

E-5353/06EN

Answer given by Mr Michel  
on behalf of the Commission  
(10.1.2007)

The Commission fully shares the Honourable Member's preoccupation with the deterioration of freedom in Ethiopia. The European Union, together with the international partners, continues to ask the Ethiopian Government, among other measures, to release the imprisoned opposition leaders and representatives of the media and civil society, in any case to grant them fair conditions of detention and a speedy, fair and transparent trial.

Following a visit to key political detainees in February 2006, the Commissioner in charge of Development and Humanitarian Aid was given the Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's commitment and assurances on their detention and trial conditions.

Concerns about the detainees, the conditions of their detention and the ongoing trial, were reiterated by the President of the Commission and the Commissioner responsible for Development and Humanitarian Aid to Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in Addis Ababa in October 2006. On that occasion, the grant of an amnesty to the political detainees was also suggested to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia.

The presence of an EU lawyer observer at the prisoners' trial serves to remind the Ethiopian authorities of the EU's attention in this regard.

Member States and the Commission also expressed their concerns on this matter in the framework of the political dialogue undertaken under Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement in a meeting in October 2006 with the Ethiopian Prime Minister, who gave assurance that the humanitarian and health conditions of prisoners would be addressed.

The Commission is deeply committed to a strong dialogue with the Ethiopian authorities, aiming at the pacification of the Ethiopian political life, dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition, and improvement in the respecting of human rights as the only way forward to build confidence.

The Commission, in its relations with the Ethiopian authorities, continuously stresses the importance of implementing reforms, including the recommendations of the EU Election Observation Mission in 2005, of consolidating the democratisation process, building a strong multi-party Parliament, and reinforcing the independence of the judiciary, and of promoting the liberalisation of the press and the media. The reform of the National Election Board, in consensus with the opposition in Parliament, has been announced, including the new composition of its board and capacity building; the reform of media law is under discussion.