

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
2201 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are deeply troubled over the comments made by Under Secretary Wendy Sherman yesterday in Addis Ababa. The Under Secretary's unfortunate statement calling Ethiopia a democracy puts the United States government on record as endorsing a government that systematically suppresses the fundamental rights of its citizens. Political pluralism and the ability of Ethiopians to freely express themselves, associate, and participate in peaceful assembly is far more restricted today than ten years ago under the same government, reflecting a dramatic deterioration in the government's respect for fundamental civil and political rights.

Since 2005, the ruling party's dominance of the political landscape, repression of political opposition parties, and restrictions on media and civil society have only increased. Under Secretary Sherman's comments are baffling to any observer of developments in Ethiopia and contradict the assessments of human rights organizations and even other governments. Her statements also undermine the courageous work of those pushing for a freer Ethiopia, many of whom are now imprisoned for exercising their fundamental human rights.

The United States should make it unequivocally clear that while Ethiopia is a strong ally in the region, there are many serious concerns about the credibility of upcoming elections. These concerns will persist until Ethiopia's government implements key reforms necessary for free, fair and credible elections, including the recommendations made by several election observer missions during previous polls. We therefore urge the Department of State to issue a statement on the elections highlighting the systematic deficiencies that will prevent the Ethiopian government from meeting the standards of democratic elections outlined by the African Union. We also respectfully urge you to issue a statement acknowledging the ongoing harassment and violence human rights defenders, independent media and opposition activists face in the country.

Finally, we urge you to highlight the Government of Ethiopia's ongoing attacks on freedom of expression and association during the launch of the State Department's human rights country reports. As you are aware, April 25 marks the one-year anniversary of the arrests of the Zone 9 bloggers and journalists. Since their arrest, the accused are alleged to have been tortured. They have been charged with terrorism and have faced repeated and deliberate trial delays. The launch of the human rights reports is an important opportunity for the United States to

acknowledge that it stands behind activists seeking to peacefully exercise their rights, as well as civil society more broadly.

Sincerely,  
Amnesty International USA  
Ethiopia Human Rights Project  
Freedom House  
Freedom Now  
International Rivers  
Human Rights Watch