

21.6.07

Ana Gomes, MEP

Human Rights in Ethiopia

I was Head of the EUEOM in Ethiopia in 2005. Many opposition leaders told the EU then that the elections would be another scam by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to fool the international community and that they would all end up in jail or killed. We, the EU, persuaded them not to boycott the elections, promising to watch and ensure accountability.

The Ethiopians believed us and voted massively and orderly on that 15 May. However, when people protested peacefully against electoral fraud, government forces resorted to brutal repression. In June and November hundreds were killed in massacres and thousands were wounded and imprisoned. Including the opposition leaders who had warned the EU.

They are among the 38 political prisoners found guilty, last June 11, in a farcical trial, in which they were not allowed to effectively present their defence. Sentences are announced for next July, possibly carrying the death penalty. Against some of the most representative, articulate and courageous leaders of Ethiopia: elected MPs, human rights defenders, journalists, activists for development, teachers and other prisoners of conscience. Prof. Mesfin Woldemariam, 77 years old, and the respected founder of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, is one of them.

The EU is the main aid donor in Ethiopia. I have seen it making the difference there. It can do it

again. If the EU Commission, Council and Member States stop turning a blind eye.

They must act immediately, holding the Government of Ethiopia accountable to human rights commitments under the Cotonou Agreement. Holding Prime Minister Meles Zenawi personally responsible and pressing for the release of the prisoners, without delay and unconditionally.

They must follow the recommendations made by the European Parliament in the resolution to be adopted today.

Not to further let down the Ethiopian people. Not to further discredit Europe's commitment towards the development of Africa. Not to betray the most basic European values and principles.