

Thursday, 16 November 2006 - Strasbourg

Ethiopia

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE), author . - (PT) The repression of students and of the Oromo, Amhara and other ethnic groups in Ethiopia; the continuing imprisonment and mock trials of elected opposition leaders, trade union leaders, journalists, teachers, human rights and development activists, and many other Ethiopians who are fighting for freedom and democracy; the manipulation by the Meles Zenawi government of the conclusions reached by the commission of inquiry into the massacre of 193 people in June and November 2005, following protests about election fraud, and the persecution of the judges in that commission who refused to alter their findings and were therefore forced to flee the country; the detention of the lawyer Yalemzewd Bekele, who was working for the European Union delegation, and the unjustified expulsion of European diplomats in violation of the Vienna Convention - all these events not only demonstrate how anti-democratic and totalitarian the Meles Zenawi regime is, but also expose its growing fragility and desperation.

Ever since the conclusions of the EU election observation mission in 2005, the Member States' governments in the Council and the Commission should have been working together to take action regarding Mr Meles Zenawi's regime. As Teshale Aberra, one of the judges who had to flee the country, said, the Meles Zenawi government is just as bad as, or even worse than, the Mengistu regime.

Ethiopia receives financial aid from the European Union, and therefore the European Union must demand the immediate release of all political prisoners. It must also demand that an international inquiry into the 2005 massacres be set up and that those responsible for the massacres be brought to justice. The EU must adopt the appropriate measures provided for in Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, of which Ethiopia is a member, as this Parliament demands.

Such measures include freezing the European assets of Mr Meles Zenawi and members of his government and denying them entry visas to Europe. All these measures must be designed so as to hit those who are primarily responsible, and not to hurt the Ethiopian people. Our governments and the Commission must stop justifying their tolerant attitude towards this anti-democratic regime that violates human rights, on the pretext that it is an ally in the fight against terrorism.

We in Europe and the United States must stop deluding ourselves. Ethiopia's intervention in Somalia on the pretext of fighting terrorism has only served to entrench the Islamic Courts in Mogadishu, and the disastrous consequences do not stop there: discredited and lacking in popular support, Mr Meles Zenawi's regime has left Ethiopia itself, Africa's second most populous country, wide open to infiltration by terrorists.