

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

His Excellency Girma Wolde-Giorgis
President of Ethiopia
The Embassy of Ethiopia
3506 International Dr. NW
Washington, DC 20008

April 17, 2007

Dear President Wolde-Giorgis,

We are writing regarding the journalist Serkalem Fassil, publisher of the newspapers Menelik, Asqual, and Satenaw. The conditions and length of Ms. Fassil's imprisonment raise great concerns to us.

As you may know, Mrs. Fassil, along with her husband Eskinder Nega, was arrested in November 2005. Mrs. Fassil was pregnant at the time of her arrest and has since been held in the Kaliti prison where she gave birth and is now raising her son. Mrs. Fassil has been charged with "trying to overthrow the constitutional order" and "genocide" and faces a possible death sentence, yet it is reported that she was arrested for nothing more than reporting on the widespread protests surrounding the May 2005 legislative elections. We believe that she has been detained on account of her opinions and for exercising her legitimate professional duties as a journalist and publisher.

We are also concerned about a report from Reporters Without Borders that indicates that roughly twenty journalists have been arrested and imprisoned, fourteen of which have been detained since November 2005. The report points out that a number of journalists were charged while out of the country and tried in absentia, five of whom were journalists of Ethiopian descent who work for the Voice of America's Africa division in Washington.

If these reports are true, we encourage you to immediately take action against the harassment, threats, and arrest of these journalists in Ethiopia and allow these families to live in peace without interference from the government. Journalists being held for nothing more than exercising their basic human right to expression and carrying out their professional activities should be freed. In addition, we urge you to undertake all efforts to ensure the safety of journalists in your nation and ensure that Ethiopia's media is free from government censorship.

We strongly encourage you to investigate Mrs. Fassil's case and either grant her a full and fair trial by an impartial tribunal or release her immediately. A free and open press is an essential guarantor of human rights. The censorship, intimidation, imprisonment, and murder of journalists violate not only their personal liberty, but also the rights of those who are denied access to these ideas and information. International law clearly guarantees freedom of expression and the right to a free press, and we urge the restoration of these rights in Ethiopia.

Respectfully,

Adam B. Schiff

Dave Loebsack

Eleanor H. Norton

Betty McClellan

Lamar Smith

Jim. McRum

Tim Lenn

Lois Capps

Carolyn B. Maloney

Carolyn McCarthy

Jay Well
