

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Brussels, 17 December 2012

Dear Prime Minister Desalegn,

We write to express our grave concern regarding the continued detention of independent Ethiopian journalist and blogger ESKINDER NEGA and urge you to facilitate his immediate release.

Mr. Nega, a longtime publisher and journalist, was arrested in 2011 and charged under the country's 2009 Anti-Terror Proclamation after he wrote and spoke publicly about the Arab-Spring movements then unfolding across the Middle East and North Africa. Although clearly sympathetic, Mr. Nega consistently emphasized that any similar movements in Ethiopia must remain peaceful. Despite this, the government of your predecessor Prime Minister Meles Zenawi arrested Mr. Nega, held him without access to family for nearly one month and without access to an attorney for nearly two months, and ultimately sentenced him to 18 years in prison. Even now, reports indicate that proceedings are underway to seize Mr. Nega's home, where his wife and young son continue to live.

Unfortunately, Mr. Nega is not alone - journalists Woubshet Taye and Reyot Alemu have also received long prison sentences on terror charges. In response to your government's use of the 2009 Anti-Terror Proclamation against journalists and opposition leaders, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and five United Nations Special Rapporteurs - including the Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights - have all expressed alarm at this worrying trend. As some have noted, the use of vague anti-terror legislation to silence legitimate expression threatens to seriously undermine the credibility of efforts to address real security threats to the region.

It is our understanding that appeal proceedings in Mr. Nega's case are ongoing and we respect your need to allow the judicial process to continue. However, it is also your government's obligation to respect the right to freedom of expression as established under customary international law and codified in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Ethiopia is a party.

You now have the unique opportunity to lead Ethiopia forward on human rights and bring the country fully within the community of nations. As such, we urge you to take all measures within your power to facilitate the immediate and unconditional release of Mr. Nega.

Sincerely,


Alexander Graf Lambsdorff


Ana Gomes


Charles Tannock

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MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Eduard Kukan

P. Lukševičs

Eija-Riitta Korhola

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Fiona Hall

Fiona J. Hall

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Michael Gahler

Michael Gahler

Norbert Neuser

Norbert Neuser

Olle Schmidt

Olle Schmidt

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'David Martin', is written over a faint yellow rectangular stamp.

David Martin