

**ETHIOPIA DEMOCRACY AND ACCOUNTABILITY
ACT OF 2007**

MARKUP
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA AND GLOBAL HEALTH
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

ON

H.R. 2003

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CONTENTS

	Page
MARKUP OF	
H.R. 2003, To encourage and facilitate the consolidation of peace and security, respect for human rights, democracy, and economic freedom in Ethiopia	2
LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD	
The Honorable Donald M. Payne, a Representative in Congress from the State of New Jersey, and Chairman, Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health: Prepared statement	23
The Honorable Christopher H. Smith, a Representative in Congress from the State of New Jersey: Prepared statement	25
APPENDIX	
The Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas: Prepared statement	33

**ETHIOPIA DEMOCRACY AND
ACCOUNTABILITY ACT OF 2007**

WEDNESDAY, JULY 18, 2007

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA AND GLOBAL HEALTH,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:29 a.m. in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Donald M. Payne (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. PAYNE. I call the meeting of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health to order. Pursuant to notice, I call up the bill, H.R. 2003, the Ethiopian Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007, for the purpose of markup and move its recommendation to the full committee. Without objection, the bill will be considered as read and open for amendments at any point.

[H.R. 2003 follows:]

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2003

To encourage and facilitate the consolidation of peace and security, respect for human rights, democracy, and economic freedom in Ethiopia.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APRIL 23, 2007

Mr. PAYNE (for himself, Mr. HONDA, Mr. MORAN of Virginia, Ms. WATSON, and Mr. CLAY) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To encourage and facilitate the consolidation of peace and security, respect for human rights, democracy, and economic freedom in Ethiopia.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Ethiopia Democracy
5 and Accountability Act of 2007”.

6 **SEC. 2. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

7 It is the policy of the United States to—

8 (1) support the advancement of human rights,
9 democracy, independence of the judiciary, freedom of

1 the press, peacekeeping capacity building, and eco-
2 nomic development in the Federal Democratic Re-
3 public of Ethiopia;

4 (2) seek the unconditional release of all political
5 prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Ethiopia;

6 (3) foster stability, democracy, and economic
7 development in the region;

8 (4) collaborate with Ethiopia in the Global War
9 on Terror; and

10 (5) strengthen United States-Ethiopian rela-
11 tions based on the policy objectives specified in para-
12 graphs (1) through (4).

13 **SEC. 3. FINDINGS.**

14 Congress finds the following:

15 (1) The people of Ethiopia have suffered for
16 decades due to military conflicts, natural disasters,
17 poverty and diseases, regional instability, and the
18 brutal dictatorship of the military junta under
19 Mengistu Haile Mariam. Hundreds of thousands of
20 civilians were brutally murdered by the Mengistu re-
21 gime, including women and children. Many more
22 sacrificed their lives fighting for freedom, respect for
23 human rights, and to bring an end to the brutal dic-
24 tatorship of the Mengistu regime. Members of that

1 murderous regime are currently living in Europe, the
2 United States, and Africa.

3 (2) In May 1991, the brutal dictatorship of the
4 Mengistu regime came to an abrupt end when the
5 Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
6 (EPRDF) defeated the Mengistu army. In July
7 1991, the EPRDF and a coalition of other political
8 groups established a transitional government in
9 Ethiopia. A number of liberation movements joined
10 the transitional government in a spirit of a new start
11 and the building of a democratic Ethiopia. These
12 groups included the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF),
13 the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), and
14 many others.

15 (3) Since the ouster of the Mengistu regime in
16 1991, the EPRDF-led government instituted a
17 multiparty system and organized 3 regional and na-
18 tional elections and a number of local elections. The
19 1995 and 2000 elections were largely boycotted and
20 judged to be neither free nor fair. Some opposition
21 groups participated in the 2000 elections, giving
22 such groups 12 seats in the 546-seat parliament.

23 (4) The May 2005 pre-election period and the
24 conduct of the elections in Ethiopia were seen by ob-
25 servers to be transparent, competitive, and relatively

1 free and fair, although there were a number of prob-
2 lems reported. More than 90 percent of registered
3 voters participated and dozens of political parties
4 took part in the elections. Moreover, some inter-
5 national groups observed the elections, unprece-
6 dented access to the mass media was given to the
7 opposition, and there were televised debates between
8 the government and the opposition. Some political
9 parties and armed political groups boycotted the
10 2005 elections. However, trained local groups were
11 barred from observing the elections.

12 (5) Despite apparent improvement in the elec-
13 toral process, preliminary election results announced
14 by the Government of Ethiopia shortly after the May
15 15, 2005, elections were seen by observers as ques-
16 tionable. The opposition accused the Government of
17 Ethiopia of stealing the elections and called for civil
18 disobedience, which resulted in the killing of dem-
19 onstrators and detention of opposition leaders and
20 thousands of their followers, including 11 elected
21 members of parliament and the elected mayor of
22 Addis Ababa.

23 (6) The Coalition for Unity and Democracy
24 (CUD), the United Ethiopian Democratic Forces
25 (UEDF), and the ruling EPRDF reached an agree-

1 ment to resolve disputed election results peacefully
2 with the help of the National Electoral Board
3 (NEB). The NEB investigated more than 299 com-
4 plaints and later agreed to hold reruns in 31 con-
5 stituencies. In late August 2005, the NEB held re-
6 runs in the 31 constituencies as well as in all 23
7 constituencies in the Somali region, where elections
8 had been postponed due to insecurity.

9 (7) Election results show that opposition parties
10 won 170 seats in the national parliament, a signifi-
11 cant increase from the 12 seats they won in the last
12 elections. Opposition parties also won the city coun-
13 cil in Addis Ababa, giving them control over the cap-
14 ital. An estimated 150 of the 170 opposition mem-
15 bers of parliament have taken their seats. In early
16 May 2006, the Government of Ethiopia appointed a
17 caretaker government in the capital. Members of
18 parliament from the CUD walked out of parliament
19 in protest. The CUD won the city, but the des-
20 ignated mayor has been in detention since November
21 2005.

22 (8) Human rights conditions deteriorated sig-
23 nificantly after the May 15, 2005, elections in Ethi-
24 opia and overall human rights conditions in the
25 country remain poor. The Department of State, in

1 its 2005 Country Reports on Human Rights Prac-
2 tices, noted a myriad of human rights abuses by the
3 Government of Ethiopia. Moreover, journalists and
4 editors of the independent press have been and con-
5 tinue to face harassment and prosecution for alleged
6 violations of press laws in Ethiopia. Dozens of jour-
7 nalisists have fled the country, and some are currently
8 in exile fearing prosecution or harassment.

9 (9) In June 2005, more than 35 demonstrators
10 were killed by Ethiopian Government security per-
11 sonnel and in November 2005 an estimated 53 peo-
12 ple were killed, including 7 policemen, according to
13 Human Rights Watch and several other reports. The
14 violence against these victims occurred after pro-op-
15 position groups went to the streets of the capital to
16 protest government actions in handling the elections
17 results of May 2005. Tens of thousands of people
18 suspected of being opposition supporters were de-
19 tained over the past months, although many of these
20 detainees were released. Nonetheless, government se-
21 curity forces continue to abuse opposition leaders,
22 supporters, and family members.

23 (10) An estimated 112 political leaders, human
24 rights activists, community leaders, and journalists,
25 including the chairman of the CUD (Hailu Shawel),

1 the newly elected Mayor of Addis Ababa (Berhanu
2 Nega), and the founder of the Ethiopian Human
3 Rights Council (Professor Mesfin Wolde Mariam),
4 were imprisoned and charged with treason and geno-
5 cide. These measures were deliberately taken to sti-
6 fle and criminalize opposition party activity in the
7 country. The measures also were intended to intimi-
8 date and silence independent press and civil society,
9 raising serious question about the Ethiopian Govern-
10 ment's commitment to democracy and good govern-
11 ance.

12 (11) According to Department of State's 2006
13 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices,
14 "human rights abuses [in Ethiopia] reported during
15 the year included: limitation on citizens' right to
16 change their government during the most recent
17 elections; unlawful killings, and beating, abuse, and
18 mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters
19 by security forces; poor prison conditions; arbitrary
20 arrest and detention . . .".

21 (12) Whereas the Ethiopian Parliament estab-
22 lished an 11-member Commission of Inquiry to "in-
23 vestigate the disorder and report to the House of
24 People's Representatives in order to take the nec-
25 essary measure". The Commission was tasked to in-

1 investigate whether government security forces used
2 excessive force, caused damage to life and property,
3 or showed a lack of respect for human rights. The
4 Commission was mandated to investigate the June
5 8, 2005, and November 1–10, 2005, violence in dif-
6 ferent parts of the country.

7 (13) Whereas members of the Commission of
8 Inquiry visited several regions, reviewed police re-
9 ports, met with prisoners and government officials,
10 made 122 radio and TV announcements to the pub-
11 lic, examined 16,990 documents, and took testi-
12 monies from 1,300 people.

13 (14) Whereas the Commission of Inquiry con-
14 cluded that 763 civilians were injured and 193
15 killed. The Commission also reported that 71 police
16 officers were injured and 6 killed. Damage to prop-
17 erty was estimated at \$512,588. The Commission
18 also reported that more than 30,000 civilians were
19 detained, some were tortured, and prisoners in Kaliti
20 were killed.

21 (15) Whereas the Commission of Inquiry re-
22 ported that security forces fired 1,500 bullets at
23 prisoners, killing 17 and injuring 53. The Commis-
24 sion stated that civilians did not use weapons and
25 reported bank robberies by demonstrators did not

1 take place. The Commission's deliberations were
2 video-taped and votes were taken on key findings on
3 July 3, 2006.

4 (16) Whereas shortly after the Commission of
5 Inquiry reached its decision, the Ethiopian Govern-
6 ment reportedly began to put pressure on Commis-
7 sion members to change their report. The Chairman
8 of the Commission, a former Supreme Court Presi-
9 dent of the Southern Region of Ethiopia, was told
10 by a senior advisor of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi
11 to call for an emergency meeting of the Commission
12 in order to change the Commission's report.

13 (17) Whereas the Commission of Inquiry was
14 scheduled to give its report to the Ethiopian Par-
15 liament on July 7, 2006, but the Parliament was ad-
16 journed a day early. Several Commission members,
17 including the Chairman and the Deputy Chair, left
18 the country with the final report, other documents
19 relevant to the investigation, and several video tapes
20 of the Commission deliberations.

21 (18) Whereas in November 2006, the Chairman
22 of the Commission of Inquiry and another Commis-
23 sion member presented the Commission's report and
24 briefed Members of the United State Congress.

1 (19) Whereas in November 2006, at a congressional
2 briefing with members of the Commission of
3 Inquiry, a young woman named Alemzuria submitted
4 her testimony about what happened to her mother,
5 Etenesh Yemam. Alemzuria's father was elected in
6 May 2005 as Council Member of Addis Ababa.
7 Subsequently security personnel came to arrest him
8 at his home and then shot Etenesh Yemam as she
9 pleaded for her husband's release.

10 (20) Whereas the Commission of Inquiry investigated
11 the killing of Etenesh Yemam and confirmed
12 beyond doubt what happened on that dreadful day.
13 Etenesh Yemam's husband still languishes in prison
14 while Alemzuria remains a refugee in another African
15 country.

16 **SEC. 4. SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN ETHIOPIA.**

17 The Secretary of State shall—

18 (1) establish a mechanism to provide financial
19 support to local and national human rights groups
20 and other relevant civil society organizations to help
21 strengthen human rights monitoring and regular re-
22 porting on human rights conditions in Ethiopia;

23 (2) establish a victims support network to pro-
24 vide legal support for political prisoners and pris-
25 oners of conscience and to assist local groups or

1 groups from outside Ethiopia that are active in mon-
2 itoring the status of political prisoners and prisoners
3 of conscience in Ethiopia;

4 (3) seek to increase the independence of the
5 Ethiopian judiciary through facilitation of joint dis-
6 cussions for court personnel, officials from the Ethi-
7 opian Ministry of Justice, relevant members of the
8 legislature, and civil society representatives on inter-
9 national human rights standards;

10 (4) create and support a judicial monitoring
11 process, consisting of local and international groups,
12 to monitor judicial proceedings throughout Ethiopia,
13 with special focus on unwarranted government inter-
14 vention on strictly judicial matters, and to inves-
15 tigate and report on actions to strengthen an inde-
16 pendent judiciary;

17 (5) establish a program to strengthen private
18 media in Ethiopia, provide support for training pur-
19 poses, offer technical and other types of support as
20 necessary, and expand programming by the Voice of
21 America to Ethiopia; and

22 (6) establish a mechanism to identify and extra-
23 dite members of the Mengistu Haile Mariam regime
24 and the current government residing in the United
25 States who were engaged in gross human rights vio-

1 lations and work with other governments to identify
2 and extradite such persons, including Mengistu
3 Haile Mariam.

4 **SEC. 5. SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRATIZATION IN ETHIOPIA.**

5 (a) STRENGTHENING LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND NA-
6 TIONAL DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES.—The Secretary of
7 State shall—

8 (1) provide assistance to strengthen local, re-
9 gional, and national parliaments and governments in
10 Ethiopia through training in consultation with gov-
11 ernment authorities, political parties, and civil soci-
12 ety groups;

13 (2) establish a program focused on reconcili-
14 ation efforts between the Government of Ethiopia
15 and peaceful political and civil society groups, in-
16 cluding in minority communities, in preparation for
17 negotiation and for participation in the political
18 process;

19 (3) strengthen training for political parties in
20 Ethiopia in areas such as organization building and
21 campaign management; and

22 (4) provide training for civil society groups in
23 election monitoring in Ethiopia.

24 (b) DEMOCRACY ENHANCEMENT.—

1 (1) ASSISTANCE.—United States technical as-
2 sistance for democracy promotion in Ethiopia should
3 be made available to the ruling party as well as op-
4 position parties in Ethiopia.

5 (2) RESTRICTION.—

6 (A) IN GENERAL.—Nonessential United
7 States assistance shall not be made available to
8 the Government of Ethiopia if the Government
9 of Ethiopia acts to obstruct United States tech-
10 nical assistance to advance human rights, de-
11 mocracy, independence of the judiciary, freedom
12 of the press, economic development and eco-
13 nomic freedom in Ethiopia.

14 (B) DEFINITION.—In this paragraph, the
15 term “nonessential United States assistance”
16 means assistance under any provision of law,
17 other than humanitarian assistance, assistance
18 under emergency food programs, assistance to
19 combat HIV/AIDS, and other health care as-
20 sistance.

21 **SEC. 6. ENSURING GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR HUMAN**
22 **RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY, AND ECONOMIC DE-**
23 **VELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA.**

24 (a) LIMITATION ON SECURITY ASSISTANCE; TRAVEL
25 RESTRICTIONS.—

1 (1) LIMITATION ON SECURITY ASSISTANCE.—

2 (A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in
3 subparagraph (B), security assistance shall not
4 be provided to Ethiopia until such time as the
5 certification described in paragraph (3) is made
6 in accordance with such paragraph.

7 (B) EXCEPTION.—Subparagraph (A) shall
8 not apply with respect to peacekeeping or
9 counter-terrorism assistance. Peacekeeping or
10 counter-terrorism assistance provided to Ethi-
11 opia shall not be used for any other security-re-
12 lated purpose or to provide training to security
13 personnel or units accused of human rights vio-
14 lations against civilians.

15 (2) TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS.—Beginning on the
16 date that is 60 days after the date of the enactment
17 of this Act and until such time as the certification
18 described in paragraph (3) is made in accordance
19 with such paragraph, the President shall deny a visa
20 and entry into the United States to—

21 (A) any official of the Government of Ethi-
22 opia who—

23 (i) has been involved in giving orders
24 to use lethal force against peaceful dem-
25 onstrators in Ethiopia; or

1 (ii) has been accused of gross human
2 rights violations;

3 (B) security personnel of the Government
4 of Ethiopia who were involved in the June or
5 November 2005 shootings of demonstrators;

6 (C) security personnel responsible for mur-
7 dering Etenesh Yemam, as described in para-
8 graphs (20) and (21) of section 3; and

9 (D) security personnel responsible for mur-
10 dering prisoners at Kaliti prison in the after-
11 math of the election violence.

12 (3) CERTIFICATION.—The certification de-
13 scribed in this paragraph is a certification by the
14 President to Congress that the Government of Ethi-
15 opia is making credible, quantifiable efforts to en-
16 sure that—

17 (A) all political prisoners and prisoners of
18 conscience in Ethiopia have been released, their
19 civil and political rights restored, and their
20 property returned;

21 (B) prisoners held without charge or kept
22 in detention without fair trial in violation of the
23 Constitution of Ethiopia are released or receive
24 a fair and speedy trial, and prisoners whose

1 charges have been dismissed or acquitted and
2 are still being held are released without delay;

3 (C) the Ethiopian judiciary is able to func-
4 tion independently and allowed to uphold the
5 Ethiopian Constitution and international
6 human rights standards;

7 (D) security personnel involved in the un-
8 lawful killings of demonstrators, Etenesh
9 Yemam, and Kaliti prisoners are punished;

10 (E) family members, legal counsel, and
11 others have unfettered access to visit detainees
12 in Ethiopian prisons;

13 (F) print and broadcast media in Ethiopia
14 are able to operate free from undue interference
15 and laws restricting media freedom, including
16 sections of the Ethiopian Federal Criminal
17 Code, are revised;

18 (G) licensing of independent radio and tel-
19 evision in Ethiopia is open and transparent;

20 (H) access in Ethiopia is provided to the
21 Internet and the ability of citizens to freely
22 send and receive electronic mail and otherwise
23 obtain information is guaranteed;

24 (I) the National Election Board (NEB) in-
25 cludes representatives of political parties with

1 seats in the Ethiopian Parliament and guaran-
2 tees independence for the NEB in its decision-
3 making;

4 (J) representatives of international human
5 rights organizations engaged in human rights
6 monitoring work in Ethiopia are admitted to
7 Ethiopia without undue restriction; and

8 (K) Ethiopian human rights organizations
9 are able to operate in an environment free of
10 harassment, intimidation, and persecution.

11 (4) WAIVER.—

12 (A) IN GENERAL.—The President may
13 waive the application of paragraph (1) or (2) on
14 a case-by-case basis if the President determines
15 that—

16 (i) the Government of Ethiopia has
17 met the requirements of paragraph (3);
18 and

19 (ii) such a waiver is in the national in-
20 terests of the United States.

21 (B) NOTIFICATION.—Prior to granting a
22 waiver under the authority of subparagraph
23 (A), the President shall transmit to Congress a
24 notification that includes the reasons for the
25 waiver.

1 (b) TREATMENT OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND
2 PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE.—

3 (1) IN GENERAL.—The President, the Secretary
4 of State, and other relevant officials of the Govern-
5 ment of the United States shall call upon the Gov-
6 ernment of Ethiopia to immediately release all polit-
7 ical prisoners and prisoners of conscience, especially
8 prisoners held without charge.

9 (2) TORTURE VICTIM RELIEF.—While it is the
10 responsibility of the Government of Ethiopia to com-
11 pensate the victims of unlawful imprisonment and
12 torture and their families for their suffering and
13 losses, the President shall provide assistance for the
14 rehabilitation of victims of torture in Ethiopia at
15 centers established for such purposes pursuant to
16 section 130 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961
17 (22 U.S.C. 2152).

18 (c) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
19 gress that the Government of the United States should—

20 (1) encourage the Government of Ethiopia to
21 enter into discussions with peaceful political groups
22 in order to bring such groups into full participation
23 in the political and economic affairs of Ethiopia, in-
24 cluding their legalization as a political party; and

1 (2) provide such assistance as is warranted and
2 necessary to help achieve the goal described in para-
3 graph (1).

4 **SEC. 7. SUPPORT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ETHI-**
5 **OPIA.**

6 (a) **RESOURCE POLICY ASSISTANCE.**—The President,
7 acting through the Administrator of the United States
8 Agency for International Development, shall provide as-
9 sistance for sustainable development of Ethiopia’s Nile
10 and Awash River resources, including assistance to help
11 Ethiopia with the technology necessary for the construc-
12 tion of irrigation systems and hydroelectric power that
13 might prevent future famine.

14 (b) **HEALTH CARE ASSISTANCE.**—The President,
15 acting through the Administrator of the United States
16 Agency for International Development, shall provide mate-
17 rial support to hospitals and health care centers in Ethi-
18 opia, especially hospitals and health care centers in rural
19 areas.

20 **SEC. 8. REPORT.**

21 Not later than 180 days after the date of the enact-
22 ment of this Act, the President shall transmit to Congress
23 a report on the implementation of this Act, including a
24 description of a comprehensive plan to address the secu-
25 rity, human rights, democratization, and economic free-

1 dom concerns that potentially threaten the stability of the
2 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia .

3 **SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—There are authorized to be appro-
5 priated to carry out this Act \$20,000,000 for each of the
6 fiscal years 2008 and 2009.

7 (b) AVAILABILITY.—Amounts appropriated pursuant
8 to the authorization of appropriations under subsection (a)
9 are authorized to remain available until expended.

○

Mr. PAYNE. I yield myself as much time as I may consume to explain the provisions of the bill.

This is a very straightforward piece of legislation which essentially does three things.

First, it requires the secretary of state to support human rights by establishing a mechanism to provide funds to local human rights organizations and victims' support networks to provide legal support for political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. It also requires the secretary of state to put in place a means to identify and extradite members of the Mengistu regime currently residing in the United States.

Second, the bill supports democratization by directing the State Department to provide assistance to strengthen local, regional, and national democratic processes through training authorities, political parties, and civil society groups in negotiation skills, campaign management, and election monitoring.

It prohibits nonhumanitarian assistance to Ethiopia if the ruling party obstructs United States efforts to provide human rights and democracy assistance and training within Ethiopia, and it makes it illegal for members of the security forces who have committed human rights violations against civilians to receive United States security assistance training.

The bill provides flexibility for the administration by means of a waiver that the President can exercise to continue security assistance to programs with Ethiopia that support United States' efforts on the Global War on Terror and the Ethiopians' efforts in United Nations peacekeeping and whatever is deemed necessary for the United States' national interests.

Finally, the bill attempts to foster accountability for the actions the Ethiopian Government has taken that undermine rule of law and fundamental political freedoms. It restricts security assistance for Ethiopia until the President certifies that, among other things, the Government of Ethiopia has taken steps to release political prisoners, hold security forces accountable for human rights abuses related to the demonstrations of 2005, and the Meles regime is respecting freedom of speech and information and allowing human rights groups to operate without being harassed.

The legislation bans travel visas for government officials who have been accused of gross human rights violations.

The bill is not merely punitive in nature, however. It also contains provisions for economic assistance and health care assistance for victims of torture, and it authorizes \$20 million in 2008 and \$20 million in 2009 to carry out these provisions.

According to Ethiopian news reports today, the pardon board recommended that the Ethiopian President grant clemency for a number of political prisoners. That is good news, and we welcome it, and we hope that the Government of Ethiopia will continue to move in this direction. I hope that clemency is granted, but the fact remains that those on trial never should have been jailed in the first place, and it is unclear how many people will be granted clemency and whether they will be able to take up the positions to which they were elected, even if they are free.

Equally as troubling is the fact that the government has yet to bring members of the security forces responsible for the killings which occurred in the wake of 2005 protest to justice.

The Ethiopian Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007 addresses much more than the detention of political prisoners. Its purpose is to promote accountability for the killing of innocent civilians by government security forces, to build the institutions of democracy, and to provide meaningful support for human rights and those who defend them in Ethiopia.

Brutal acts committed on behalf of the government against the political opposition have gone unpunished for too long. For example, a woman named Etenesh Yemam was killed in her home in front of her family for simply asking why her husband, one of the politicians elected in May 2005, was being arrested. The security officer who killed her faced no sanctions. In fact, he still has his job.

This is deplorable. We cannot remain silent in the face of such impunity. It is obvious to me and, I hope, to my colleagues in the United States Government that we need to do much more in order to promote the rule of law and respect for fundamental freedoms in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is a very proud country and has a tremendous heritage and history. As a matter of fact, next week, Congressman Honda will be sponsoring a resolution that I will co-sponsor recognizing the Second Millennium Celebration in Ethiopia.

So we want to see Ethiopia move back, as it has in the past, to being a good ally of the United States. We can no longer sit by and allow these issues to go without us mentioning them.

I plan to work with Congressman Rohrabacher on an amendment to be offered when the full committee marks up the bill. This bill currently has 83 co-sponsors. So we are sure that many Members of the U.S. Congress feel that this legislation is overdue. I urge my colleagues to support the legislation, and, at this time, I yield to the ranking member of the subcommittee for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Payne follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DONALD M. PAYNE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY, AND CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AFRICA AND GLOBAL HEALTH

This meeting of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health will come to order. Pursuant to notice, I call up the bill H.R. 2003, the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007, for purposes of markup and move its recommendation to the full committee. Without objection, the bill will be considered as read and open for amendment at any point. I yield myself such time as I may consume to explain the provisions of the bill.

This is a very straightforward piece of legislation, which essentially does three things:

First, it requires the Secretary of State to support human rights by establishing a mechanism to provide financial support to local human rights organizations and victims' support networks to provide legal support for political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. It also requires the Secretary of State put in place a means to identify and extradite members of the Mengistu Mariam regime currently residing in the United States in place.

Second, the bill supports democratization by directing the State Department to provide assistance to strengthen local, regional and national democratic processes through training authorities, political parties and civil society groups in negotiation skills, campaign management and election monitoring.

It prohibits non-humanitarian assistance to Ethiopia if the ruling party obstructs U.S. efforts to provide human rights and democracy assistance and training within Ethiopia. And it makes it illegal for members of the security forces who have committed human rights violations against civilians to receive United States security assistance training.

The bill provides flexibility for the administration by means of a waiver that the President can exercise to continue security assistance programs with Ethiopia that support U.S. efforts in the global war on terror should he deem it in the national interest to do so.

Finally, the bill attempts to foster accountability for the actions the Ethiopian government has taken that undermine rule of law and fundamental political freedoms.

It restricts security assistance for Ethiopia until the President certifies that, among other things, the government of Ethiopia has taken steps to release political prisoners, holds security forces accountable for human rights abuses related to the demonstrations of 2005 and the Meles regime is respecting freedom of speech and information and allowing human rights groups to operate without being harassed.

The legislation bans travel visas for government officials who have been accused of gross human rights violations. The bill is not merely punitive in nature, however. It also contains provisions for economic assistance and health care assistance as well as assistance for victims of torture. And it authorizes \$20 million to carry out the provisions for assistance. I am encouraged to hear that Prime Minister Meles has recommended Amnesty for the political prisoners. I hope that it is granted. But the fact remains that those on trial never should have been there in the first place. And it is unclear whether they will be able to take up the positions to which they were elected, even if they are freed.

Equally as troubling is the fact that the government has yet to hold members of the security forces responsible for the killings which occurred in the wake of the 2005 protests. The Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007 addresses much more than the detention of political prisoners. Its purpose is to promote accountability for the killing of innocent civilians by government security forces, build the institutions of democracy and to provide meaningful support for human rights, and those who defend them in Ethiopia. Brutal acts committed on behalf of the government against the political opposition have gone unpunished.

For example, a woman named (EE TE NE SHE) Etenesh Yimam was killed in her home in front of her family for simply asking why her husband, one of the politicians elected in May of 2005, was being arrested. The security officer who killed her faced no sanction. In fact, he still has his job. This is deplorable. We cannot remain silent in the face of such impunity.

It is obvious to me, and I hope to my colleagues that the United States government needs to do much more in order to promote rule of law and respect for fundamental freedom in Ethiopia. I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

I yield to the ranking member for his opening statement.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW JERSEY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank you for your graciousness in delaying this a bit. I was a keynote speaker at a breakfast this morning and made the mistake of taking questions, and the questions never ended. So I thank you again for your kindness.

I am very pleased that the Ethiopia Democracy Act is up for subcommittee markup this morning. Last year, as you know, when I was chairman, you and I moved a piece of legislation that made it through the full committee only to be blocked from coming to the House floor. It is my earnest hope that that will not happen with this legislation. It is important, it is timely, and it needs to become law.

The Ethiopia Democracy Act is as timely now as it ever was, maybe even more so after the failure of half-hearted attempts to promote democratic reform. People in this room will know that, on Monday, the Ethiopian Government, after trials in a kangaroo court, sentenced opposition leaders and democracy activists to prison. Thirty-five received life terms, six received terms of 15 to 18

years, and two journalists received 1 to 3 years in prison. This is only the most recent in a long series of human rights outrages.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, this bill was born in response to the June 2005 slaughter of almost 200 pro-democracy demonstrators in Addis and the mass arrests that followed. As I think you know, I visited Ethiopia and met with Prime Minister Meles and urged him to investigate the atrocities, the parties responsible for them, and to release the political prisoners. Meles told me, "I have a file on all of them. They are all guilty of treason."

Mr. Chairman, only a vicious dictator would make a remark like that. I remember thinking, as I got on the plane to fly home, that we needed something like the Belarus Democracy Act for Ethiopia, and you and I worked together last year to try to bring that legislation to the floor. Regrettably, it was blocked from coming to the floor.

I believe that the Bush administration, frankly, has not pushed Meles hard enough on human rights issues because it is satisfied that his government is cooperating with us in the War on Terror. The War on Terror is very important—we all know that—but no regime that terrorizes its own citizens can be a reliable ally in the War on Terror.

Terrorism is not just a military issue; it is also a human rights issue. Terrorists come from countries whose governments failed to respect their human rights. In promoting human rights in Ethiopia, we are attacking terrorism at its roots.

Over the past several years, Mr. Chairman, I have come to know and admire many people from Ethiopia's great and ancient civilization, and I assure my colleagues that democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are things they want desperately for their own country. It should be our country's policy as well to promote these things which correspond to our long-term interests.

I urge my colleagues to support this important piece of legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Smith follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, A
REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to everybody.

I am very pleased that the Ethiopia Democracy Act is up for subcommittee markup. Last year, when I was chairman of this subcommittee, you and I, Mr. Chairman, moved this bill through full committee but were blocked when we tried to bring it to the floor. It is my earnest hope that the bill will not be blocked again, and I will continue to give the Ethiopia Democracy Act my wholehearted support.

The Ethiopia Democracy Act is as timely now as it was last year—maybe even moreso, after the repeated failure of half-hearted attempts to promote democratic reform. People in this room will know that on Monday the Ethiopian government, after trials in a kangaroo court, sentenced opposition leaders and democracy activists to prison: 35 received life terms, 6 got terms of 15 to 18 years, and two journalists got 1 to 3 years.

This is only the most recent in a long series of human rights outrages.

This bill was born in response to the June 2005 slaughter of almost 200 pro-democracy demonstrators in Addis, and the mass arrests that followed. In August of that year, as I think you know, Mr. Chairman, I visited Ethiopia and met with Prime Minister Meles. I urged him to investigate that atrocity, to punish those responsible, and to release political prisoners. Meles told me, "I have a file on all of them, they are all guilty of treason." Mr. Chairman, only a vicious dictator would make a remark like that.

I remember thinking, as I got on the plane for the flight home, "We need a Belarus Democracy Act for Ethiopia." I am also the author of the Belarus Democ-

racy Act, and, working off that model, I wrote the first draft of the Ethiopia Democracy Act on that flight from Addis to Washington. In November 2005 I introduced it as HR 4423 and, in 2006, you and I, Mr. Chairman, worked together to move it as HR 5680. This spring I reintroduced it as HR 2228.

I believe that the Bush administration has not pushed Meles hard enough on human rights issues because it is satisfied that his government is cooperating with us in the war on terror. The war on terror is very, very important; but no regime that terrorizes its own citizens can be a reliable ally in the war on terror. Terrorism isn't just a military issue, it's also a human rights issue. Terrorists come from countries where their governments failed to respect their human rights. In promoting human rights in Ethiopia, we are attacking terrorism at its roots.

In the past three years I have come to know and admire many people from Ethiopia's great and ancient civilization, and I assure my colleagues that democracy, human rights, and the rule of law are things they want desperately for their country. It should be our country's policy to promote these things, which correspond to our own long-term interests. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

Finally, I'd like to thank my former subcommittee staffer Greg Simpkins for his dedicated work on this legislation.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much, Mr. Smith. I do recall the frustration when you introduced the legislation last year. Hopefully, this year we will be able to break through and mark it up in full committee and then finally get to the floor, so thank you.

I will recognize any members to strike the last word. Congresswoman Watson?

Ms. WATSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your work on this crucial piece of legislation.

I represent a district that has a significant number of Ethiopian-American constituents, and I know they are happy to see our committee moving forward with this bill.

This week, 35 Ethiopian opposition politicians were sentenced to life in prison by an Ethiopian court. Their crime was simply to have challenged the results of a national election. I think this indicates that there are some serious problems in Ethiopia that this bill is intended to address.

Ethiopia is one of the oldest and proudest civilizations in the world. Sitting astride the confluence of Africa and Asia of Islam and Christianity, Ethiopia has, over the centuries, found its diversity to be a crucial asset, even as it poses significant challenges.

Ethiopia's recent history has been marred by political violence. In May 2005, Ethiopia held elections which some observers billed as the freest in the country's history. Unfortunately, these elections still fell short of the basic standards of openness and transparency. U.S.-based groups funded by the National Endowment for Democracy were prevented from observing the elections. When average Ethiopians took to the streets to protest their flawed elections, the government responded with violence and killing dozens of unarmed citizens.

Mr. Chairman, I think there are some key points we need to keep in mind when we try to craft a policy to support democracy in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is not a totalitarian dictatorship. In May 2005, elections were deeply flawed; even so, they resulted in unprecedented electoral gains for opposition parties.

Furthermore, the United States cannot bring democracy to Ethiopia. Democracy is a process that must be, and will be, led by Ethiopian people themselves. The most we can hope to do is to provide assistance to those Ethiopians seeking to bring peace and positive change to their country.

Ethiopia is a strong ally of the United States, and we should continue to support it and the Ethiopian people, but I think we have an obligation to do what we can to support those Ethiopians who are seeking to change their country to make it more stable, democratic, and affluent.

So I support the balanced approach that is found in H.R. 2003. I am also a co-sponsor, and it is an effective strategy for achieving this goal. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much. Mr. Boozman?

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really reluctantly am kind of taking a little bit of the other side of view of my chairman and my ranking member, which I have a tremendous amount of respect for.

I think there are a lot of good things in the bill, but I just do not like the overall tone. It really does appear that we are taking sides. There is no recognition of the fact that there have been significant advances since the ruling party came to power in 1991. Also, I have concerns that the suspension of the joint military activities and the travel ban are inconsistent.

We deal with many, many countries that have similar or much worse records that we do not impose those kinds of restrictions on their countries, and I think the one thing that the world looks to us, you know, is we take these polls, and we try to decide, why is the rest of the world not liking us? I think the one thing that the world expects out of us is fairness. So I would feel much better if we imposed a similar sanction on whatever. I am making it very broad.

For those reasons, I do think it appears that we are taking sides, and, for those reasons, I will oppose the bill. Thank you.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much. Ms. Woolsey? Mr. McCaul?

Mr. MCCAUL. I want to thank the chairman and ranking member for their hard work to address issues of freedom and democracy in Ethiopia and around the world. Your work in Africa during your time in Congress has been admirable, and I give great deference to your expertise on this issue.

However, I do come to today's markup with some concerns about both the state of democratic reform in Ethiopia, on one hand, and the effects of this bill on the progress of that reform, on the other.

Ethiopia has traveled a long, hard road over the past few decades. The Ethiopian people have suffered through devastating wars and famine. However, the progress made in recent years has been remarkable, culminating in a new constitution and elections.

Ethiopia is also an important ally in the War on Terror. They have provided crucial intelligence on Islamic extremist activities and play a crucial role in the ongoing crisis in Somalia. Despite this progress, there is still much work that needs to be done.

Recent protests against the government have been met with deadly responses by government forces, and the people responsible for that have not been brought to justice. Steps need to be taken in order to establish a more independent judiciary, and political prisoners who have been held for exercising their democratic rights must be released.

We have recently heard that negotiations between the government and the opposition may finally be bearing fruit. We under-

stand that the detainees and government will remain committed to pursuing such a resolution, and tribal elders have confirmed to American diplomats that they are close to reaching a consensus between the detainees and the government to resolve this matter.

The Ethiopian Government is far from perfect. However, they have shown a willingness to move in a positive direction. I am concerned that the passage of this bill, as it is currently written, will do more harm than good to the Ethiopian democratic movement and will hurt our strategic partnership with Ethiopia in combating terrorism.

I am also concerned that it may have a negative effect on the current negotiations between the government and the opposition.

I believe that this bill, as currently drafted, has number of shortcomings that must be addressed. By failing to do so, we may be inadvertently undermining the very principles of democracy and human rights that this well-meaning, well-intentioned piece of legislation seeks to advance.

Mr. Chairman, I do not intend to stand in opposition to this bill today; however, I would like to urge the chairman and ranking member to address these fundamental concerns that I have with this bill prior to its consideration in the full committee so as to address some of the unintended consequences that I see in your good-faith effort, and I yield back.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much. Mr. Brad Miller?

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Chairman, can I just comment?

Mr. PAYNE. Yes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. The other thing, and I failed to mention, I guess, the other concerns that I have about the suspension of joint military and the travel ban is that—maybe we should change what we are training, but that is an opportunity for us to interact with their military in the sense of trying to teach them some positive things about how you do crowd control.

In other words, I really believe, and I think we all believe, that the way you change the world is through personal relationships, but that does allow our military to, I think, have a positive role in interacting.

Maybe the same is true of the travel ban, if you banned certain functions and maybe not other functions. I do not know, but I do think that it is positive that the United States interact in both of those ways to try and be helpful. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. PAYNE. Yes.

Mr. SMITH OF NEW JERSEY. I thank you, and I say to my good friend, I understand those thoughts, but, frankly, we do apply this and try to apply it to more countries. I wish that we had a more consistent policy vis-à-vis those countries.

We passed the North Korea Human Rights Act. I was the sponsor of the Belarus Democracy Act. One of the core features of the Belarus Democracy Act, which is similar to the act under consideration, is that we try to strengthen civil society, we try to ensure that the court system is transparent and independent. When it comes to travel bans, the problem is the ability, the unfettered ability, on the part of many of those in government, to travel, to make money, to really not be held to account for the atrocities for which they appear to be complicit in. And so we include travel bans in

this legislation, because people are accused of gross human rights violations.

We are talking about a serious human rights violator who should not be allowed to come to this country and move around with impunity when, back home, there are people who have suffered, died, and have been tortured because of him.

Let me also say that I chaired the Human Rights Committee for 12 years in this body and held numerous hearings on security assistance, the military-to-military, the JSETS program and the other programs that we have.

I will never forget hearings that we held on Indonesia, where Capiases, which was the equivalent of their Green Beret, were getting training from the United States during the Clinton administration, so, it seems, it does not matter who is in the White House. When it came down to the change of leadership from Zohartu to Habibi, there were troops out in the streets, we believe, using the very training that we had provided, and little red dots were showing up on people's heads in terms of crowd control.

I tried desperately to get from the government, our Government, who it is that we trained and what kind of human rights training they received, and I never got it. We held hearings, we got redacted copies of lists, and I went to Indonesia a couple of times to try to glean that information, and I could not get it. The same holds true, as Mr. Payne and I have been witness to, crowd control turned out to be crowd killing.

When I visited with Meles the first time, asked him, "What are you doing to investigate these massive numbers of deaths of people who were out there clamoring for democracy?" We know that the election was egregiously flawed. Despite that, the opposition did extremely well. They would have done much better, but there were flaws. For that, they got bullets, and they got killed. They got clubbed.

We were saying, "Investigate and hold those people responsible." We got none of that. As a matter of fact, that is when Meles went into his tirade with me about how he has dossiers on everybody. He said, "I could throw them all in prison for treason." I said, "Please, Mr. President, do not do that." We want to be friends, but, frankly, it is hard to be friends when you have got a clenched fist, and you are using it and using your secret police.

Greg Simpkins, who is here with us today, and I met with the opposition leaders while we were there. Greg got in the car with some of the opposition leaders, and as soon as he took off, a group of bully boys was following close behind, within yards, following these individuals around. You know, if Greg was not there, who knows if they would not have gotten the club then, too?

So I take your point: We are inconsistent around the world, the PRC, for example, and other countries where we do not do enough. Notwithstanding that lack of consistency, I would hope that we would try where we can make a difference. This legislation, I think, will make a difference, and my hope is it becomes law. I hope that maybe it does not need to become law because Meles does turn a new leaf. Hope springs eternal, but, absent pressure.

Finally, Mr. Chairman—I know I have gone on too long—when I was in China, I visited with Weijing Chang, the great human

rights democracy world leader, who spent years in the gulag. After our visit he was rearrested. The Chinese wanted Olympics 2000. They let him go, thinking they would get it.

I had him testify, when he was finally given a parole and when he was well enough—he was next to death—he came and testified, and he said that contrary to what many of you in the West think, when you are nice and placate dictatorship, they beat us more. When you draw a line in the sand and say, as this bill does, we mean business; there are going to be sanctions. You are not going to be able to travel, they pay attention. Even Joseph Coney, when he was indicted by the ICC, all of a sudden, he wants that lifted as a precondition to coming to a final negotiating settlement with Uganda.

It does sharpen the mind, and I think this is a modest step in that direction. I will never forget sitting right there when Weijing Chang said that when you are nice, when you lift glasses and try to accommodate, even though you are well meaning, they beat us more. When you are tough, the beatings, they do not end, but they are diminished.

So my hope is that this will have a positive, laudatory affect on this government that we mean business, and I thank you, my friend.

Mr. PAYNE. Let me thank the ranking member. I certainly concur with what he said. I also visited the prisons, saw Professor Mesfin, went back to the prime minister and said, "He is elderly, he is very ill, and he is probably going to die," and he said, "Well, it is up to the courts and the mayor of Addis."

Then when we were able to speak to the chairman of the inquiry board, who was a Supreme Court justice from Ethiopia who fled the country because the prime minister continually asked him to change the findings. He slipped out of the country with another of the commissioners. He showed us photos.

There were sharpshooters. The people who were killed in the demonstration were not killed by random shooting. If that were the case, you would see people hit in the stomach or in the shoulder. These people were shot in the head with the intent to kill by sharpshooters trained by someone.

This happened in 2005. They said there were going to be some things done, and so we held off in 2006. In 2007—this is almost 2 years ago—we have exempted assistance to Ethiopia for fighting terrorism. We have exempted peacekeeping assistance. We have said that it will not impact on our U.S. existence and cooperation in terrorism.

So I think that we are hoping that the President will grant clemency, and then the provisions related to the release of the prisoners will be removed, if they are allowed to leave, and the \$40 million that we have to help the Black Star Hospital, which is atrocious, to help in Ethiopia's development of the Nile, to help with the whole question of democracy building can go forward. There is much more positive, as a matter of fact, in this bill than the fact that we are simply saying, Do the right thing and release the political prisoners.

So, with that, I yield to Ms. Jackson Lee, and we will have to call this vote before eleven. Several members have markups in their committees, and we will then convene the hearing.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Chairman, let me thank you very much, to the ranking member, to my colleagues, and I know that time marches on. We are equally, many of us, in markups, but I wanted to come, Mr. Chairman, because, obviously, this is an important markup and important legislation.

You know very well that I cannot mention Ethiopia and Houston without mentioning Congressman Mickey Leland. I pay tribute to him every time that I can, for he taught those in the deep, if you will, areas of my congressional district, the Fifth Ward, Texas, where he was born, the importance of internationalism and the importance of Ethiopia. During the time that he lived, Ethiopia was gripped with a terrible drought.

Since that time, we have seen cycles of drought. This Congress has made every effort to provide, if you will, the stones of opportunity rather than the stones of clubbing by providing resources and looking to provide opportunities for irrigation and working with the cycles of hunger in Ethiopia.

We worked with President Meles during the Eritrea-Ethiopia conflict, which still today poses concern. The Clinton administration worked extensively, and, during that time, there was an effort by Ethiopia to work with Eritrea; of course, differences of opinions.

But I think Ethiopia can meet its longstanding history of having the first human, Lucy, a long and viable history, respected leaders, over years, honored around the world, by rising to its appropriate higher angels, and that is to address the decades' question of human rights.

So I am interested in seeing this legislation pass. I would remind Chairman Payne that the first time, I believe, he met me, there was an amendment on the floor regarding Ethiopia, and, of course, we had, at that time, maybe similar views but differences of opinion on how we were approaching it. We worked together, and I am an advocate, a strong advocate, for Ethiopia.

I am concerned about the military assistance, but I am listening to how it is to be instructive because, right now, although we are about to release a number of prisoners, we still have a series of individuals who are still incarcerated. The question becomes, what will happen to them?

It is crucial that we make these steps toward human rights in Ethiopia and the final recognition by Prime Minister Meles to take the critical step of referring the cases of all sentenced opposition leaders to Ethiopia's Board of Pardon and, hopefully, that Ethiopia's Board of Pardon and Prime Minister Meles will grant clemency to the sentenced prisoners in the interests of justice and political reconciliation. Only through amnesty will the Ethiopian Government and opposition leaders be able to secure a path to reconciliation rather than sharing a future political divisiveness.

So I look forward to working with Congressman McCaul on his areas of concern, but I do believe, as Father Mandela did in South Africa, reconciliation is now, it is imperative, and it is the only route for Ethiopia to again take its rightful leadership role as a historic leader, a leader in democracy and human rights.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your leadership and that of the ranking member. I know we can always do better, but I am very glad to hear you say that, as we move toward the full committee or move toward the full House, that as we look to Ethiopia's work, we may be able to look, again, at ways of working with them, and I yield back my time.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you very much. Mr. Adam Smith?

Mr. SMITH OF WASHINGTON. No. Thank you.

Mr. PAYNE. Thank you.

There are no amendments to the legislation. Therefore, the question occurs on the motion to report the bill, H.R. 2003, favorably. All in favor, signify by saying aye.

[A chorus of ayes.]

Mr. PAYNE. Aye. Opposed? The ayes have it. The motion is approved, and the bill is reported favorably.

The staff is directed to make any technical and conforming amendments. At this time, this hearing markup stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:01 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD

PREPARED STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHEILA JACKSON LEE, A REPRESENTATIVE
IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF TEXAS

Mr. Chairman, I am proud to support H.R. 2003, the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007, of which I, together with over 70 of my colleagues, have co-sponsored. This important legislation reaffirms the United States' commitment to supporting human rights, democracy, independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press, and economic development in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is currently on the road to democracy. This is a path that should be paved with civil and political discourse, peaceful transitions of power, and respect for human rights. By necessity, the achievement of a modern democracy requires the implementation of electoral reforms, the separation of powers in the government, and the establishment of a truly independent judiciary. These are the founding principles of our American Republic, and I have seen firsthand the progress on the path to democracy Ethiopia has made since the brutal dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam was brought down in 1991. I strongly believe that the United States should do all it can to support this transition, including bolstering civil society and speaking out when fundamental human rights are violated.

Ethiopia has a long and proud history. It is the cradle of mankind, as illustrated by Lucy, also known as Dinkinesh (Amharic for "you are wonderful"), which is the nearly complete hominid skeleton discovered by archeologists in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia on November 30, 1974. Lucy is estimated to have lived 3.2 million years ago and has redefined science's understanding of human evolution. I was happy to work with Texas State Senator Rodney Ellis, Ethiopian Ambassador Samuel Assefa, and the Houston Museum of Natural Science to bring Lucy to Houston, which is one of only nine American cities and the only city in Texas where the bones will be on display later this year.

Ethiopia is also the oldest independent nation in Africa, has never been colonized, and is home to the African Union. Despite Ethiopia's rich history, however, this bill recognizes that recent decades have brought hardship and suffering to Ethiopia's people, through military conflict, natural disasters, and a military dictatorship.

For over a decade in the House of Representatives, and prior to that in the Houston city council, I have been an outspoken and unwavering advocate for the country of Ethiopia and its people, both in Ethiopia and in the diaspora. Following in the legendary footsteps of my predecessor, Mickey Leland, who died attempting to alleviate the starvation faced by Ethiopia's innocent populace, I have been a champion of increasing foreign aid to, political, economic, and social cooperation with, and improving human rights in Ethiopia.

While I continue to advocate close interaction and constructive dialogue with Ethiopia and its leaders, I believe the human rights situation there must be addressed. Of particular recent concern has been the detention of elected parliamentarians, human rights advocates, and independent journalists and the harsh response to protestors after Ethiopia's recent unprecedented elections in 2005. In response to reports that thousands of prisoners languished in prisons throughout Ethiopia, I was proud to join a number of my colleagues in sending a letter to Secretary Rice, expressing our strong concern about the treatment of detainees.

Only this week, an Ethiopian court harshly sentenced 35 opposition leaders and activists to life in prison and denied them the right to vote or run for public office on charges of inciting violence. Although I was pleased to see the Court rebuff the prosecution's call for the death sentence against these defendants, I believe that the sentence of life imprisonment is still too severe a punishment.

However, I am heartened by the active role that elders such as Professor Ephraim Isaac have played in the negotiations for these prisoners' release, and I am hopeful that these negotiations will lead to the imminent release of these prisoners. Moreover, I believe Prime Minister Meles Zenawi took a critical step by swiftly referring the cases of all sentenced opposition leaders to Ethiopia's Board of Pardon, and I am confident that Ethiopia's Board of Pardon and Prime Minister Zenawi will grant clemency to the sentenced prisoners in the interests of justice and political reconciliation. Only through amnesty will the Ethiopian government and opposition leaders be able to secure a path to reconciliation rather than assuring a future of political divisiveness.

This legislation reaffirms the United States' commitment to supporting Ethiopia as it builds the necessary institutions and civil society framework for a successful democracy. It contains a number of important provisions directing the Department of State to provide mechanisms for supporting and monitoring the promotion of human rights and democracy within Ethiopia.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to conclude by reiterating my firm belief in the extreme importance of supporting the strengthening of democracy and human rights in Ethiopia. Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.

