

## [In Ethiopia, UN rights chief urges authorities for greater freedoms, especially space for critical voices](#)

4 May 2017 – Speaking to the press during his mission to Ethiopia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights today highlighted the need for greater and freer civic space, with “broader latitude for the contributions of critical or dissenting views” to decision-making in the country.

“All governments need to be held to the mark by independent media and the vital action of civil society and human rights defenders,” High Commissioner Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein [said](#) at a press conference in the capital, Addis Ababa.

“I am convinced the Ethiopian Government will find its most important and productive investment will be in the rights of the people, which build strong and safe societies.”

In his remarks, the UN rights chief hailed the contributions of the Horn of Africa country ranging from its contributions to UN peacekeeping efforts as well as its commitment to protect the human rights of its people as illustrated by its accession to a number of human rights treaties and their reflection in the Ethiopian constitution.

He also expressed that the work of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission was heartening and called on the Government to continue further steps to grant the body more independence.

However, speaking on the unrest in the country in November 2015 and August 2016, and the response of the security forces, Mr. Zeid urged the authorities to allow access to UN human rights officials to visit the affected region and establish the facts.

“The extremely large number of arrests – over 26,000 – suggests it is unlikely rule of law guarantees have been observed in every case. I believe my staff ought to be given access to the affected areas, and I renew my request,” he added, noting that he would continue to follow-up on the case.

The High Commissioner also spoke on the importance of economic, social and cultural rights and stressed that progress on these rights would translate into civil and political rights advances.

He also offered his support and that of his Office, [OHCHR](#), to the Government and the people of Ethiopia in confronting the challenges posed by the drought plaguing large parts of the region.

SEE ALSO: [As new drought hits Ethiopia, UN urges support for Government’s ‘remarkable’ efforts](#)

During his visit, High Commissioner Zeid met with a number of senior

Ethiopian officials, including the Prime Minister, Hailemariam Desalegn, Ministers, legislators, and human rights officials and defenders.

Also, while in Ethiopia, the UN top human rights official signed a Memorandum of Intent with the Government to strengthen OHCHR Regional Office in Addis Ababa programmes on capacity building for stakeholders across the region, including Ethiopia.

During his mission, Mr. Zeid also met with Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, and other senior African Union (AU) officials, with whom he discussed human rights priorities with the AU, as the regional bloc's new leadership develops its vision and frameworks for impact across the continent.