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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 21, 2007

**ETHIOPIA HUMAN RIGHTS BILL RE-INTRODUCED IN THE HOUSE:
A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF AN ADVANCE COPY OF THE NEW BILL**

THANK YOU, DONALD PAYNE!

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The Coalition for H.R. 5680 is informed and believes that Congressman Donald Payne (D-N.J.), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations, introduced the “Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007” in the U.S. House of Representatives on Friday, April 20, 2007.

The official copy of the new bill will be available after the Clerk of the House issues a tracking number for it.

Chairman Payne’s bill replaces H.R.5680, also known as the “Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy and Accountability Act of 2006”.

Chairman Payne’s bill maintains much of the substance of H.R.5680 in terms of legislative findings and provisions. However, Chairman Payne has re-drafted the new bill with **regime accountability** as a centerpiece of the legislation.

Specifically, the new bill:

Emphasizes **current regime accountability** by affirmatively stating that it is the policy of the United States to seek the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. This emphasis is manifest in light of the evidence the new bill incorporates from the findings of the Inquiry Commission and the U.S. Department of State’s 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Ethiopia. Effectively, the new bill places the release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience as a top priority, and now appears second in line in the legislative statement of U.S. policy, ahead of the collaboration on the global war on terror. Moreover, using the findings of the Inquiry Commission, the new bill sends a clear message to the ruling regime that excessive use of force against peaceful citizens, lack of respect for human rights, rampant conditions of beatings and physical and mental abuse, mistreatment of detainees and opposition

supporters, poor prison conditions and arbitrary arrests and detentions are condemned by the U.S. Congress.

Underscores **retrospective regime accountability** by demanding the prosecution and punishment of the killers of the unarmed protesters in the period following the May, 2005 elections. It is clear from the plain language of the new bill that accountability is sought not only for the criminal and lawless acts of the security forces, but also others who may have had material participation and involvement in the commission of gross abuses of human rights. The bill intends that all persons who have engaged in gross human rights abuses will be brought to justice.

Aims to ensure **prospective regime accountability** by preventing the future recurrence of extrajudicial killings and massacres such as those that took place after the 2005 elections. The new bill adds 10 extraordinary paragraphs meticulously documenting the massive scope of human rights violations in Ethiopia as set forth in the findings of the Inquiry Commission and the U.S. Department of State's 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, Ethiopia. The findings of gross abuses of human rights in the new bill are so detailed that individual victims such as Etenesh Yemam, and her daughter Alemzuria are mentioned. Etenesh's husband was elected to the Addis Abeba City Council in 2005, and she was shot by so-called security officers in cold blood as she pleaded for his release. Justice for the innocent detainees who were massacred in Kality prison is also specifically mentioned. The inclusion of the extensive new findings sends a clear message to the ruling regime in Ethiopia that massacres, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary detentions and other gross violations of human rights will not be tolerated by the United States.

Aims to use **regime accountability as a means of immediately ending gross abuses of human rights and the violence** perpetrated by the regime against opposition elements, dissenters and others. In this regard, the incorporation of the findings of the Inquiry commission and the 2006 U.S. State Department Human Rights report clearly indicates the sense of Congress that future U.S. policy and relations with Ethiopia will depend a great deal on the ruling regime's transparency and accountability on the issue of human rights, and its restraint in the use of indiscriminate violence against citizens.

Sends a clear message to **the ruling regime that it must be transparent and accountable** on its human rights record to its citizens and the international community, and take immediate remedial action to comply with human rights conventions. Consistent with H.R. 5680, the new bill offers a package of financial and technical support to the regime to achieve the objective of human rights accountability by strengthen human rights monitoring, creating a victims support network for political prisoners, increasing the independence and monitoring of the judiciary, and strengthening the private media, among other things.

Doubles the level of financial support to the ruling regime for human rights accountability by providing **\$20 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 and 2009**. (H.R. 5680 provided \$10 million for fiscal years 2007 and 2008.)

LIST OF SPECIFIC TEXTUAL CHANGES IN THE NEW BILL

Sec. 1: Short Title: The new bill may be cited as the “Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007.”

Sec. 3: Findings: Lists facts on 1) human rights abuses as reported in the U.S. Department of State’s 2006 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, including lack of free elections, unlawful killings, beatings, abuse, mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters, poor prison conditions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, 2) human rights abuses from the findings of the 11-member Commission of Inquiry charged to investigate whether government security forces used excessive force, caused damaged to life and property and showed lack of respect for human rights. The Commission’s findings are reported in great detail in 9 paragraphs.

Sec. 6 (3) (D): Specifically requires that the security personnel involved in the unlawful killings of demonstrators, Etenesh Yemam and Kaliti prisoners are punished.

Sec. 7: Provides support for economic development assistance to Ethiopia. The Agency for International Development is expected to provide assistance for sustainable development of the Nile and Awash River resources, including technical assistance for irrigation system development and hydroelectric power to prevent future famines. Additionally, support is provided for health care assistance to hospitals and health care centers in rural areas. Prior provisions for assistance in the areas of taxation, debt management, bank supervision, etc, and financing for commercial ventures are omitted in the new bill.

Sec. 9: Authorization of Appropriations: The bill provides \$20 million for each of the fiscal years 2008 and 2009.

WE SHOULD THANK CHAIRMAN PAYNE

We should thank Chairman Payne not only for what he has done for Ethiopia in this bill and H.R. 5680, but also for his tireless efforts on behalf of the African continent.

All Ethiopian Americans and Ethiopian human rights advocates should recognize that Chairman Payne, by introducing the new bill replacing H.R. 5680, demonstrates his unflagging support and high level of commitment to the cause of human rights in Ethiopia.

It is equally important for us to appreciate that Chairman Payne has been involved in the cause of human rights in Africa for a very long time, in addition to all of his tireless efforts to improve the economic, political and health problems facing the continent.

Among Chairman Payne’s recent efforts on behalf of human rights in the current 110th Congress include the Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act of 2007. He has previously sponsored and authored numerous bill and resolutions promoting democracy, good governance, human rights, peaceful conflict resolution and sustainable peace throughout the African continent, including the Sudan Peace Act and the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act.

Express your thanks and appreciation to Chairman Payne!

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NEXT STEPS ON THE NEW BILL

There are a number of issues and questions that supporters and advocates of human rights in Ethiopia will need to address as the new bill begins its journey to the House floor.

A number of these issues have been raised by various human rights advocates and groups in the past, and as part of the “next steps” on the new bill, these issues and questions must be addressed.

Among the critical issues raised to improve the effectiveness of grassroots legislative advocacy for human rights in Ethiopia include: 1) the need for increased sophistication in the use legislative advocacy strategies and tactics, 2) learning from past mistakes and avoiding the pitfalls of improvised and haphazard grassroots advocacy, 3) the need to harness available material, technical and human resources to produce specific results that maximize passage of a human rights bill, and 4) the need to develop effective mechanisms to work with congressional members and staff.

We hope such discussions will take place in the near future, and concerted action will be taken to bring this new bill to the House floor as quickly as possible.