

**PREPARED REMARKS OF CONGRESSMAN DONALD PAYNE  
ETHIOPIA BRIEFING  
NOVEMBER 16, 2006**

I would like to thank all of you for coming today to attend this important briefing by members of the Ethiopia Commission of Inquiry and human rights advocates. Despite all the important activities today in Congress, we feel this is equally important to pay attention to and to help find a better way of addressing problems. For over a year, I constantly argued that the Ethiopian government used excessive force against innocent civilians. Many innocent civilians lost their lives in June and November 2005. Parliament established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate the killings.

The Commission interviewed over 1300 people and spent months investigating and documenting what they saw and heard. When the time came to submit the report, parliament was adjourned a day early, denying the Commission the opportunity to present their findings. The decision was deliberate in order to force the Commission to change its findings. In August, I was told by a senior Ethiopian official that the Commission did not finish its work. After constant threat and harassment, the Chairman of the Commission and the Deputy Chair left the country with the report. Over the past week, a friend spoke to both the chair and deputy chairman of the Commission. They clearly stated that they "can not turn their backs on all those people who risked their lives to speak to us." They said "the truth must come out and Ethiopians must know what happened in June and November."

I have seen the reports and the video of the deliberation of the Commission. And today you will see some segment of the video and the document they prepared. One can not question the quality of the work nor the authenticity of the documents. The faces of the Commissioners are clear to see and the message and conclusions loud and clear. The data presented in these reports and the videotaped testimony of the members of the Commission as they cast their votes further reveals the degree to which a systematic crackdown was in place. I repeatedly stated then and the Commission agrees that the Government used excessive force against civilians in June and November. I said then and I repeat again, those who gave the orders and those who carried out the order must be held accountable for this unspeakable crime.

The commission finally voted 8-2 that indeed excessive force was used. The committee chairman, Supreme Court Judge Frehiywot Samuel, stated that "many people were killed arbitrarily." He stated further that "Old men were killed while in their homes, and children were also victims of the attack while playing in the garden." A member of the Commission and an Ethiopian Orthodox priest was recorded as saying, "based on my eyes, ears and knowledge the actions taken were 100 percent wrong."

We must never forget the victims. The victims are real people like 14 year old Mathewos Girma and 25 year old Tamam Muktar. Most troubling to me is about the killing of Alem's mother, Etenesh Yimam. She was killed in her home in front of her family for simply asking why they are arresting her husband, who was elected in May. Etenesh is

dead, her husband in prison, and her daughter in hiding somewhere in Africa. She was supposed to be with us today. But the U.S. embassy denied her visa to attend this briefing. It is astonishing that our government issues visas to the masterminds of genocide like the Sudan security chief, but not to real victims of abuse. The same goes for Wolde Michael, the Deputy Chairman of the Commission. He was also not able to get a visa to join us today. But he submitted his testimony and a video of his testimony. His testimony will be read and his story will be told.

This is the more reason why we should pass H.R. 5680, Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Advancement Act of 2006. I want to personally read to you what Alem sent us this morning.