



Congressman Donald Payne

Tenth District - New Jersey

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**Contact: Kerry McKenney
(202) 225-3436**

Chairman Donald M. Payne Welcomes Release of Prisoners in Ethiopia

Representative Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Africa, issued the following statement today:

“I very much welcome the release of these political prisoners and call for all political prisoners to be released without further delay. I congratulate the many advocates of democracy, journalists, and human rights activists who have been imprisoned for standing up for what they believe.

As we celebrate the release of these political prisoners, we should never forget those still left behind and the 193 innocent civilians killed in June and November of 2005. The Government-appointed Commission of Inquiry concluded in its report that 193 people were killed and that government security forces used excessive force. It is important to remember that these advocates of democracy were imprisoned for exercising their constitutional rights, something they never should have gone to jail for in the first place. Those who should be held accountable are the killers of the 193 innocent civilians.

The Prime Minister of Ethiopia told a press conference that “the Ethiopian government isn’t willing and is unable to be run like a banana republic from Capitol Hill.” The U.S. Congress is not in the business of running banana republics. American taxpayers are providing hundreds of millions of dollars every year to help Ethiopia in education, health care, and humanitarian assistance. Ethiopia is a symbol of freedom, a country with rich history. Over the years, the proud and courageous people of Ethiopia made enormous contribution for the freedom of many African countries and fought courageously to defend Ethiopia’s freedom. Many died defending Ethiopia’s independence and freedom.

I am hopeful that the release of the political prisoners will trigger a new peaceful, democratic process in Ethiopia. Strengthening the institutions of democracy and respect for the rule of all by all parties is essential and long overdue. It is also critical for those outside the political process return home and to peacefully participate in rebuilding their country.

The 2005 elections were by far the best organized, transparent, and highly competitive. What happened after the elections led to the crisis we face today. I am confident that by working together, Ethiopians will build a strong, democratic Ethiopia.”