

PRESS RELEASE
Qaliti Qal Kidan

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February 8, 2007 and February 9, 2007

Panel Discusses Human Rights in Ethiopia at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

The panel discussion on human rights in Ethiopia co-sponsored by the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, Amnesty International and Qaliti Qal Kidan (Qaliti Covenant) was warmly received by a capacity crowd in attendance. Josh Rubenstein, the Northeastern director of the Amnesty International USA, Northeast Region, was the moderator for the event dubbed: " Ethiopia: Peaceful Resistance and Civil Disobedience as Dissent."

Dr. Meqdes Mesfin, the first panel speaker, set the parameters of the discussions by discussing the major events that took place after the May 2005 elections. She described the changing patterns in the Ethiopians government's explanation of what happened during the protest. She said that based on her research she found that the official Ethiopian government's explanation for the violence kept shifting over time from "It is the opposition, who is responsible", to "The government had to act swiftly and decisively to halt an armed insurgency", to " Police panicked when met with such volume of protesters".

She wrapped up by saying that the crisis in Ethiopia today is not one of political partisanship but a need for accountability for human rights violations. She closed by saying that **only with the release and the involvement** of the prisoners at Qaliti would a sustainable resolution be found that would be based on accountability for human rights violations to eliminate the possibility of vengeful retribution and ensure the institution of the rule of law.

Judge Frehiywot Samuel presented a discussion of the methodology used by the Inquiry commission in investigating the facts surrounding the violence and killings of protesters in June and November of 2005. Judge Frehiywot said the Commission undertook its investigation by carefully collecting data from health care facilities, police agencies and government officials. He said the Commission visited the various locations where the protests had taken place, as well as prisons and other sites.

As part of its investigation, the Commission also interviewed Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and top police and defense ministry officials. Judge Frehiywot stated that the Commission determined on an 8-2 vote that government security forces used excessive force to quell the protests, and unanimously found that the conduct of the security officers was in violation of the human rights of the protesters and the

constitution of Ethiopia. The judge stated that the government had provided the Commission a list of names of 30,000 detainees in the post election period. The judge clarified that while they have evidence of documented casualties during the protest, he was making no speculations as to how many others may have been killed or injured in incidents on dates other than the ones the commission was authorized to investigate.

Ato Mitiku Teshome described the findings of the Commission in greater detail. Ato Mitiku said he and other members of the Commission were under continuous surveillance by security officials following leaks that the Commission had reached findings unfavorable to the government. There was much pressure to get the commission to rewrite its findings consistent with a prior whitewash in the Anuak massacre matter. He and the others left the country once it became clear that their lives were in imminent danger.

A short but powerful segment of the Inquiry Commission's deliberations was screened with English subtitles for the benefit of the non-Ethiopians in the audience.

Prof. Al Mariam, the last speaker on the panel stated he was there to speak about "Human rights and government wrongs in Ethiopia." He itemized the list of human rights guaranteed to Ethiopian citizens under the Universal Declaration of Human rights and other international conventions. He also listed a catalogue of "**government wrongs**".

He said: "The problem with the so-called 'crimes against the state' is that they are absurd as they are untenable. Charging a 76 year old retired university professor, a former UN genocide prosecutor at the Rwanda tribunal and former UN Special Envoy in the Cameroon/Nigeria border dispute, one of the most distinguished women judges in Ethiopia and a whole bunch of academics and newspaper reporters and editors with genocide just does not make sense." He made a plea to the international human rights community to join the Ethiopian human rights community in advancing freedom, democracy and human rights in Ethiopia by supporting H.R. 5680.

A sustained and animated question and answer period followed the presentations.

On February 9, 2007, members of the Greater Boston Ethiopian Community hosted an event at the Williams Middle School complex in Chelsea,

Massachusetts. Councilor Mike Mekonnen introduced his fellow City Councilors with whom he had drafted and signed a resolution calling upon the Congress of the United States of America to support the fight for human rights democratization and economic developing in Ethiopia by enacting HR 5680. They also promised to facilitate communication with other municipalities to support the cause of the release of the prisoners of conscience and the aforementioned legislation.

In addition, Councilor Leo Robinson shared with the audience, and presented to Dr. Meqdes Mesfin, a letter he had received from Congressman Mike Capuano, expressing his commitment to working with the City Council and with Amnesty International USA in calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Professor Mesfin Woldemariam and all other prisoners of conscience detained since 2005.

The audience expressed its sincere appreciation for the presence of these men of integrity and thanked them for their commitment and dedication to the truth and the human rights of their fellow citizens in spite of the adversities they knew they would face.

Qaliti Qalkidan is grateful for the support it has received from Enem LeHagere, Democracy for Ethiopia, and many members of the community for organizing both of these events and providing the material, logistical, technical and human resources that was required to make this event a success.

Our thanks also goes to the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Josh Rubenstein of Amnesty International, Northeast Region, Councilors Mike Mekonnen, Leo Robinson, and Calvin Brown of Chelsea as well as many others who have worked on promoting the cause of the release of the prisoners of conscience, and the exposure of human rights violations in Ethiopia with a view towards the establishment of the rule of law, and respect for human rights in Ethiopia.