

# ACP-EU JPA: Co-Presidents welcome the release of 528 opposition members in Ethiopia

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Brussels, 18 January 2018/ ACPEU JPA: The Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly welcome the decision of the Ethiopian authorities to release 528 members of the opposition, including Dr. Merara Gudina.

The Co-Presidents of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Louis Michel (for the European Parliament) and Mr Joseph Owona Kono (for the ACP Parliamentary Assembly) congratulate the decision taken on Thursday 4 January 2018 by the Ethiopian authorities to release 528 members of the opposition, including Dr. Merara Gudina, President of the Oromo Federalist Congress (OFC) opposition party. They welcome the release of a first group of detainees on Wednesday 17 January, including Dr. Merara Gudina.

They commend the President, HE Mr. Molatu Teshome and the Prime Minister, HE Mr. Haile Mariam Dessalegn, and the members of the Ethiopian Government for their efforts to deepen the democratic debate in Ethiopia with a view to improving the national consensus. They stress that democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights are the nuclear triangle of the foundations of any society.

They also welcome the decision to definitively close the Maekelawi detention center in Addis Ababa. These decisions are a first step towards national reconciliation. They recall that democracy requires the protection of rights and freedom, respect for legality and the guarantee of free discussion and encouragement of debate.

They recall that Ethiopia plays a key role in the region, including hosting the headquarters of the African Union (AU), contributing to United Nations peacekeeping forces, engaging in aid and security cooperation with Western countries and is contributing to international efforts to restore stability in Somalia and to combat terrorist groups in the region.

They commend Ethiopia's commitment to relations between Sudan and South Sudan and its willingness to assist in peace negotiations under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD).

They recall the strategic engagement between the European Union and Ethiopia adopted on 14 June 2016, recognizing Ethiopia's essential role in Africa and in the international community, and commend its constructive role in maintaining peace and security in the Horn of Africa, and beyond on the entire African continent.

They commend Ethiopia's progress in improving the living conditions of the rapidly growing population, including some 847,000 refugees who have fled conflict in neighboring countries, and express their gratitude for her leadership in the region and within the African Union.

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