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Dear Caroline

The Commission is closely following the matter of the detention of Ms. Birtukan Midekssa, and expects that the Ethiopian authorities will ensure that her case is treated in conformity with Ethiopia's laws and in respect of Ms. Midekssa's legal and human rights. The Commission also notes that the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has recently labelled her arrest as arbitrary.

The Commission had welcomed the earlier decision by the Ethiopian authorities to pardon several members of the opposition including Ms. Birtukan Midekssa and has appealed to the Ethiopian authorities to show clemency, including on humanitarian grounds.

At a recent article 8 dialogue, where the matter was once again raised, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi indicated that he felt Ms. Midekssa has been treated according to the law and that she will have to serve her life sentence.

The Commission will continue to urge the Ethiopian authorities to deal with this question and other human rights issues in line with Ethiopia's ambitions as a modern, emerging democracy.

The Commission has also posted a message regarding the situation of Ms. Birtukan Midekssa on the website of DG Development and on the website of the EU Delegation to Ethiopia:

http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/ethiopia_birtukan_midekssa_KDG_A_2082.pdf

The EU, in cooperation with other development partners, is furthermore closely following up human rights issues through the regular dialogue with the Ethiopian authorities and other interested parties. Several projects in the area of human rights and advocacy are presently being supported in Ethiopia and work has recently started on a Local Implementation Strategy of the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders in Ethiopia, in line with the EU policy.

Where there is evidence of human rights abuse anywhere in Ethiopia, then this can be taken up with the Ethiopian authorities.

The Commission believes that it is essential to maintain a regular dialogue with the Ethiopian authorities on these matters. The Commission and Member States have a strong commitment to the people of Ethiopia. There is good evidence that cooperation with Ethiopia is yielding at times impressive results. It is important that this cooperation can be further strengthened and that the partnership, which should allow for frank dialogue on subjects of mutual interest and on issues of concern to the EU, can become even more effective.

Ethiopia is approaching general elections in May. These elections could prove an important step in the democratisation process of the country. The Commission and Member States will seek to intensify the dialogue and monitoring during this period.

Yours sincerely



Catherine Ashton