



Congressman Donald Payne

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For Immediate Release

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Joint Statement by Congressman Donald M Payne and European Parliament Member Ana Maria Gomes

We are deeply shocked and dismayed to hear the guilty verdict of the 38 courageous human rights advocates, elected parliamentarians, and opposition leaders. This decision clearly demonstrates that the judicial process is controlled and managed by the ruling party in Ethiopia.

The verdict by the Court also proves beyond doubt that the Courts lack the necessary and required independence from political influence. These prisoners were deliberately and systematically misled by the Prime Minister's office that a peaceful resolution was possible. In fact, on a number of occasions we were led to believe that an agreement between the prisoners and the Prime Minister was reached.

We strongly condemn this politically driven and unjust guilty verdict. This kind of authoritarian behavior will only lead to more violence and instability. What crime did the prisoners commit? They ran for parliament and won. Many Ethiopians lost their lives under this regime and many have been tortured while in prison. The Commission of Inquiry that the Ethiopian Parliament established to investigate the June 8, 2005 and November 1-10, 2005 violence, concluded that 193 civilians were killed and 763 injured by government security forces.

This regime not only murdered innocent civilians in the streets of the capital, but also killed prisoners who were locked up in their quarters. According to the Commission, security forces fired 1,500 bullets at prisoners inside the corrugated iron building, killing 17 and injuring 53 prisoners. Now, who is guilty of multiple crimes? The prisoners or the government whose own Commission of Inquiry stated that security forces used excessive force against civilians?

Once again, we call for the immediate release of these prisoners without condition.

Ms. Birtukan Mideksa

**Professor Mesfin W.
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Dr. Yacob Hailemariam

**Dr. Berhanu Nega
Congressman Payne**



Photos taken in August 2006 in Kaliti Prison.