



## Press statement

### European Parliament delegation visit to the African Union and Ethiopia Addis Ababa, 15-17 July 2013

**A delegation of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Human Rights conducted a visit to the African Union and Ethiopia on 15-17 July 2013 to take stock of the European-African cooperation, as well as to assess the human rights situation in Ethiopia.**

The parliamentary delegation was led by **Barbara LOCHBIHLER** (Greens, Germany). The other participating Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) were **Jacek PROTASIEWICZ** (European People's Party (EPP), Poland), **Jörg LEICHTFRIED** (Socialists & Democrats, Austria) and **Jean-Jacob BICEP** (Greens, France).

#### **The African Union (AU)<sup>1</sup>**

MEPs reiterated their support for a strong African Union, stressing the need for collective African efforts to push forward the integration process of the continent. This support should be underpinned by concrete assistance from the side of the European Union, notably by contributing to building the capacity of the AU human rights mechanisms.

The Members congratulated the AU for its achievements in the field of peace and security and discussed current challenges in this field such as the crises in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Mali, and the forthcoming elections in Zimbabwe. On human rights, MEPs together with their AU interlocutors agreed that AU political decisions and legal instruments have to be better implemented. "National governments must be more accountable for what they have signed at AU level and should translate these acts into domestic law in order to have a real impact on citizens' rights", declared the chair of the EP delegation. This impact would be enhanced by further AU engagement with civil society organizations, particularly those dealing with human rights.

On the specific human rights violations raised, MEPs encouraged the AU institutions to increase their efforts in addressing the situation of women and children in armed conflict, as well as to effectively promote and protect the work of human rights defenders in Africa. On the death penalty, Ms. Lochbihler said: "We very much hope that Africa will be the first abolitionist continent and reiterate the EU's fullest support."

A priority issue for the EP delegation was the fight against impunity. In this respect, Ms. Lochbihler declared "Africa has played a pivotal role in the establishment of the International Criminal Court

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<sup>1</sup> MEPs met with Mr Ramtane Lamamra (Algeria), Commissioner for Peace and Security and Ms Aïsha Adbullahi (Nigeria), Commissioner for Political Affairs and civil society organisations active at AU level.



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(ICC). Cooperation among international, regional and national levels is crucial to promote global justice and peace. We owe to the African victims of atrocious war crimes that those responsible are brought to justice." Following the meetings with the AU interlocutors, Ms. Lochbihler regretted the fact that Nigeria, and ultimately the African Union, allowed once again Sudanese president Al-Bashir to travel freely despite the existing ICC arrest warrant, this time at a HIV conference held in Abuja this week.

MEPs encouraged the AU and its States parties to tackle the issue of sustainable and equitable management of natural resources, and to draw on these resources to ensure the enjoyment of basic human rights, such as the right to housing, food and education, by the African population.

### **Ethiopia**

The visit included meetings with a wide range of Ethiopian interlocutors, including representatives of the government, parliament, opposition parties, as well as with representatives of civil society organizations.

MEPs took note of some encouraging developments in the field of human rights, such as the adoption of the National Human Rights Action Plan and the establishment of the Human Rights Commission and of the Ombudsperson. However, they expressed substantial concern regarding the respect of a number of civil and political rights.

While welcoming the efforts of the Ethiopian authorities in the field of economic and social rights, notably in relation to poverty alleviation, the EP delegation called for the opening of the domestic space for civil society, which could only contribute to the overall development of the country. They stressed that civil society organisations should be allowed to function freely, without interference, harassment and undue restrictions. "The Ethiopian authorities should acknowledge the important role of civil society actors and of trade union in reaching their ambitious development objectives. The restrictive NGO framework should be urgently revised", emphasized the chair of the EP delegation.

"Free, independent and pluralistic media are one of the cornerstones of any democracy and maintaining and strengthening their freedom and independence is in the common interest," said Ms. Lochbihler. She was worried about the fact that certain broadcasters are jammed and that access to the Internet and to social media are regularly restricted. She observed that blocking the free flow of information was directly at odds with the Ethiopian Constitution, which enshrined freedom of expression.

The EP delegation recognized the highly volatile security situation of Ethiopia's immediate neighbourhood. However, MEPs raised questions on the reported misuse of the anti-terrorism legislation for stifling dissent at domestic level.

Article 78 of the Ethiopian Constitution provides for the establishment of an independent judiciary. Despite this, MEPs noted flaws in the impartiality of the judicial system. Therefore MEPs also



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called on the Ethiopian authorities to release all journalists, members of the opposition, and others arbitrarily detained or imprisoned for exercising their legitimate right to freedom of expression, freedom of association, as well as freedom of religion and belief. The Government of Ethiopia must guarantee freedom of opinion, speech and the right of peaceful assembly at all times, in accordance with its Constitution and obligations under international law.

The 2015 elections should be an occasion for the Ethiopian government to demonstrate its commitments to democratic principles. In this regard, the MEPs called on the Ethiopian authorities to address a range of shortcomings identified during past elections and to ensure an open and fair competition between all political parties.

Highlighting the particular responsibility of Ethiopia as a member of the UN Human Rights Council, the delegation of the European Parliament also called on the Ethiopian authorities to ensure ratification of the optional protocols of the UN Conventions on Torture and on the Rights of the Child concerning child soldiers.

Regarding the ongoing resettlement programmes by the Ethiopian authorities, MEPs underlined the importance of adequately consulting the populations concerned, and ensuring that such programmes do not lead to human rights violations.

MEPs asked for the possibility of visiting the Kaliti prison, which would have allowed for a first-hand experience of the detention conditions. They called for further efforts, including with the support of international donors, to improve the treatment of detainees and the detention facilities. Despite the approval of the visit by the Ministry of Federal Affairs, admission was denied, including a meeting with prisoners. The EP delegation expressed its disappointment the resulting inability to further assess potential cooperation in improving conditions in prisons and detention as discussed with the Human Rights Commissioner and the Minister of Federal Affairs. While welcoming the open discussions with the different interlocutors, MEPs deplored the unexpected refusal of the prison visit without prior notification, after arrival at Kaliti.

### **More information**

European Parliament, Subcommittee on Human Rights

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/DROI/home.html>

Parliamentary activities, including CV of participating MEPs

Barbara Lochbihler

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/96728/BARBARA\\_LOCHBIHLER\\_home.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/96728/BARBARA_LOCHBIHLER_home.html)

Jacek PROTASIEWICZ

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/23782/Jacek%20PROTASIEWICZ\\_home.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/23782/Jacek%20PROTASIEWICZ_home.html)

Jörg LEICHTFRIED

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/28251/JORG\\_LEICHTFRIED\\_home.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/28251/JORG_LEICHTFRIED_home.html)

Jean-Jacob BICEP

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/113891/JEAN-JACOB\\_BICEP\\_home.html](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/113891/JEAN-JACOB_BICEP_home.html)



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