

Thursday, 21 June 2007 - Strasbourg

Human rights in Ethiopia

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE), author . - Madam President, I headed the EU election observation mission in Ethiopia in 2005. At that time, Opposition leaders warned the EU that the elections would be another scam by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to fool the international community and that they all would end up in jail or killed. We, the EU, persuaded them not to boycott the elections, promising to watch and ensure accountability. The Ethiopians believed us and voted massively and in an orderly manner.

However, when people protested peacefully against electoral fraud, government forces resorted to brutal repression. In June and November, hundreds were killed in massacres and thousands were wounded and imprisoned, including the leaders who had warned the EU. They are among the 38 political prisoners found guilty on 11 June of this year in a farcical trial in which they were not able to present their defences. Sentences are due next July, possibly carrying the death penalty, against some of the most representative, articulate and courageous leaders of Ethiopia - elected Members of Parliament, human rights defenders, journalists, activists for development, teachers and other prisoners of conscience. Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, aged 77, the respected founder of the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, is one of them. The EU is the main donor of aid in Ethiopia. I have seen the difference it makes there. It can do it again if the Commission, Council and Member States stop turning a blind eye.

They must act immediately, holding the Government of Ethiopia accountable to human rights commitments under the Cotonou Agreement, holding Prime Minister Meles Zenawi personally responsible and pressing for the release of the prisoners without delay and unconditionally. They must follow the recommendations made by this Parliament in several resolutions, including the one we will approve today, not to further let down the Ethiopian people, not to further discredit Europe's commitment towards development in Africa and not to further betray our basic values of democracy and human rights.