



## **EU EOM Ethiopia 2010**

### **Opening press conference speech, April 16, 2010**

#### **TRANSCRIPT**

Greetings and welcome.

I will speak in English and I do apologize as I don't speak any of your languages.

My name is Thijs Berman, and I am the Chief Observer of the EU Election Observation Mission to Ethiopia in 2010.

We are here to introduce the observation mission.

On the invitation of the Ethiopian government, this mission will be here to observe the general and regional elections on the 23rd of May.

Let me just state the main objectives of this Election Observation Mission.

Our mandate is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the electoral process and to observe the extent to which the election complies with international standards for elections, as well as domestic law. The international standards are, of course, the respect of political rights and fundamental freedoms, and they are formulated in a whole set of international and regional texts, conventions, declarations to which Ethiopia is a signatory.

We are independent in our work. Independent from European Institutions: the European Commission, the Council (Member States), and the Parliament. There have been over 70 missions like this to 50 countries all over the world, since 2000.



**European Union**  
**Election Observation Mission to Ethiopia 2010**  
House of Peoples' Representatives and State Council Elections



We are here to be impartial, independent and neutral.

We are not here to please any party, be it the government or the opposition. We are here to watch the democratic process itself, and later, with our report and recommendations, we hope to contribute in strengthening with our professional assessment the democratic growth of Ethiopia. To me, as a Member of the European Parliament in the Development Committee, this is highly important.

Europe has a role to play in fostering democracy and the respect for human rights. With this kind of missions, this is what we aim to do. And this is best done, with an analysis based on clear facts, - on verifiable facts.

I know that in the past, there has been criticism against an EU observation mission here. All I can say is this: our core team of 10 experts, our 90 long term observers who will arrive next week, and the 60 short term observers who will be there around Election Day – they are all highly professional, they know how to watch things and stay independent and neutral. We will carry out this mission knowing our responsibility. We will be deployed in most of the regions, ensuring a fair overview of this beautiful and vast country.

This Mission will strictly fulfill its task and will **observe**, that is, we will abstain from any action interfering, influencing these elections. The Observation Mission will not make these elections or change them. But afterward, the final report will hopefully be of help in your own decisions regarding your democracy.

I understand that with these elections, every Ethiopian citizen has the past in mind, and everyone is committed to make these elections a success – peaceful, calm, responsible. You are building your future, and these elections are an important moment on this path. You choose your leaders, your parliament, your regional councils.

Our observation mission will be in close contact with all parties involved – although, with more than 70 parties, this



**European Union**  
**Election Observation Mission to Ethiopia 2010**  
**House of Peoples' Representatives and State Council Elections**



certainly is a challenge... This week, I met with the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I had meetings with several political parties, and these meetings are just the start of a series of meetings and we will continue these meetings.

The observation mission will work under a Memorandum of Understanding, signed with the Government, that ensures that the government will facilitate our task. We have freedom of movement throughout the country, free access to all interlocutors of our choice. We will have freedom of access at any time to all bodies of the electoral administration, to polling stations as well as counting centers, and we will also have access to all information we might need in our task, before, during and after elections.

There will also be a continuous consultation process between the Ethiopian government and this Mission. This is of course to avoid any misunderstanding, and to exchange information, if need be.

So, within this framework, we will look at all aspects of the electoral process. And we are very much looking forward to this. Ethiopia is an important country, I feel honored to be able to accompany your country on this path, in the interest of all its citizens.

Thank you.