

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 23, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

We remain deeply concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation and human rights abuses being committed in the Ogaden region of southeastern Ethiopia. The region is facing a severe drought and we fear the situation will worsen if steps are not taken to help protect innocent civilians.

Millions of Ethiopians are in need of emergency humanitarian assistance. The past year's lack of adequate rainfall and the current drought has resulted in severe water shortages, increasing the likelihood of displacement, mass migration, and complications from the scarcity of clean water, such as cholera. Despite the increasing humanitarian need, the international community has been unable to provide adequate assistance due to insecurity in the region and ongoing hostilities between the Government of Ethiopia and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF).

The ongoing conflict in the Ogaden has had a devastating impact on innocent civilians. Serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law have been committed by all sides, including extrajudicial killings, torture, rape, abductions, arbitrary arrest and detention, and even entire communities being displaced. The Government of Ethiopia has taken a series of steps to clampdown on opposition forces, including use of force and human rights violations. The State Department's 2010 Report on Human Rights Practices in Ethiopia detailed incidences of human rights abuses committed by Ethiopian security forces, including police and local militia.

Since the launching of their counterinsurgency campaign in 2007, the Government of Ethiopia has restricted access of diplomats, humanitarian workers, and journalists into the Ogaden region to prevent reporting of human rights abuses by government forces. Furthermore, movement restrictions have made independent verification of the population's needs extremely difficult. Just this month, Foreign Minister Hailemariam Dessalegn refused to accept the findings of the 2010 Report on Human Rights in Ethiopia, stating there was "no need to accept this report as something that can help." The Government of Ethiopia is not demonstrating genuine willingness to help alleviate this humanitarian crisis.

We understand the valuable strategic relationship that the United States has with the Government of Ethiopia. But the United States also has a responsibility to promote good governance and human rights in Ethiopia. Ethiopia's role as a security partner cannot come at the expense of the most fundamental human rights and humanitarian norms, including the right to live free from harm, freedom of movement and freedom of association.

As such, we respectfully request that you urge the Ethiopian Government to reopen the Ogaden region to independent organizations, including humanitarian ones, to assess and monitor the humanitarian situation. We also ask that you keep us informed on U.S. efforts to help bring about a resolution to this ongoing conflict and to urge the Ethiopian Government to hold accountable any military officials complicit in these abuses.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter and for your tireless work to ensure that all people are able to enjoy their fundamental human rights.

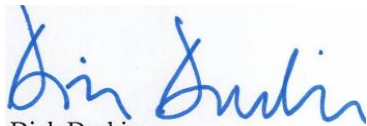
Sincerely,



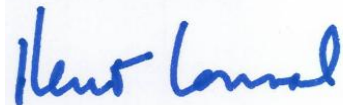
Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



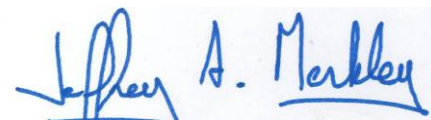
Dick Durbin
United States Senator



Kent Conrad
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Jeff Merkley
United States Senator