

## **Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners (SOCEPP-Canada)**

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**Web: [www.humanrightsethiopia.com](http://www.humanrightsethiopia.com)**

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December 5, 2016

It is with great dismay that we learn the arrest of Dr. Merera Gudina, the current Vice Chair of Medrek Ethiopia. He was arrested on his return from a visit to Europe where he participated in a meeting at the European Parliament. His crime according to government statement is that he was at a meeting in which groups alleged as “terrorists” by the regime were present. He was invited to speak by a profoundly august institution, the European Parliament, and he does not have the prerogative to select or deselect who attends the meeting.

The government knew all the details of Dr. Merera’s visit to Europe: his travel plans, where and why he was going before the meeting took place. If the government feared that he will be contaminated by terrorists, if there were such Ethiopian groups at all and why they are not arrested by EU countries that are friends and supporters of the Ethiopian regime, it should have advised him against the trip or denied him an exit visa. As there was no warning of this nature, we feel that the government has been planning to lock him up all along and this meeting merely provided an excuse. We would like to remind readers that Dr. Merera was one of the few prominent opposition leaders that are based in the country and had remained outside the jails of the ruling until now.

The arrest of Dr. Merera is an insult to the European Parliament and an insult to EU as an institution, which has been funding Ethiopia more than \$1 billion every year partly to promote “pluralist democracy”. Yet again the Ethiopian government has blatantly demonstrated its disrespect to the international community. For anyone familiar to the Ethiopian political landscape, the arrest of Dr Merera is one of many political leaders who are loyal to their country and the laws of the land. It suffices to mention that Andualem Aragie (UDJ), Bekele Gertba, Olbana Lelissa, Dejene Tafa (ONC), Yonathan Tesfaye (Blue Party) and others from AEDP etc are also other leaders still languishing in prison. We have stopped counting the incarceration of senior cadres of major parties and a multitude of journalists. Ethiopia is effectively a police state, where it is not even possible to enumerate the severity and scale of tyranny suffered by the people.

The arrest of Dr. Merera is yet another attempt by the rulers to completely eclipse the peaceful opposition which until now has stayed alive although ruthlessly ravaged and willfully handicapped. Human rights organizations, including SOCEPP Canada have been consistently pointing out the human rights abuse and the enormous political repressions taking place in Ethiopia. What we see today is the escalation of a brutal dictatorship that has perfected the art of deceit, corruption, embezzlement and authoritarian decadence. In the face of this, the international community, particularly donor countries, apart from the occasional mild critic, have refrained from taking meaningful actions against the regime.

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SOCEPP Canada urges Canada and other donor countries to consider:

- 1) giving the Ethiopian rulers an ultimatum to release Dr Merera and all political prisoners immediately;
- 2) Donors should demand that the government opens its door for the appropriate international authorities to verify the human rights situation in Ethiopia
- 3) Donors should demand the government to sit down with the opposition and civic society and map out a democratic future for the country;
- 4) We also urge donor countries to press the Ethiopian government to comply by a certain deadline, if it failed to comply by the deadline they should consider stopping all forms of assistance, including bi-lateral and multilateral;
- 5) Donor countries should consider building the capacity of peaceful opposition and civic society groups.

SOCEPP Canada