

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 2, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write to request that the State Department provide recommendations for actions the United States can take to address the escalating violence against civilians in the Oromia region of Ethiopia. In November 2015, farmers and students in the Oromia region began protests in response to the Ethiopian government's Master Plan to expand Addis Ababa into surrounding farmland. We are deeply concerned by reports from Human Rights Watch and the media that indicate at least 140 protesters have been killed by Ethiopian security forces.

Minnesota is home to the largest Oromo population in the United States, and our constituents are concerned about the reports of violence and intimidation protesters have faced from government security forces. We want to thank you for condemning the recent killings and violence against peaceful Oromo protesters. However, we believe stronger action is required. Reports from Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Committee to Protect Journalists have alleged that government security forces are using arbitrary arrests and prosecution to silence journalists and Ethiopian citizens who are exercising freedom of expression.


Ethiopia's restrictions on freedom of the press and independent civil society groups mean those monitoring human rights in Ethiopia increasingly rely on social media reports from protesters and contacts on the ground. There is widespread fear that violence will escalate and that the government is taking steps to isolate the Oromia region. Reports indicate that authorities have recently cut mobile phone coverage in areas where there is a heavy military presence, further escalating fears about the potential for increased violence.

The United States Congress sent a strong message to Ethiopia regarding the government's Master Plan and harsh crackdown on peaceful protestors by passing a provision in the 2015 Omnibus Appropriations Bill to ensure U.S. aid to Ethiopia cannot be used to support the forced evictions of farmers. The United States has a compelling interest in ensuring U.S. resources provided to Ethiopia are not being used to violate human rights. We would like more information regarding the alleged actions by the Ethiopian government and how the United States can ensure that basic human rights are not being violated.

We respectfully ask you to conduct a full, thorough review of this ongoing situation and report to Congress on immediate actions that can be taken to protect innocent civilians in Ethiopia.

Thank you for your attention to this important human rights matter.

Sincerely,



Amy Klobuchar
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Al Franken
Al Franken
United States Senator

Cc: Susan Rice, National Security Advisor, White House
Samantha Power, United States Ambassador to the United Nations