

# Ethiopian Americans Council (EAC)

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## **U.S. Should Reject the Outcome of May 2010 Ethiopian Election**

**“... history offers a clear verdict: Governments that respect the will of their own people, that govern by consent and not coercion, are more prosperous, they are more stable, and more successful than governments that do not. ... In the 21st century, capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success -- strong parliaments; honest police forces; independent judges; an independent press; a vibrant private sector; a civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy, because that is what matters in people’s everyday lives,” Barack Obama’s Speech in Ghana, July 11, 2009.**

The Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) party will surely declare a landslide victory in the upcoming May 2010 local elections. The victory will come about because since the 2005 national elections, the party has moved aggressively to manipulate local elections, pass repressive legislations, and to ban free media in order to consolidate its power base throughout Ethiopia.

The U.S. Department of State 2009 Human Rights Reports/Ethiopia, and Human Rights Watch on Ethiopia/March 2010 issued reports critical of the human rights and political conditions in the country. The reports illuminate how the EPRDF uses foreign aid to suppress dissent and intimidate citizens into political submission. Given this revelation, the Obama administration can take two immediate steps to end the misappropriation of U.S. aid by the Ethiopian ruling party: 1) It can order all non-military U.S. aid to reach target audiences directly; 2) It can reject the outcome of the May 2010 elections in protest of the pre-election undemocratic environment.

***Why are we, Ethiopian Americans Council calling for the Obama administration to take the two important steps?***

EPRDF manipulated the 2008 local elections to control 99.9 percent of the kebele (*Kebele means local government*) council seats, as well as the Woreda (*Woreda means Districts*) council seats. Those seats combined, represent close to 85 percent of rural Ethiopia. The kebele administrative structure has four major organs: Kebele council, Kebele Chief Executive, Kebele Standing Committee and Kebele Social Court. Several services are rendered at Kebele level, including development activities, housing, employment, issuance of ID, etc. The Kebele officials use these organs to coerce citizens, including the civil servants, students, farmers and business owners, to become cardholding members of the EPRDF party or face exclusion.

In a country like Ethiopia that depends on foreign aid for one-third of its expenditures, the vast majority of citizens could hardly risk the consequences of opposing the regime that controls all access to their basic amenities. After all, the ruling party uses donor food aid as a political tool to

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reward or punish individuals and families in the countryside. Allegiance to the ruling party is a matter of life or death decision in the country.

### **Draconian Legislative**

After consolidating its power base in the 2008 local elections, the ruling party turned its attention on restraining civil society. In 2009, it used its rubber-stamp parliament to pass two draconian legislation: the Civil Society Law and the Ant-Terrorism Proclamation.

- **The Civil Society Law** was passed by the parliament on January 6, 2009, to restrict the activities and funding for civil society organizations (CSOs). The law, "Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies", forbids civil society organizations from engaging in building democratic and human rights culture. In addition, it requires CSOs, which receive more than 10 percent of their budget from outside, to register as "foreign agents." The objective is to restrict CSOs to mere service providers and to muzzle local human rights groups.
- **The Anti-Terrorism Law**, which was passed in July 2009, gives the state sweeping powers to arrest individuals it deemed threatening. The law is designed to end peaceful demonstrations, and to persecute and penalize political dissidents.

Through the 2008 local elections and punitive legislative in 2009, the EPRDF regime has effectively instituted a police state. In this repressive political climate, there is no way a fair and free election can take place. Thus, it is absolutely justifiable for the Obama administration to consider our modest recommendations.

Human Rights Watch rightfully points out that the Obama administration is yet to reverse the Bush's policies toward Ethiopia. It is clear that the appeasement policy of the Bush administration toward the Ethiopian regime had left the country on the brink of political and economic disaster. The potential calamity should compel the Obama administration to seriously examine the current policies toward Ethiopia. After all, EPRDF is unpopular not only in Ethiopia, but also in the surrounding countries. It has caused political instability in the Horn of Africa because of its misguided policies and military adventurism. If the current trajectory continues, the Horn of Africa will sink into further political chaos, which is a nightmare scenario for the United States. Ethiopia is a very influential country in the Horn of Africa. It is also an important country to the United States because of the two nations' historical ties and Ethiopia's strategic location. A democratic Ethiopia can be a stabilizing force not only for the Horn of Africa, but for the entire continent.

As Human Rights Watch/March 2010 correctly put it, the United States is "Ethiopia's largest donor and most important political ally on the world stage." The United States government should not continue to give credence to a notoriously repressive regime that is growingly become a threat to millions of Ethiopians and to regional stability.

A strong and democratic Ethiopia will prove to be a reliable and durable ally to the United States both in the short-term and long-term.

### ***The Ethiopian Americans Council***

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