

Testimony of Girum Alemayehu
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Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and
International Organizations

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‘Reviewing Current Developments in Ethiopia’

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the situation in Ethiopia. I would like to open my testimony first by thanking my representative, the Honorable Mike Coffman (CO-6) for his support to the Ethiopian-American constituents in his district and for giving us the forum to voice our concern about current developments in Ethiopia. I also would like to recognize the active participation of all Ethiopians from all walks of life in advocating the passage of HR 128.

HR 128 was passed on April 10, 2018 and in the same month the long-lived struggles of the Ethiopian people resulted in disintegration of the EPRDF from within. The former prime minister was unable to control the situation, even after declaring the state of emergency, and resigned. Following that a new vibrant Prime Minister was appointed. I give full credit to Abiy Ahmed, Lemma Megeressa Gedu Andargachew and Demeke Mekonen for their extraordinary work in transforming Ethiopia from a looming ethnic based civil war into an unprecedented of civil peace.

Ethiopia today is undergoing peaceful changes unlike any that has been seen in its long history. After 27 years of dictatorial rule, Ethiopians, for the first time, are now seeing the dawn of a new day in which they are regaining hope and confidence in their future. Over the past six months, we have seen things none of us expected in our wildest imaginations. To put some examples:

1. The state of emergency was lifted
2. Many political prisoners were released, Ethiopians who were denied entry into Ethiopia are now receiving a hero's welcome.
3. Peace was finally achieved with neighboring Eritrea. The phone service and flights are reinstated. They are also working hard to reconnect the countries through 5 roads. Some of the roads that were heavily mined are now being repaired for commercial use between the two countries
4. The government has made a significant stride towards the market economy and even offered to partially privatize some of the government owned business. Ethiopian Airlines and Ethiopian Telecom are the two biggest that are slated for privatization.

5. The press is operating without being muzzled by the government. And independent media networks are allowed to work from Ethiopia.

With all the changes happening there are some worrying events. All over the country nearly 2 million people have been forced out of their homes to escape violence, particularly Oromos from the Ethiopian Somali region, Gedeos from Oromia, Wolaytas from the South region and Amharas from Benishangul Gumuz. Most of them are women, children and the elderly.

The attempt to take the life of the new Prime Minister at a public support rally in Addis Ababa this past June has yet to be resolved in spite of help from FBI investigators from USA. There were highly publicized cases of mob justice in Shashemene in Oromia and Bure in Amhara regions

The terror unleashed in Jigjiga, the capital of the Ethio-Somalia region where six churches were burned down, priests were killed, and people labeled as highlanders were viciously murdered in public squares.

All these signs, I believe, show the weakness in the institutions that safeguard law and order, human rights and democracy. The last 27 years, the EPRDF has weakened the institutions to be subservient to it. The US can help strengthen the institutions by providing resources for capacity building of the Human Rights Commission, the Election commission, and the Broadcast Authority as independent, competent and credible institutions.

We would like the USA to urge the Ethiopian Government to:

- create an independent commission to conduct a full, credible, and transparent investigation into the killings, detentions, torture and instances of excessive use of force by security forces and hold accountable security forces accused of such actions through public proceedings, and to publicly release written findings from such investigation
- organize an independent commission that oversees the reorganization of the Human Rights Commission, the Election commission, and the Broadcast Authority to be independent institutions.
- conduct a full, credible, and transparent investigation into the recent ethnic violence that led to loss of life and displacement of a large number of Ethiopians (including those that targeted Amharas in Benishangul, Oromos in Somali region, Gedeos in Oromia region and Wolyatas in Southern Region) and hold accountable those responsible for these human rights violations.
- To call for an open and constructive dialogue with all the opposition forces (both at home and abroad, armed and peaceful) in order to chart the country's future together.

I know, Mr. Chairman, under your leadership your committee and this House will do its part for the wellbeing of the people of Ethiopia.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. I stand ready to answer any questions you might have.