of human rights violations by the Ethiopian government, and the continuing and troubling vacancy of a permanent American Ambassador to Ethiopia. The lack of accountability of the estimated One Billion dollar in monetary aid to Ethiopia was also raised. The delegation pointed out that most of the money was misappropriated and used to prolong the regime's repressive rule. Mr. Yamamoto acknowledged past missteps but assured the delegation that the United States will take corrective steps including closely scrutinizing future aid to Ethiopia to ensure accountability and



transparency. Mr. Yamamoto promised swift action on most of the matters raised by the delegation.

The diplomatic offensive continued the next day with a meeting with Congressman Donald Payne (D – NJ) at 9 AM, Ms Sarah



Margon, the Senior Foreign Policy Advisor to Senator Russ Feingold (D – WI) at 11:30 AM, and finally with congressman Mike Honda (D – CA) at 2:00 PM. In addition to raising political, security, and human rights concerns, the Medrek officials detailed the major obstacles to establishing regional stability and security in East Africa. Quoting President Obama, Medrek leaders underscored that securing lasting peace in the region can only be achieved by building stable and democratic institutions and governments that are subservient to the will of the people.

The Medrek delegation further stressed that U.S. and International security interests will incur irreparable damage if the US falls victim to short-term gains promised by the divide and conquer policies the Zenawi regime. Congressmen Payne and Honda renewed their support for democratic reforms in Ethiopia. Responding to the reports of the misuse of US aid money by the Ethiopian government, both

congressmen pledged to investigate and finally put an end to this practice. Ms Margon reiterated Senator Feingold's concerns about the intimidation of the opposition in Ethiopia, as expressed in his recent letter to the Obama Administration where he identified the Zenawi regime as "*intent on preventing a repeat of the relatively open 2005 elections ... [and that] there is no way that elections can be fair, let alone credible, with opposition leaders in jail or unable to campaign freely.*" Ms Margon also promised to quiz, on these very issues, the Ethiopian Health Minister, Mr. Tewodros Adhanom, during his upcoming scheduled meeting with the Senator.

Having successfully concluded both its consultations with constituents and its diplomatic campaign, the Medrek delegation now heads back to Ethiopia to continue its celebrated fight to bring all Ethiopians under one democratic umbrella and defeat Zenawi's regime at the ballot.

