



**ONE SMALL STEP FOR THE U.S. CONGRESS,
ONE GIANT LEAP FOR ETHIOPIAN HUMAN RIGHTS**

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“It is a great day for America! It’s a great day for Ethiopia!”
Congressman Donald Payne

A Great Day for Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights in Ethiopia!

Passage of H.R. 2033 on October 2, 2007 in the U.S. House of Representatives marked a great day for Ethiopia as did the lunar landing of Apollo 11 for humanity on July 20, 1969. When astronaut Neil Armstrong first stepped on the lunar surface, he said: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." That was the spirit of Payne’s message when he stepped out of the Foreign Affairs Committee hearing room on September 26, 2007 and said, “It is a great day for America. It is a great day for Ethiopia”. But we all know what he meant: “H.R. 2033 is one small step for the U.S. Congress, one giant leap for Ethiopians on their long walk to freedom, democracy and human rights.”

Two dates in Anno Domini 2007 shall forever live in glory in the history of Ethiopia: September 26 and October 2. On these dates, the American Congress sent a message of hope, redemption and salvation to the Ethiopian people, “Hold on! Hold fast! Hold tight! Your Freedom Train is coming!”

The U.S Congress also addressed another stern message to the ironfisted, cruel and pitiless dictators in Ethiopia: “America will not give you guns, tanks and bombs to wipe out the people of the Ogaden. America will not be your partner in crime as you slaughter unarmed demonstrators in the streets. America will not stand with you by your prison gates as you keep hundreds of thousands of innocent citizens behind bars. The American tax payer will not bankroll your wicked decimation of the democratic liberties and human rights of your citizens. Americans will not allow their tax dollars to oppress the Ethiopian people, massacre, maim and mistreat them. No, America will not befriend tyrants who pervert and corrupt justice for private gain and disfigure it in the pursuit of partisan politics. America will not conspire with election thieves and rob the Ethiopian people of their democratic voices.”

On October 2, 2007, the U.S. House of Representatives made its final declaration, unanimously and without objection: “Enough is enough!” In the pithy words of Congressman Chris Smith, “No more American tax dollars to support a vicious dictator and his henchmen!” And Congressman Dana Rorabacher could barely contain his fury when he said: “No military aid to the thugs and gangsters that are running Ethiopia today and profiteering

from the confiscated property of American citizens of Ethiopian descent!” But the imperturbable Donald Payne just laid out the plain case to a candid world: “Our aim in H.R. 2003 is to foster accountability and transparency in Ethiopia, and strengthen its institutions of democracy.”

Donald Payne’s Long Road to Deliver a Gift of Freedom to Ethiopians

On October 2, 2007, at precisely 12:58 p.m., Donald Payne stood in the well of the House of Representatives as the Speaker Pro Tem thundered: “H.R. 2003 is passed by the House without objection.” Many of us had waited to hear those words for a mighty long time. And those words resonated in our ears like sweet musical lyrics, and reverberated across the globe wherever Ethiopians live scattered by the winds of tyranny. And all freedom-loving Ethiopians the world over let out a crescendo of joyful noises for God to hear!

But on that fateful day, Don Payne stood in the well of the House like a captain standing on the bridge of a ship that had just emerged on the horizon after a long night on the savage sea. There he stood calm, collected, deliberate and with an air of quiet dignity and self-assuredness. That brief moment masked the years of hard work and toil he had exerted to get this bill to the floor. But how many of us really know the trials and tribulations of the lone captain of the H.R. 2003 in getting the bill to the House floor?

Encircled by 3,500 ferocious predator sharks from the lobbying firm of D.L.A. Piper, our captain did not flinch. When Arme y’s Army marched on the Hill to lay siege to his office, he held his ground. And when D.L.A. Piper, engorged by millions of lobbying dollars, bombarded members of Congress with the slings and arrows of falsehoods, half truths and distortions in an effort to defeat H.R. 2003, Payne stood there and said, “I shall not be moved!” When he saw Ethiopian brokers of tyranny skulking in the halls of Congress to spread their lies and mislead lawmakers, he must have shaken his head in dismay: “How can men sell their souls and their people for thirty pieces of silver?” In the end, he was told, “You will never make it against the mighty D.L.A. Piper. You are up against George Mitchell, Richard Gephart, Richard Klien, Richard Arme y and 3,500 of the cleverest and most cunning lawyers in the world. There is no way you can win against a regime that has mined the legislative sea with millions of dollars. Back off Payne! Give it up!”

But Captain Payne would have none of it. He called out: “All hands on deck. Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!”

On that glorious October day, Don Payne pried open the locked jaws and serrated teeth of the D.L.A. Piper sharks and snatched H.R. 2003 to safety. As he had promised long ago, on October 2, 2007, Payne delivered to us on a golden platter the most precious gift any human being can offer another -- the gift of freedom, democracy and human rights.

Donald Payne and the Struggle for Human Rights and Democracy in Ethiopia

Why did Donald Payne toil so much for democracy and human rights in Ethiopia? Why did he put up with those insufferable and provocative ignoramuses? Why did he say passage of H.R. 2003 marked a great day in the history of America and Ethiopia?

Payne's concern for human rights is nothing new, and certainly, his commitment to human rights in Ethiopia is above and beyond the call of duty. For the past two years, he toiled relentlessly to pass a bill that sought to improve the human rights situation in Ethiopia. He had traveled to Ethiopia on a number of occasions, and he spoke with regime officials, opposition leaders, independent journalists and just common folks. He visited Kality jail and uplifted the spirit of the prisoners of conscience. He welcomed the Inquiry Commission members, and invited them to brief Congress on the massacre and wholesale incarceration of innocent citizens. He met and spoke with hundreds of Ethiopians in his office, at community events, panel discussions, on radio and television. Payne has been there for us, the whole time! But how many of us really know that?

Payne, like all of the other members of Congress who support H.R. 2003, did not get involved in Ethiopia human rights to get recognition, credit or applause. No, he got involved because of the outrageous abuses of human rights. "The people of Ethiopia have suffered for decades," he said "and millions live in abject poverty." He reminded everyone, "Human rights have been abused not only in the capital, but in other part of the country such as the Somali and Ogaden regions."¹ He got involved because he felt he ought to do something to alleviate the suffering of the Ethiopian people both as a ranking member and later as Chairman of the Africa subcommittee. His colleagues on the Foreign Affairs Committee recognized his efforts at the mark-up hearing and commended him for his tenacity and hard work in trying to improve human rights in Ethiopia.

None of this should come to us as a surprise. Payne is no stranger to human rights advocacy or promotion of democratic institution-building in Africa. In 2004, he authored the resolution that condemned the genocide in Darfur, the Sudan. He has traveled to Chad and other locations in the region time and again to learn first hand the conditions of refugees. In 1994, President Clinton appointed him to head a delegation to Rwanda to bring the warring parties to a negotiated settlement of that country's humanitarian and political crises. He has served on the board of directors of the National Endowment for Democracy (the premier NGO that supports pro-democracy forces throughout the world) and TransAfrica (the premier African American lobbying group that made decisive contributions to bring an end to apartheid in South Africa). He has worked actively to support the Northern Ireland peace process.

But Why Is It a Great Day for America?

In the general scheme of Congressional legislation, H.R. 2003 is not an earthshaking

¹ http://www.abugidainfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/press_release_paayne.pdf

bill. It is by no means a bill that “locks the horns” of the great institutions of American government in policy conflict. It is not a bill that weighs heavily in the debate between the great powers of the world. It is just a little human rights bill that aims to help a small and very poor country in the northeast corner of Africa. In the words of Donald Payne, H.R. 2003 is a simple bill with “strong bipartisan support” intended to “send a clear message that transparency, accountability, rule of law and respect for human rights are paramount for the United States.”

H.R. 2003 marks a great day for America because it shows America does strive to live out the true meaning of its founding principles. As the U.S. State Department Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor aptly put it:

The protection of fundamental human rights was a foundation stone in the establishment of the United States over 200 years ago. Since then, a central goal of U.S. foreign policy has been the promotion of respect for human rights, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United States understands that the existence of human rights helps secure the peace, deter aggression, promote the rule of law, combat crime and corruption, strengthen democracies, and prevent humanitarian crises.

The pursuit of human rights in U.S. foreign policy remains paramount. For three decades, the U.S. Congress has legislatively mandated human rights certification for recipients of U.S. aid. In section 502B of the Foreign Assistance Act (1976, as amended), the American Secretary of State is required to transmit to Congress "a full and complete report" every year concerning "respect for internationally recognized human rights in each country proposed as a recipient" of U.S. security assistance. Specifically, this section requires accountability information on specific areas such as: torture, arbitrary arrest, denial of fair trial and invasion of the home and extra-judicial killings. The Leahy Amendment (2001) prohibited funding to the security forces of any country involved in gross violations of human rights.

Why Is It a Great Day for Ethiopia?

The history of Ethiopia has been a history of a long train of abuses of its people by a motley syndicate of autocrats, despots, dictators and tyrants. It is great day for Ethiopia because in H.R. 2003, for the first time since the elections of 2005, we have an opportunity to purge the miasma of tyranny and dictatorship that envelopes Ethiopia today. It is an effective tool to promote and institutionalize freedom, democracy, human rights, accountability and transparency in Ethiopia. H.R. 2003 helps Ethiopia live up to the true meaning of its own constitutional guarantees and international human rights obligations.²

²See Art. 13 of the “Ethiopian Constitution”; Ethiopia has ratified, is a signatory to or has adopted the following major human rights conventions, among others: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1977), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1992), Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1994) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1980) Convention on the Rights of the Child (1995).

Passion of Don Payne, Chris Smith, Dana Rorabacher and...: Is it “Vendetta” or Passion That Gave Birth to H.R. 2003?

The Vendetta?

On the occasion of the state visit of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Zenawi accused Donald Payne and the U.S. Congress of exacting a “vendetta” against him in passing H.R. 2003. Zenawi said, "If this man [Payne] is really concerned about human rights issues, he should talk about human rights violations in Eritrea, not Ethiopia."³ He complained, "It is an unfair decision. It is the result of a vendetta... If it was about the human rights situation, they should have looked at Eritrea first."⁴

Why would Payne wage a personal vendetta against Zenawi? Where is the evidence of a vendetta?

But here is conclusive proof that H.R. 2003 is NOT a vendetta. The bill was co-sponsored on a bipartisan basis by 85 members of the House of Representatives. It first passed unanimously in the Africa subcommittee (11 members), then passed unanimously again in the Foreign Affairs Committee (50 members) and finally passed unanimously on the floor of the House of Representatives (435 members). It was not passed by one man. Does Zenawi mean to suggest that 435 democrats and republicans were assembled by Don Payne in a secret location, and conspired to exact a vendetta on him and his regime when they passed H.R. 2003?

Assuming, arguendo, H.R. 2003 is an act of vendetta, what is the harm done? What harm is done by requiring observance of the rule of law in Ethiopia? Or establishing independent and professional judicial institutions? Or allowing an independent and free press to function? Or guaranteeing democratic liberties such as freedom of speech, association, assembly and due process of law? Or... Or...

But even more wacky is Zenawi’s claim that Payne and the U.S. Congress should have scrutinized Eritrea before turning their attention to his regime. By why begin with Eritrea? Why not clean up Burma, the Sudan, Chad, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Algeria, Sierra Leone, North Korea, Iran, Zimbabwe, East Timor, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrghistan.... before knocking on the doors of Ethiopia. Zenawi says, “There are worse guys than me out there. Deal with them first before you train your flashlight on me. Turn a blind eye and deaf ears to what I do because I am helping you fight Al-Qaeda.”

This is the kind of reasoning logicians call *ignoratio elenchi*; or in common vernacular, the argument that misses the point. The point is that there are massive human rights violations in Ethiopia, not that more massive or severe violations of human rights are not

³ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKL049165020071004?pageNumber=1>

⁴ http://addisvoice.com/news/german_chancellor.htm

occurring in neighboring countries or elsewhere in the world. The fact that other countries violate the human rights of their citizens at a greater level offers neither moral absolution nor legal immunity for human rights violations or other criminal acts by the regime in Ethiopia. It certainly does not preclude accountability to a legislature that shells out \$500 million a year to support that regime!

While we are on the subject of “vendetta”, let’s ask a few of our own: Was vendetta the cause of the massacre of the 193 unarmed protesters and shooting of 763 others in 2005? Or the mass incarceration of 30,000 innocent persons? Or the 20-month imprisonment of opposition leaders? Or jailing of independent journalists? Or continued detention of thousands of ordinary citizens? Or.... Or...

The Passion

Why are House democrats and republicans familiar with the human rights situation in Ethiopia so passionate about doing something to improve it? What would drive ordinarily genteel members of Congress -- who rarely, if ever, use abrasive language in their proceedings -- use such word and phrases as “thugs”, “gangsters”, “vicious dictators”, “petty tyrants” to describe Zenawi’s regime? Surely, anyone who has viewed the video stream of the mark-up proceedings will attest to the passionate and bipartisan advocacy on behalf of human rights and democracy in Ethiopia.

Why should any of them care about Ethiopia? Don Payne does not have relatives in Ethiopia. It is doubtful that any other member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee has an extended network of family, friends and relatives in Ethiopia to care so passionately about Ethiopia. The answer is simple. They love Ethiopia and its people. They care about their Ethiopian American constituents. Talk to any member of Congress who is familiar with the human rights situation in Ethiopia and you will understand what I mean. Talk to Payne, Smith, Honda, Rorabacher, Royce, Jackson-Lee, Lantos, the whole bunch. Ask them how they feel about Ethiopia and Ethiopians. Only then will you truly appreciate the passion behind the words.

But behind the passion stand great principles. “The protection of fundamental human rights was a foundation stone in the establishment of the United States over 200 years ago. A central goal of U.S. foreign policy has been the promotion of respect for human rights, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” In the memorable words of Jimmy Carter, “America did not invent human rights. In a very real sense human rights invented America.” Exhibit A: The Declaration of Independence.

What Can We Learn From Members of Congress in Advancing Ethiopian Human Rights?

Passion, More Passion

What we saw in the Committee room on September 26 is something that we rarely see in our community: deep, passionate commitment to a cause which forces us to overflow with

the truth. If members of Congress can be so passionate about human rights in Ethiopia, why can't we? When these members of Congress and other supporters advocate on behalf of the cause of democracy and human rights in Ethiopia they do not hide their emotions or hide behind cute pseudonyms and fearsome-sounding pen names. Unlike many of our invisible, nameless and faceless cyber-warriors, they do not launch missiles of barbed words comfortably ensconced behind their keyboards. They don't conceal their message in scholastic arguments or pedantry. They stand up in public and say what they mean, and mean what they say! That is what we should learn from our members of Congress. Saying it like it is!

But why can't we say it like it is? Could it be because we really do not believe in what we say, and say what we believe. How can anyone expect to offer an intellectually respectable view or analysis when that person is afraid to reveal his/her identity? Who would accept a soulless message or believe in it? If one is afraid of public scrutiny, ridicule or castigation, then one ought to remain silent. We must not be paper tigers willing to shout and criticize the adversary only when he is not looking, or when he does not know our names. If the people for whom we struggle can risk their lives and liberties everyday and put everything on the line, we must not fear standing up in public for them in our own names, in our own persons, and say it like it is.

Infuse Your Passion With the First Amendment

Living in America and as American citizens, we have something that few people on earth have, and the vast majority would kill to have: The right to free speech. This most precious of our civil liberties was placed for safekeeping in the Constitution so that we, the people, will NEVER fear anyone, any official or any government, when we want to say our peace.

Since 1791, the First Amendment has served as the peoples' impregnable shield against censorship. Many great Americans have stood up and exercised their right to free speech in times of peace and war, in hard times and good times. Paul Robeson stood against the withering persecution of McCarthy's communist witch hunt. Thousands of ordinary American youth challenged their government and brought an end to the Vietnam War exercising their First Amendment rights. Even the brash young man, Gregory Johnson, could feel wholly confident in his right to freedom of speech that he burned Old Glory, the American flag, with impunity in a public place as thousands of patriots looked on heartsick.

Let us use our right to free speech to hold government accountable, to demand answers from public officials, to challenge them and to keep them honest. Let's use our powers as American taxpayers to make sure "vicious dictators" do not use weapons of war which paid for by our tax dollars to be used against civilians, our brothers and sisters. **IF WE DOT NOT SPEAK OUT AND SPEAK UP AS TAXPAYERS AND ALLOW AMERICAN HUMVEES AND MACHINE GUNS TO BE USED AGAINST THE CIVILIAN POPULATION IN ETHIOPIA, WE ARE GUILTY OF MORAL COMPLICITY IN ANY CRIMES**

COMMITTED. On this question, there is no opportunity for fence sitting, and for indifference. You have to take a stand, or stand trial in the court of your own conscience.

But let us not misuse our constitutional right to free expression. When we misuse the First Amendment to insult, demean, belittle, dishonor, disrespect and humiliate each other, not only do we squander and dishonor our precious right, in our verbal slugfest, we let those tyrants and dictators off the hook. We end up becoming their laughing stock.

We Must Act Out of A Sense of Duty, No Place For Moral Indifference

Members of Congress passed H.R. 2003 out of constitutional duty under Art. I, sec. 8 of the U.S. Constitution and in exercise of their “power of the purse”. Of course, we do not have a constitutional duty to help our people, but we do have an equally compelling moral duty to act. That moral duty arises from the moral imperative to stand up against evil. As Edmund Burke said, “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.” Let’s not forget, the good women as well.

Why do we have a moral duty? Many reasons, but let’s start with Zenawi’s recent statement in Time Magazine. He said, “We represent the greatness of Africa's past. We also represent the worst of Africa's present, in terms of poverty.”⁵ Both statements are absolutely true, and the latter is supported by independent economic assessments.⁶ On the Corruption Index, Ethiopia ranks 138/179 countries in the world.⁷ The prestigious Committee to Protect Journalists ranked Zenawi’s regime as the most repressive in the world in terms of press freedoms. In its Special Report 2007, the CPJ stated, “Ethiopia, where the government launched a massive crackdown on the private press by shutting newspapers and jailing editors, leads CPJ’s dishonor roll.”⁸ And on and on...

There is no question that Ethiopians need help, big time. It is our duty to do what we can to ease suffering, spread freedom, and to lay the foundations for a robust democracy for generations yet unborn. When our homeland is filled with despair, resentment, violence, repression and there is no place for moral indifference that paralyzes us from taking affirmative action to help.

Commitment to Democracy, Human Rights Principles and Advocacy

Advocates of human rights are driven by an unshakeable belief in the fundamental dignity of the individual. They are distrustful of government – any government – that is not restrained by law. They believe government must be under the constant watch of the people. Even when the people sleep, they must do so with eyes wide open, because government, if given the opportunity, will snatch liberty from the people at the blink of an eye. That is why the universal motto of human rights advocates is, “The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.”

⁵ <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1659420,00.html>

⁶ <http://www.usaid.gov/policy/budget/cbj2006/afr/et.html>

⁷ http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2007/cpi2007/cpi_2007_table

⁸ <http://www.cpj.org/backsliders/index.html>

That's why human rights advocates believe in the principle of the rule of law – a rule that binds the naughty hands of government tightly enough so that the people can sleep in peace, talk to each other without fear, walk the streets without looking over their shoulders and live in their homes without dread of the midnight knock.

Every Man, Every Woman A Human Rights Leader

Human rights advocacy is one area of human struggle where anyone, whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, man or woman, can play a decisive role. Every man and every woman can be a leader -- a leader to enlighten the people on the rule of law, to help them assert their God-given rights, to help them realize the greatness in themselves. These leadership qualities do not require a Ph.D., an M.D., of some other badge of formal learning. One does not have to be a professor or a lawyer, a democrat, republican or anything else to stand up for human rights. All you have to be is YOU. All you need is a sincere belief in the dignity of the individual, a healthy distrust of government, an uncompromising commitment to the rule of law, and unwaivering commitment to democratic principles. The key to effective Ethiopian human rights advocacy is to make every Ethiopian man and woman a human rights leader in his/her own right. No power on earth can defeat a human rights movement built on these simple principles.

Improving American Foreign Policy While Improving Human Rights in Ethiopia

From time to time, some people ask how H.R. 2003 helps America. "It is just an Ethiopian human rights bill," they say. It does not really help America." But they are mistaken. In advocating for human rights in Ethiopia and in passing H.R. 2003, we are transforming, albeit in a small way, the basic structure of American foreign policy itself.

The U.S. is often criticized for being hypocritical in its foreign policy, for being inconsistent on its basic values by supporting dictatorships out of political expediency. H.R. 2003 helps America reconnect to its founding principles, and reaffirm a basic tenet that human rights define the core of American foreign policy. We are helping shape a foreign policy that is familiar to the American people, a policy they thoroughly understand because it is a thread pulled from the very fabric of their cultural ethos and the pathos of their everyday experience. America as the land of immigrants is as diverse as the world. But what draws Americans together, more than anything else, is a universal belief in human freedom. That is exactly what H.R. 2003 does: Spread freedom to the arid political landscape of Ethiopia.

One Giant Leap for Ethiopian Human Rights, And Many Bold Strokes

In less than a generation, it is possible to bring about dramatic transformations in Ethiopia. It is possible to heal a society besieged by the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse -- war, famine, pestilence and death -- and divided by manufactured ethnic conflict. It is possible to address sincerely felt historical grievances and rebuild a new national identity based on a robust human rights ideology and principles of social justice. As we begin the New Millennium, we must develop a new paradigm, a new way of looking at ourselves and the world; new approaches to old problems and new methodologies and strategies to

navigate the brave new world of the New Millennium. But we must start with a new unshakeable confidence in the future, in the dignity of the human being, in freedom and liberty and in timeless democratic principles. We must accept some basic truths:

I. Make a Clean Break With the Politics of the Old Millennium. We should avoid preoccupation with the failures of the past Millennium not only because we do not want to be prisoners of history but also because such preoccupation prevents new ideas from appearing. Such preoccupation makes the task of changing to a new paradigm of government, politics and society more difficult and less unattainable. The old political culture of ethnic antagonism and fragmentation and distrust must be replaced by a new one that emphasizes respect for the rule of law, observance of human rights and acceptance of democratic principles.

II. The New Millennium Requires a New Paradigm, New Strategies and New Methods of Governance. We must resolve and accept the fact that the old methods and strategies of “governance” are unworkable in the New Millennium. It is no longer possible to beat, intimidate and terrorize a population into submission. People know their rights, as demonstrated in the 2005 elections, and they will NEVER accept a government based on coercion or force. In the New Millennium, there can only be a government based on consent of the governed. To be successful, such a government must harmonize issues of good governance, accountability and transparency with issues of justice, equity, fairness and human rights. In advancing these values, there is no place for violence. Consent necessarily implies the absence of coercion, and withdrawal of consent when government no longer serves its just ends should require nothing more than the electoral judgment of the people.

III. Lead by Inspiration, not Deception and Recrimination. We must demand of our leaders to lead by inspiration, not by deception and recrimination. Leaders need to inspire by the democratic principles and values they uphold and practice, and their boundless optimism and clear vision of a better future. Of late, we have suffered the prevailing winds of recrimination and acrimony, and this has pushed some of us to the verge of despair. Many discouraging words are uttered by those we respect the most. We seek uplifting words, but we do not get them. We ask for a vision, but are left to feel our way in the dark. We ask for direction to the future, and we are told any road will get us there. We ask for a message of unity, we receive words of rancor and acrimony. Our confidence has eroded and our faith in the future shaken. If they are listening, they should know: “We need leaders who can empower us with the truth, convince us with the cogency of their logic and persuade us by the power of their arguments.” Lead by inspiration!

IV. Believe in the Power of Ideas. Ideas Always Defeat Guns, Always. We must believe in the power of ideas. The power of ideas will always, always overcome the power of gunpowder. Mahatma Gandhi’s ideas of nonviolence led to the liberation of 350 million Indians from colonialism. He opposed violence because it created more problems than it solved, and often left a legacy of hatred and bitterness that made genuine reconciliation and

long term harmony nearly impossible. He said, “An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.” Martin Luther King transformed the arid American political landscape pockmarked with segregation, discrimination and injustice after 350 years, without firing a single shot. Read his “Letter From Birmingham Jail” to understand the power of his ideas. As Victor Hugo observed, “One can resist the invasion of an army, but one cannot resist the invasion of ideas whose time has come.” The time has come for the ideas of freedom, democracy, human rights and accountability in Ethiopia. We must believe in the power of ideas!

V. Change Human Hearts and Minds Before Changing Human Actions. Before we change human actions, we must change human hearts and minds to rekindle the divine. Gandhi, saddened by the bloody carnage of WW II said, “Because these acts of terror and bloodshed appall man's conscience; because he knows that they are evil; because, in his innermost heart and mind, he deplors them. And because, when he is not misled, deceived, and corrupted by false leaders and false arguments, man has in his breast an impulse of kindness and compassion, which is the spark of the divine, and which one day, I believe, will be brought forth to the full flowering that is inherent in it.” If we clear our hearts and minds of hatred, fear and distrust and hold onto the Truth (satyagraha), we will also be able to experience the “spark of the divine.”

VI. Act Out of a Sense of Duty, Not Craving for Credit. In whatever political act we engage in, we should act out of a sense of duty and not out of craving for credit or acclaim. We should undertake human rights advocacy to make a practical difference, not to posture for fleeting credit and public recognition. Human rights advocacy and activism means just that: We should actively advocate for the cause of human rights because as human beings it is our moral duty to do so. It is immoral and illegal to imprison, torture, maim or kill another because of political differences, ideology or perspectives. We all have a moral duty to take reasonable steps to prevent human rights violations, and to use all available means to speak out against such violations, to identify those responsible whenever we can and to seek justice for victims of human rights abuses.

VII. Never be Afraid to Lose. In October, 2006, a year ago, we were licking our wounds after House Speaker Dennis Hastert stonewalled H.R. 5680 from getting to the House floor after it had passed the International Relations Committee. D.L.A. Piper and Dennis Hastert knocked us to the ground, and thought we were down for the count. The enemies of freedom threw a party and wrote the epitaph to an Ethiopia human rights bill in the U.S. Congress. But we got right up and took the fight to Hastert’s congressional district in Illinois. We were welcomed on the airwaves, newspaper editorial boards, in the churches, civic organizations, colleges and universities in his district. But it took only two weeks when Hastert himself found out that he was down for the count. He was knocked out permanently by a left hook delivered by the American voters. A year later, D.L.A. Piper was out for the count as H.R. 2003 passed the House unanimously. We know D.L.A. Piper is working triple overtime in the Senate today, but we will fight them tooth and nail, day and night. We know

we will win in the end. How can we lose when God and Truth are on our side? Because we are certain of the righteousness of our cause, we are never afraid to lose!

VIII. Learn to Say, “We Messed Up! We Sincerely Apologize!” As the old Ethiopian saying goes, “One will always find rust on iron and mistakes from Man.” There are some who say that in Ethiopian culture it is considered a sign of weakness, an admission of shame, to say, “I am sorry. I messed up. I was wrong.” There is a kernel of truth in that opinion. But it is actually an act of courage to say, “I am sorry. I made a mistake.” We should publicly acknowledge our faults and shortcomings. The average person is more compassionate and understanding when we admit our mistakes; but there is nothing that destroys the confidence of fellow human beings than calculated deceit and deception.

IX. Believe, “This Too Shall Pass.” We must always reaffirm our basic optimism in the future of the democratic system. We should always work to spread our spirit of confidence in the democratic process and conviction in our cause of freedom, democracy, human rights and accountability. It is written that, “The righteous shall never be removed, but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.” This too shall pass.

With Malice Towards None... Let’s Finish the Job

Abe Lincoln in his Second Inaugural Address said: “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”

With malice towards none, let’s keep our eyes on the prize and finish the job of H.R. 2003. Let’s join hands and sing the old civil rights song:

Keep Your Eyes on the Prize

...

The only thing that we did wrong,
Stayed in the wilderness a day too long.

Hold on, hold on,
Keep your eyes on the prize,
Hold on, Hold on.

But the one thing we did right,
Was the day we started to fight.

Hold on, hold on,
Keep your eyes on the prize.

Hold on y’all! Keep Your Eyes on the Prize!!!