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Federica Mogherini

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice-President of the Commission

Brussels, 1st December 2016

Subject: Detention of Dr. Merera Gudina in Ethiopia

Dear Federica,

Thank you for your reply of 29 November 2016 to my letter concerning the state of emergency decreed by the Ethiopia and the human rights situation in the country. Despite your efforts to request the Ethiopian government to address the grievances of the population, open democratic space and respect the population's fundamental freedoms, the government is not listening.

And the latest evidence of that is in the sad news that Dr. Merera Gudina, a former MP and leader of the Oromo People's Congress, was arrested yesterday at Bole airport in Ethiopia upon arrival from Europe. I was also informed that his residence was raided by security forces and that at least two of his close family members were taken in custody.

The apparent reason for the arrest was his participation in a hearing at the European Parliament, which I hosted, and where he sat next to the Ethiopian athlete Feyisa Lilesa and Dr. Berhanu Nega. Government affiliated media in Ethiopia accused Dr. Merera Gudina of "crossing the red line" for sitting at the meeting with opposition leader Dr. Berhanu Nega, who is considered a "terrorist" by the Ethiopian government. There are reports that the government-affiliated media circulated pictures of the hearing and implied that he violated both the state of emergency decree and the so called Ethiopian Anti-Terrorism Law by meeting someone that the Ethiopian government designated as a terrorist.

Dr. Merera Gudina came to the European Parliament at my invitation to speak about the situation in Ethiopia, which is of direct concern to European parliamentarians and institutions, given the strong ties between the European Union and Ethiopia and the fact that Ethiopia is the single biggest recipient of EU development aid in Africa. For these reasons, he also met with the cabinet of President Schulz and with the External Action Service.

Ana Gomes

European Parliament

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It is unacceptable that Dr. Merera Gudina was detained upon arrival in Ethiopia, and his arrest demonstrates the government's absolute disregard for human rights, namely freedom of speech. It should serve as an indication that the Ethiopian government has no intention to open up democratic space in the country nor to heed your calls for inclusive dialogue.

A more stringent approach is necessary from the EU towards the Ethiopian government. Failing to do so will only aggravate the violence in the country, which can easily escalate into civil war. I am extremely concerned about the detention of Dr. Merera Gudina and his relatives, and believe that he is at risk of being submitted to torture and other ill-treatment. I therefore hope that you will adamantly press for his immediate release and condemn his arrest as a blatant violation of international human rights norms, which Ethiopia is bound to uphold, namely under the Cotonou Agreement.

Best regards,

Ana Gomes

Ana Gomes
Member of the European Parliament

cc: Martin Schulz, President of the European Parliament
Neven Mimica, Commissioner for International Cooperation & Development
Elmar Brok, Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee
Linda McAvan, Chair of the Development Committee
Elena Valenciano, Chair of the Sub-committee on Human Rights
Gianni Pittella, President of the Group of the Socialists and Democrats

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