

SENATE BILL REPORT

HJM 4031

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Judiciary, February 29, 2008

Brief Description: Requesting that Congress and the President demand Ethiopia fulfill its human rights obligations.

Sponsors: Representatives Santos, Pettigrew and Kenney.

Brief History: Passed House: 2/14/08, 93-1.

Committee Activity: Judiciary: 2/26/08, 2/29/08 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Kline, Chair; Tom, Vice Chair; McCaslin, Ranking Minority Member; Carrell, McDermott, Roach and Weinstein.

Staff: Robert Kay (786-7405)

Background: On May 15, 2005, Ethiopia held general elections for seats in both its national, and four regional government councils. The elections and results were observed by the European Union and the Carter Center. While early election reports indicated that opposition parties were sweeping the election, ensuing reports declared the ruling party won the election and retained control of Parliament.

Demonstrations over the election broke out throughout Ethiopia. Government reports indicated there had been more than 60,000 arrests, with 42 deaths. However, according to a 10-member public inquiry commission report, 193 civilians had been killed and 763 were seriously injured during the protests.

Since the 2005 elections, arrests of political dissenters, journalists, human rights defenders, and civic leaders have been reported, as well as widespread announcements of human rights violations.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature prays that Congress and the President of the United States demand that the Ethiopian government immediately and unconditionally release all political prisoners and journalists and fulfill its obligations under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is resolved that the Washington State Legislature condemns the widespread human rights violations in Ethiopia. It is further resolved that the U.S. Government:

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- work to secure the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, monitor prison treatment, and demand disclosure of detained political prisoners and that these prisoners be treated humanely;
- demand that the Ethiopian government not interfere in the exercise of rights to freedom of opinion, expression, and association;
- work with the United Nations to establish an independent international commission of inquiry to investigate human rights abuses in Ethiopia;
- demand resumption of the process of reform and improvement of democratic institutions;
- encourage and support the African Human Rights Commission and its member state to investigate and report on human rights violations;
- demand that the Ethiopian government prosecute those responsible for the 193 deaths of protesters and those injured as a result of the use of deadly force by government security forces; and
- demand that the Ethiopian government implement measures to ensure the independence of the judiciary due process.

It is further resolved that Congress adopt a resolution on the human rights situation in Ethiopia and pass "The Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2006."

It is further resolved that copies of this Memorial be transmitted to the President and Vice President of the United States, the Senate Majority Leader, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and each member of Congress from the State of Washington.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The 2005 parliamentary election in Ethiopia was monitored by the European Union and the Carter Center, and was adjudged to be a free and fair election. Over 90 percent of the eligible voters participated in the election. The governing party at the time was confident of victory, but ended up losing all its seats in the districts of the capital city, and almost all its seats in the country as a whole. The day after the election, the government declared martial law. Demonstrations were held to protest the apparent message the government was sending that it was going to ignore the election results. In the ensuing violence between demonstrators and government police, 193 people were killed, including seven police officers. The government jailed the leaders of the opposition parties which had won the election, and held them for two years. There are still many Ethiopian citizens held in jail as a result of these demonstrations. The election results have not been honored.

Living in the greater Puget Sound area, there are about 20,000 Ethiopians and Ethiopian-Americans, many of whom are refugees from civil unrest in Ethiopia and have family and friends who are among those Ethiopians that have suffered murders, assaults, incarceration, and displacement by the government forces. These constituents have brought the issue of the repression in Ethiopia to the public's attention. This resolution echoes the federal House of Representatives Resolution 2003, the Ethiopian Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Santos, prime sponsor; Wayne Debeb.