

[Washington Update August 26, 2010](#)



Great news for all Ethiopians and Ethiopian-Americans! Senator Russ Feingold (D-WI) has introduced legislation, S. 3557 entitled "Support for Democracy and Human Rights in Ethiopia Act of 2010".

In this new piece of legislation, which has been cosponsored by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Feingold summarizes the ongoing crises in Ethiopia. He goes on to focus on the deplorable state of Human Rights in the country.

Please find below the actual text of the bill. It speaks directly to the great issues that we face. We must organize and mobilize to see that this bill is enacted into law by both houses of Congress and signed by President Obama.

S. 3557 reads: It is the policy of the United States —

(1) to support and encourage efforts by the people and Government of **Ethiopia** —

(A) to achieve a participatory multiparty democracy, an active and unhindered civil society, rule of law and accountability, judicial capacity and independence, freedom of the press, respect for human rights, and economic development; and

(B) to develop a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism and terrorism in a manner consistent with international law;

(2) to promote peace and stability, equal access to humanitarian assistance regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or political views, and good governance, transparency, and accountability;

(3) to seek the unconditional release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in

(4) to prohibit funding to any unit of the Ethiopian security forces if the Secretary of State has credible information that such unit has committed a gross violation of human rights, unless the Secretary certifies to the appropriate congressional committees that the Government of **Ethiopia** is taking effective measures to bring the responsible members of the security forces unit to justice; and

(5) to seek a resolution of the ongoing dispute between the Government of Ethiopia and the Government of Eritrea consistent with the **Ethiopia-Eritrea** Border Commission arbitration decisions on border demarcation, to press the Government of Eritrea to cease all support for armed opposition groups in **Ethiopia** and the region, and to urge both Governments to contribute constructively to stability throughout the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia.

SEC. 4. SENSE OF CONGRESS.

It is the sense of Congress that the United States Government should

(1) build on successful diplomatic efforts that contributed to the October 2007 release of political prisoners in Addis Ababa, and press the Ethiopian government to release Birtukan Mideksa, as well as other political prisoners;

(2) urge the Government of **Ethiopia** to repeal or at a minimum amend the Civil Society Proclamation, the Anti-Terrorism Proclamation, and the Mass Media and Freedom of Information Proclamation in order to genuinely protect the constitutional rights and freedoms of all Ethiopian citizens;

(3) press the Government of **Ethiopia** to allow human rights and humanitarian groups, as well as the media, to have unfettered access to areas of concern throughout the country;

(4) encourage and assist the United Nations and other independent organizations and the media to investigate credible reports of gross violations of human rights or international humanitarian law in the Somali region of **Ethiopia**, to publish any information of serious abuse, and send consistent messages to the Government of **Ethiopia** that the continuation of such violations or impunity in this region, or **Ethiopia** more generally, has consequences for relations between the United States and **Ethiopia**; and

(5) encourage the Governments of both **Ethiopia** and Eritrea to immediately take steps to lessen tensions, physically demarcate the border in accord with the **Ethiopia**-Eritrea Border Commission decision, and promote normalization of relations between the two countries.

SEC. 5. RESTRICTIONS ON ASSISTANCE.

(a) Conditions.—

(1) PROHIBITION OF FUNDS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, assistance may not be provided to the Government of **Ethiopia** unless the Secretary of State certifies annually that the Government of **Ethiopia** has taken demonstrable steps—

(A) to ensure the autonomy and fundamental freedoms of civil society organizations to pursue work on civic education, democratization, good governance, accountability, human rights, and conflict resolution, without excessive government intervention or intimidation;

(B) to respect the rights of and permit non-violent political parties to operate free from intimidation and harassment, including releasing opposition political leaders currently imprisoned;

(C) to strengthen the independence of its judiciary, including developing the capacity of the judiciary at the national, regional, and local levels;

(D) to allow Voice of America and other independent media to operate and broadcast without interference in **Ethiopia**;

(E) to promote respect for human rights and accountability within its security forces, including undertaking credible investigations into any allegations of abuse and ensuring appropriate punishment; and

(F) to ensure that humanitarian and development entities, including those of the United Nations, have unfettered access to all regions of the country without prejudice to the political views of recipients.

(2) **WAIVER.**—The prohibition included in paragraph (1) shall not apply if the Secretary of State certifies in writing to Congress that waiving such a prohibition is in the national security interest of the United States.

(b) Exceptions.—The prohibitions in paragraph (1) shall not apply to—

(1) health and HIV/AIDS assistance;

(2) humanitarian assistance; or

(3) emergency food aid.

(c) Report.—Not later than 120 days after exercising a waiver pursuant to subsection (a)(2), and every 90 days thereafter, the Secretary of State shall submit a report to the appropriate congressional committees assessing progress made by the Government of **Ethiopia** in the areas set forth in subparagraphs (A) through (F) of subsection (a)(2).

SEC. 6. DEFINITIONS.

In this Act the term “appropriate congressional committees” means —

(1) the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate; and

(2) the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

Please note how comprehensive this bill is! It touches nearly all our human rights issues. We are not forgetting the necessary development programs like the Blue Nile and Awash projects but no real development is possible with out these preconditions for democracy, freedom of speech, assembly, movement, and press.

Washington Update Aug. 26, 2010 PLEASE CONTACT YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES IN WASHINGTON, DC

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