

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2015

President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We write to urge you to prioritize human rights during your upcoming visit to Kenya and Ethiopia. Minnesota is home to a large Ethiopian and Somali diaspora that adds rich cultural diversity to our state. We are proud to represent them and ask that when you visit Africa you address issues of concern for our Ethiopian and Somali communities. Specifically, we ask that you urge the Kenyan government to prevent discrimination against Somalis and call on the Ethiopian government to address reports of troubling human rights abuses.

After nearly two decades of violence and famine, Somalia is making steady progress towards stability. A provisional constitution and the political will for progress have helped Somalia reestablish a central government. The United States has provided critical assistance, enabling Somalia to make security gains against the terrorist group al-Shabaab. Despite important progress, recent terrorist attacks in Mogadishu and Garissa, Kenya remind us that Somalia still faces enormous challenges. Kenya has been deeply impacted by the instability in Somalia; Kenya is home to more than 350,000 Somali refugees, and al-Shabaab continues to pose a security threat to the region.

As the Kenyan government continues to battle the threat of terrorism, Somali refugees in Kenya are often-targeted for detention or deportation, and Somali neighborhoods are frequently raided by Kenyan military and police forces. Recently, Kenya temporarily suspended the licenses of 13 Somali money remittance firms. While the licenses have been restored, the threat of disruption in remittance services remains. Cutting off remittance services compounds the humanitarian crisis being face by Somalis in their home country. This could reverse the limited gains that the Somali government and the international community have made against al Shabaab and lead to increased terrorist activity in Somalia and the greater Horn of Africa. We ask that you raise these issues during your visit.

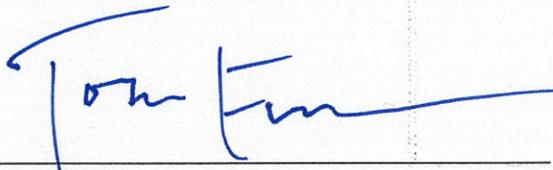
In Ethiopia, we ask that you urge Prime Minister Desalegn take stronger action to improve human rights. Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights have documented the Ethiopian government's crackdown on freedom of the press, arbitrary arrests, politically-motivated prosecutions, and the use of excessive force by security forces. While we are happy to hear that the Ethiopian government has released five journalists from detention, legislation restricting nongovernmental activity remains in place and is contrary to international standards. We also urge you to address the very serious concerns that have been brought to us by Ogaden and Oromo groups. As the first U.S. President to visit Ethiopia, this is a historic opportunity for you to press for meaningful and long-lasting change.

We urge you to use your time in Kenya and Ethiopia to persuade policy makers to prevent discrimination and prioritize human rights. Thank you for your commitment to improving economic growth and security in Africa.

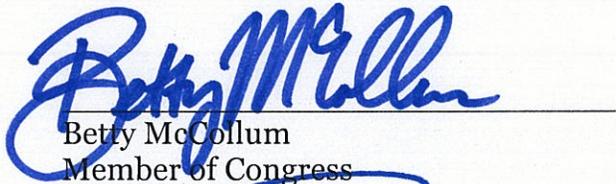
Sincerely,



Keith Ellison
Member of Congress



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress



Senator Amy Klobuchar



Senator Al Franken



Timothy J. Walz
Member of Congress