



# *Congressman Donald Payne*

## Tenth District - New Jersey

For Immediate Release  
September 27, 2007

Contact: Kerry McKenney  
(202) 225-3436

---

### House Committee Approves Payne Ethiopian Democracy Bill

Yesterday, the House Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously approved the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007 (H.R. 2003).

"I believe that the strong bipartisan support H.R. 2003 received will send a clear message that transparency, accountability, rule of law, and respect for human rights are paramount," said Representative Donald M. Payne, Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health. "The people of Ethiopia have suffered for decades and millions live in abject poverty. Human rights have also been abused not only in the capitol, but in other parts of the country such as the Somali and Oromo regions."

In recent weeks, government security forces have been accused of massive human rights abuses in the Ogaden region.

The Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act is aimed at fostering accountability and transparency as well as strengthening the institutions of democracy.

In 2006, an Inquiry Commission sponsored by the government concluded that in the months after the 2005 elections, 193 people were mercilessly killed by Ethiopian security forces and many more were injured. An estimated 30,000 people were arrested. The perpetrators of these atrocities have not been held accountable, and the Commission's Report was never allowed to be made public in Ethiopia.

In the face of domestic and international pressure, the Ethiopian government released an estimated 68 political prisoners this July and August. However, thousands remain in prison.

The killings of demonstrators and imprisoning of their leaders and the government's mishandling of the post-election period diminished democratic gains made earlier by President Meles Zenawi's government.

"Using excessive force, ignoring the plight of millions of Ethiopians, and attempting to intimidate journalists, human rights activists, and opposition groups will only lead to a more disastrous situation. Ethiopia is an important country with a long, rich history," said Payne. "Our efforts are not intended to punish the people of Ethiopia but to ensure respect for the rule of law and human rights."

The government of Ethiopia and its representatives here in Washington often claim that Ethiopia is promoting regional stability in the Horn of Africa and democratic rule in Ethiopia. "The fact is the Ethiopian government is a source of instability in the region and one of the most repressive regimes in Africa. In the view of the regime, it is democratic and acceptable to imprison elected members of parliament and to kill innocent civilians, said Payne."