

Washington update

September 26, 2007

The House Committee on Foreign Affairs Wednesday "marked up" H.R. 2003, the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007. It approved a revised version of the bill in a unanimous vote. The next step in the process will be a vote by the full House of Representatives.

Committee Chairman Tom Lantos (D-Calif.) modified the bill prior to the markup. The major difference between the bill that was approved by the committee and the original version is the elimination of the 9-page "findings" section. This section summarized the human rights abuses and stifling of democracy in Ethiopia but had no legal effect. Another change to the bill is the addition of demands to allow the U.S. and the international community to provide humanitarian assistance to the residents of the Ethiopian Ogaden region. Language adding "counter-terrorism assistance" to the definition of "essential" assistance that would continue to flow from the U.S. to Ethiopia regardless of its progress in meeting human rights and democracy objectives described in the bill. There is language, however, attempting to ensure that counter-terrorism assistance "shall not be used for any other security-related purpose or to provide training to security personnel or units accused of human rights violations." The new version of H.R. 2003 will be available online within a few days.

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.) attempted to have provisions added to the bill requiring the Ethiopian regime to return the property of American citizens that was confiscated by the DIRG regime. The Rohrabacher amendment provoked a spirited debate and was defeated in a party line vote.

Today's action was a major victory for Ethiopia. It is, however, just one step along the way. It is essential that all Ethiopians contact members of the House, especially the offices of House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, to press for a rapid vote on this bill. Lobbyists for the Ethiopian regime will definitely attempt to block or defer the vote.

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