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6TH DISTRICT, COLORADO

ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0606

31 October 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Ethiopian-American Community in Colorado's 6th Congressional District. We are deeply concerned over the continued violence in the Oromia and Amhara regions of Ethiopia. According to Human Rights Watch, this violence has led to the deaths of more than 500 people at the hands of Ethiopian security forces.

As I understand it, the initial violence was due to popular discontent with the Ethiopian Government's Master Plan to expand Addis Ababa. However, the Ethiopian government's excessive use of force during the early protests has led to a much broader popular response as a large number of Ethiopian citizens question their diminishing freedoms under what even the State Department has indicated is an increasingly authoritarian Ethiopian government.

We are especially concerned with the Ethiopian government's recent decision to declare a six month state of emergency. While there is clearly escalating violence in Ethiopia that must be addressed, I believe the State of Emergency will exacerbate tensions because it expands the Ethiopian government's authority to censor, arrest, and detain Ethiopian citizens.

Particularly troubling to me is the Ethiopian government's apparent unwillingness or inability to address the underlying causes of the protests which include the lack of government transparency, unequal distribution of resources, increasing censorship, mass incarcerations, and police brutality.

I ask the State Department to boldly address these issues with the Ethiopian government. It is clearly in the best interests of the United States and the Ethiopian people to work to ensure the Ethiopian government promotes basic freedoms and does not sponsor, condone, or tolerate the use of excessive force against peaceful protestors.

I also urge the State Department to closely scrutinize U.S. humanitarian and economic aid provided to Ethiopia. The State Department and the U.S. Congress must work together to ensure U.S. foreign aid promotes democratic values and benefits all Ethiopians.

I will, of course, continue to monitor the situation in Ethiopia and keep my Ethiopian-American constituents' concerns in mind as the U.S. Congress prioritizes humanitarian, economic, and security assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Coffman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mike Coffman
U.S. Representative
6th District of Colorado