

Archived: Friday, April 2, 2021 4:39:42 PM

From: Aho, Loren K.

To: Charles, Donna; Gallagher, Meghan

Subject: Ethiopian Ambassador Letter to Chairman Meeks and Ranking Member McCaul Regarding Letter to Secretary Blinken

Sensitivity: Normal

Attachments:

[Ambassador Fitsum Arega Letter to Chairman Meeks and Ranking Member McCaul.pdf](#)

Donna and Meghan,

Ambassador Fitsum Arega drafted the attached letter to Chairman Gregory Meeks and Ranking Member Michael McCaul in response to the letter they sent to Secretary Blinken the other day. He asked me to send it to you.

The Ambassador hopes to have the opportunity to meet with Chairman Meeks and Ranking Member McCaul to discuss the concerns they raised in their letter, report on the progress that is being made in Ethiopia, and to answer any questions that they have.

I look forward to continuing to work with you.

Best,

Loren

This material is distributed by Venable LLP on behalf of the Embassy of Ethiopia. Additional information is available at the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

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Embassy of Ethiopia

Office of the Ambassador

March 31, 2021

The Honorable Gregory Meeks
Chairman
The Honorable Michael McCaul
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Your Letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Ethiopia

Dear Chairman Meeks and Ranking Member McCaul:

Allow me to thank both of you for your interest and concern about allegations of human rights violations and the general political situation in Ethiopia. I would like to assure you that the Ethiopian Government regards human rights protections of its citizens as its highest priority and is fully committed to uphold its human rights obligations under international law and conventions.

First, I wish to respectfully point out certain facts apparently overlooked in your letter to Secretary Blinken. The Ethiopian government was forced to undertake a law enforcement operation in the Tigray region of Ethiopia after the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) launched a surprise and devastating attack on the Northern Command of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces on November 4, 2020. Thousands of federal troops died, suffered grievous injury and were subjected to the most inhumane treatment.

The Ethiopian Government has swiftly responded to ensure the rule of law and uphold the Constitution. Many informed commentators have likened the attack on the Northern Command in Tigray to the attack on the U.S. Army at Fort Sumter in 1861. Like the Confederate militia, the TPLF's aim was to bombard the Northern Command, force the surrender of federal troops, seize military property and take over military installations. Fort Sumter became a watershed moment in the American Civil War. Fortunately, Ethiopian federal troops were able to respond decisively to the TPLF attack and avert a destructive civil war.

I wish to underscore the fact that the Ethiopian Federal Government exercised maximum restraint in responding to the TPLF attack and offered their leaders ample opportunities to surrender and defend themselves in a court of law.

As you are aware, Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed is deeply concerned about the reports of atrocities that have been committed. He has repeatedly stated that he is fully committed to investigating all allegations of human rights abuses and that anyone found to have engaged in these acts will face justice for their crimes. He made this clear to President Joe Biden's emissary, The Honorable Senator Chris Coons during his visit to Ethiopia last week.

Over the past weeks, there have been notable achievements not fully acknowledged in your letter to Secretary Blinken. In order to provide full transparency and thoroughness in your finding, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission is now working jointly with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to investigate cases of alleged human rights violations and abuses.

The Ethiopian Government has provided full access to international humanitarian organizations to deliver humanitarian assistance. In this regard, I wish to inform you there is great need that the U.S. could help meet and alleviate conditions. Ethiopia has been providing nearly 70 percent of the humanitarian assistance to date. I must say that we have been disappointed by the fact that too many of our international partners who had expressed their concerns about the need for humanitarian relief have failed to offer much needed resources to help alleviate the situation.

The regional transitional government has been operating in Tigray for the past several months in consultations with faith and civic leaders and others. The civil service has also been reactivated and is providing public service. As you may be aware, the TPLF destroyed the region's infrastructure as it retreated into the bushes. Roads, bridges, schools, health facilities, ground and air transport services are under reconstruction.

In your letter, you called for the use of "targeted sanctions to help bring an end to the crisis." I am dismayed by your call for sanctions before credible preliminary investigation have even taken place. Basic principles of fairness would dictate punitive actions and sanction based on facts, not half-truths, speculation and reports with hidden political agendas.

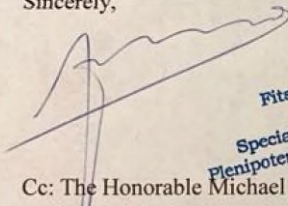
Your call for what appears to be blanket sanctions is not only counterproductive to the goal of providing support for those in need but also significantly undermines the two nations' long cooperative relationship. The U.S. should be working to ensure that funds and supplies are going to those in need, not in threatening behavior that will diminish cooperative efforts to bring much needed help to those in need.

I wish to take special exception to your statement about “ethnic cleansing”. The Ethiopian Government categorically rejects any and all notions and practices of “ethnic cleansing”. The Ethiopian Government will never tolerate any such practices in its territory, nor will it turn a blind eye to such crimes regardless of the circumstances. The Ethiopian Government will take maximum action against anyone suspected of ethnic cleansing or involvement in human rights violations.

I am certain that once a full investigation is completed, the evidence will show that the Ethiopian Government has lived up to its own constitutional mandate and international obligations. I respectfully request that U.S. officials refrain from using such an inflammatory phrase without legally competent evidence. We should work together to ascertain the truth unvarnished by political rhetoric and overstatement.

I want to express my appreciation for commitment to improved bilateral relations between the United States and Ethiopia and good will as we reinvigorate our long enduring relationship. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you and share with you updates and answer your questions.

Sincerely,



Fitsum Arega Gebrekidan
Ambassador
Special Envoy, Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic
Republic of Ethiopia

Cc: The Honorable Michael McCaul

The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State

The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary of the Treasury



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