

ETHIOPIA

Statement by Member for Yokine

MR R.C. KUCERA (Yokine) [12.52 pm]: I recently met with a number of Ethiopian community representatives who live within the Yokine electorate concerning the current situation in Ethiopia. According to United States Ambassador Vicky Huddleston, 111 members of the opposition have been imprisoned on alleged treason charges, as well as virtually every journalist who dares to report the actions of the current government led by Prime Minister Zeles Menawe. The entire leadership of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy, the largest opposition party, was imprisoned in November 2005 after protests over the disputed 15 May elections. The European Union election observation mission subsequently expressed grave concerns about the conduct of the elections. Arrests totalled some 40 000 detainees, with horrific allegations emanating from a camp at Dedesa, 400 kilometres west of Addis Ababa. Most were held for just three weeks, but some 3 000 are still incarcerated, with many of those facing the death penalty. As reported in *The West Australian* of 17 December 2005, a crackdown on this scale has not been seen in Africa for 20 years. The reported repression exceeds anything perpetrated by President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe. The world was horrified when police arrested CUD leader Teshome Legesse, and his wife was beaten with rifle butts, and shot and killed by police in front of her family. Some 80 Ethiopians were killed in the ensuing protests. On 6 April 2006, after a damning United States Senate human rights report on Ethiopia, the American Senate called upon Menawe to immediately release the thousands of political prisoners of conscience. Our local Ethiopian community members are desperate for news of their loved ones. In approaches to me, they have spoken of the anguish they feel at the current situation. I call on all members of this house, and our federal colleagues, to acquaint themselves with what is occurring and to ensure that the voice and spirit of democracy are not strangled in the once proud nation of Ethiopia.