

2007 King Holiday Human Rights Symposium
Human Rights & Conflict Resolution:
"Peace on Trial in Ethiopia"



White Paper

MLK Jr. Africa/African American Renaissance Festival
Fourth Annual Human Rights Symposium

Presented to

Congressional Members & Committee Chairs, United Nations, European Union, U S State Department , African Union, & Ethiopian Embassy in US

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Executive Summary:

The 4th Annual Human Rights Symposium sponsored by the MLK Jr. March Committee Africa African American Renaissance Festival, brought to focus the human rights issues of the African Diaspora and the pressing need for conflict resolution to bring about peace specifically in Ethiopia. In an unprecedented move, the Human Rights Symposium brought together human and civil rights activists from North America, Europe and Africa joined by federal and state elected officials, leaders of the opposition parties to foster open dialogue and a strategy for moving forward towards peace. This historic event was set in the place where Dr. King delivered and addressed the message of peace during the Civil Rights movement – Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The results of this dialogue far exceeded the expectations of the organizers to bridge or make the connections to human rights violations in both the United States and Africa.

Participants in the symposium included diverse representatives from human and civil rights organizations, the Ethiopian opposition parties and Liberation Fronts, South African government, and Sierra Leone opposition party – Alliance for Freedom and Democracy (EPPF, CUDP, OLF, ONLF), United Ethiopian Democratic Front, Carter Center, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Rainbow/PUSH, MLK March Committee, Coalition for the Peoples’ Agenda, Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials (GABEO), Africa African American Human Rights, Amnesty International, Ogaden Voice for Peace, Oromia Support Group, Qaliti Covenant, Ogaden Human Rights Committee, Center for Citizen Participation, Anuak Justice Council, and Ethiopian Free Press Journalists’ Association.

While the symposium debated human rights issues in both the United States and Africa, Ethiopia was highlighted because of the developing crisis in the horn of Africa and the devastating consequences it could have for millions of people. Organizers, including representative of the MLK March Committee and Ethiopian community in Atlanta, felt that in the wake of the May 15, 2005 elections (including a three month delayed election for Ogaden) in which opposition won an unprecedented number of seats amidst massive controversy over election results, the federal police in Oromia, Ogaden, Gambella, and Amhara regions have threatened, beaten and detained opposition supporters, elected members of parliament, lawyers, academics, members of the media and people with no political affiliation. They were also concerned about the extrajudicial execution of youth in Gondar, Ambo and Jigjiga, and the hidden crackdown in the rural areas where government is using intimidation, arbitrary detentions and excessive force warranted a strategy for peace.

The escalation of war in Somalia on December 25th that resulted in the invasion by the Ethiopian government precipitated a unified plan to bring all factions together to make strides towards achieving peace and conflict resolution in the horn of Africa.

Dr. King’s strategy for nonviolent conflict resolution was presented by members of the civil rights movement beginning with Reverend James Orange, a lieutenant for Dr. King; Mrs. Juanita Jones Abernathy, wife of Ralph David Abernathy successor to Dr. King; Representative Tyrone Brooks, a Field Director for SCLC; Mr. Charles Steele, current President of SCLC; Reverend Charles White, Jr, National Field Director for the NAACP; a representative from Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow/PUSH coalition; and Helen Butler, Director of the Coalition for the Peoples’ Agenda headed by Dr. Joseph E. Lowery.

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A leading human rights organization, Amnesty International, as well as, the European Union presented messages of support of the condemnation of the ongoing torture, incommunicado detention, killings, forcible conscription and obstruction of humanitarian relief in Ethiopia.

The human rights issues past and present were outlined by Ethiopian human rights activists – Ms. Fowsiya Abdulkadir, Ogaden Human Rights Committee; Dr. Mohammed Hassan, Oromia Support Group; Dr. Asafa Jalata, Oromo Study Association; Dr. Meqdes Mesfin, Qaliti Covenant; Mr. Obang Metho, Anuak Justice Council; and Mr. Kifle Mulat, Ethiopian Free Press Journalists' Association.

The Ethiopian leadership of political and human rights organizations was challenged to present a strategy for moving forward for peace and reconciliation in Ethiopia. This challenge was answered by Mr. Mohamud N Abas, Ogaden National Liberation Front, Dr. Abraham Bekele, Coalition for Unity and Democracy, Dr. Nuro Dadafo, Oromo Liberation Front, and Dr. Seyum Gelaye, United Ethiopian Democratic Forces.

The civil rights movement and struggle paralleled the current movement in Ethiopia, thus in the wake of commemorating Dr. King's birthday, the MLK Jr. March Committee after hearing more than eight hours of testimony and presentations developed the following resolutions to be presented to Congressional members of the United States and the international community as a means to resolve conflict and bring peace in the horn of Africa.

Conclusion:

The MLK Jr. March Committee is committed to working with all parties, including the U S Congress, to bring resolution to the human rights violations, establish democratic processes, secure justice for all political prisoners, and a continued strategy for peace in the Diaspora. We are committed to follow this effort to conclusion.

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Resolution Adopted by MLK Jr. March Committee

BE IT RESOLVED by the MLK March Committee and civil rights organizations that we adopt the following resolution:

1.

As members of the civil rights and human rights movement whose achievement of moral and basic rights and freedoms was founded on the philosophy and principles of non-violence, we condemn the use of violence in Ethiopia and ask the Ethiopian Government to abide by the rule and law of the Constitution and respect the right of the People to exercise their freedom of speech, protest, and political participation.

2.

We call for the immediate and unconditional release of all political prisoners.

3.

We call for the set up a democratic Ethiopian government with appropriate separation of powers and duties, especially an independent judicial system.

4.

We urge the Ethiopian government to establish independent election system that meets all international standards including independent election monitors.

5.

We call for a national reconciliation conference that includes all political parties and liberation fronts to find amicable solutions and lasting peace in Ethiopia.

6.

We ask the U S government and the international community to conduct a thorough and independent investigation of all human rights violations through the engagement of international human rights organizations and their experts that can complement the findings of the Ogaden Human Rights Committee, the Inquiry Commission, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Oromia Support Group, and the Anuak Justice Council.

7.

We ask the both houses of the U S Congress to support HR 5680, "Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy, and Human Rights Advancement Act of 2006".

8.

We ask the U S government and the international community to support third party mediation between the Ethiopian government and the Opposition Party and Liberation Fronts.

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Resolution Adopted by MLK Jr. March Committee

BE IT RESOLVED by the MLK March Committee and civil rights organizations that we adopt the following resolution:

9.

We urge the establishment of an independent and free media that is accessible to all parties.

10.

We urge public censure of the Ethiopian government by the United Nation's Human Rights Council regarding its human rights record.

11.

We ask the U S government and the international community to refrain from providing aid and support to the Ethiopian government until it respects the human rights, political rights and democratic rights of all people in Ethiopia.

12. Focus on Ethiopia

We ask the international community and U S government to bring justice to all individuals engaged in violations of human rights, including public officials and political leaders.

This 31st day of January, 2007 at the Atlanta Life Financial Center, 100 Auburn Avenue, Suite 102, Atlanta, Georgia 30303.

Dr. Joseph E. Lowery
Convenor
Coalition for the Peoples' Agenda

Reverend James Orange
President
MLK Jr. March Committee
Africa/African American Renaissance Festival

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