Everyone Should Stand Guard for the Protection of Human Rights!

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(EHRCO Press Release issued on the occasion of International Human Rights Day)

Every year, the International Human Rights Day is celebrated around the world on 10th December to mark the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the General Assembly of the United Nations, on this day in 1948. When EHRCO was established 15 years ago, the principles it was founded on were the fundamental human rights enshrined in the UDHR as well as the resolution of all differences through peaceful means. In this respect, the three inseparable goals that EHRCO stands for are:

1. the establishment of a democratic system;
2. the prevalence of rule of law and due process;
3. the protection of human rights.

Since its establishment, EHRCO has been monitoring the human rights situation in the country, investigating violations and issuing reports of its findings to government organs, the Ethiopian public and the international community. In these reports, it has been calling for the improvement of the human rights situation and for bringing to justice the perpetrators of the violations. EHRCO will continue to pursue this distinguishing mission in the future too.

During the last fifteen years, there have been major developments in Ethiopia that could contribute to the protection of human rights. Among these, major examples include: the guarantee of fundamental human rights in the Transitional Charter and the FDRE Constitution, the establishment of the Ombudsman and the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and their commencement of operation, the ratification of several international human rights instruments by the government and their being accorded legal status in the Constitution, and the establishment of civil society organizations promoting human rights.

Nevertheless, despite these encouraging developments, the violation of human rights has not stopped. In particular, since the May 2005 national election, brutal extrajudicial killings, mass arrests, and torture have been committed against citizens. There have been repeated violations of freedoms of expression, belief, and assembly, press freedom, the right to organise, and other political rights. It is the duty of the government to bring to justice those who wilfully violate the rights enshrined in the Constitution and in the international human rights instruments that Ethiopia has ratified. At the same time, every citizen has to struggle to ensure that this is done so.

On this occasion, EHRCO calls upon civil society, the Ombudsman, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, the Parliament and other appropriate government organs, development partners as well as the media to develop common programmes and work together to promote political and religious tolerance, the resolution of differences through peaceful dialogue, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights.