

# Joint Civic and Political Task Force of Ethiopians in Europe

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## Ethiopia: The Price of Democracy

*A Press Release Issued in Connection with the First Anniversary of the May 2005  
Ethiopian Elections (Monday, May 15, 2006)*

On May 15, 2006, it will be exactly one year since an unprecedented number of Ethiopian voters went out to vote in what promised to be a founding election only to see their democratic dreams and aspirations turn into their worst nightmare as of the following day.

In response to the strong showing of the opposition parties in the polls, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has launched a massive crackdown on the opposition leaders, their supporters and civil society and peaceful protestors in an effort to forcefully contain the mounting popular discontent and anger. Consequently, over one hundred people, mostly peaceful demonstrators, have been killed by security forces while many more are maimed and tens of thousands of young people are incarcerated in makeshift detentions camps. Mr. Zenawi has also charged over 120 detainees for 'treason and genocide'. The detainees consist of nearly all the leaders of the main opposition party of the Coalition for Unity and democracy (CUD) and MPs, the Mayor-elect of Addis Ababa, independent journalists, leaders of civic organisations and scores of dissidents, including dozens from the Ethiopian Diaspora.



It is, therefore, with a deep sense of gratitude that we welcome the joint meeting organized by the Development and Foreign Relations Committees and the Human Rights sub-Committee of the European Parliament in Strasbourg under the title, Ethiopia: One year after the elections. The meeting will hear the testimony of representatives of the Commission and Presidency of the European Union, the Ethiopian Government and the main opposition parties. Equally, importantly, **Mrs. Nathalie Amiot**, the author of the popular blog **Addis Ferengi** who has recently been forced to leave Ethiopia, **Dr. Martin Hill of Amnesty International**, **Mr. Obang O. Metho of the Anuak Justice Council** and **Mr. Yared Hailemariam, an exiled human rights defender**, are expected to provide the assembly with well documented and vivid accounts of human rights violations committed under the current regime.

**We believe that the holding of such a meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2006 is a fitting recognition of the millions of Ethiopian voters who expressed their faith in Democracy and all those who have paid and are paying huge sacrifice on a daily basis over the past 12 months as a result. However, the past 12 months will also be remembered for the failure**

**of the leading members of the international community to live up to their rhetorical commitments towards the promotion of democracy and human rights around the globe when it comes to Ethiopia.** We are particularly dismayed to see that member states of the European Union and EU decision makers were not immune to the above. As noted in the final report of the EU Election Observer Mission, the EU has been instrumental in convincing opposition leaders and candidates to stay put and in inculcating public confidence in the electoral process against the backdrop of deep-seated scepticism about the government's intention, which was born out of lived experience, and the worrisome developments over the last few weeks prior to polling day.

Unfortunately, there is a glaring inconsistency in EU policy since polling day, in comparison both with the pre-election period and with EU's policy in other contexts. Thus, while the EU-EOM and the European parliament expressed great concern over electoral irregularities and the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, the Commission and the Council had appeared less inclined to pressure the government to abide by its pledges and obligation to respect international human rights and electoral standards. This was displayed in their recognition of the ruling parties victory and insistence that the opposition and the public to do the same even before the main Election Observer groups have issued their final reports and bypassing EU-EOM's preliminary findings that post electoral process did not live up to international standards and the aspirations of the Ethiopian people. More important, one year and countless cases of serious human rights violations later, the Council and the Commission seem to be of the view that the situation in Ethiopia is not serious enough to warrant the imposition of measures that have been taken elsewhere with relative ease, Bylerussia being the most recent example.

As part of the series of activities being organized worldwide, **Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia will hold a rally in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 15 May 2006 from 5:00pm.** The participants will demand the EU decision makers and other members of the international community to **take concrete and principled actions aimed at halting the ongoing crimes against humanity in Ethiopia, ensuring the unconditional release of all the prisoners of conscience and putting the derailed democratization process back on track.**

**Meeting point of the rally: Allée du printemps (in front of Louise Weiss Building), Strasbourg, France.**

We also take this opportunity to join calls already made and request Ethiopians and friends of Ethiopia around the world to organize and take part in a series of coordinated activities during at least the following 30 days in order to commemorate the hundreds of Ethiopians who have lost their lives and whose life plans, dreams and aspirations have been shattered through systematic human rights violations and to press for justice and the unconditional release of all political prisoners. Such activities must also be directed at sensitizing the international community about the human rights crisis in Ethiopia may include teach-ins, workshops, video screening and the distribution of tracts involve and the likes that shall be organized at the level of neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces and together with local and international civic organization.

*Joint Civic and Poitical Task force of Ethiopians in Europe, Brussels, 14 May 2005.*

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