



March 7, 2012

Eritreans Mourn the Loss of Rep. Donald Payne

The Organization of Eritrean Americans, on behalf of Eritreans living in the United States, wishes to express its deepest condolences on the untimely death of the Honorable Congressman Donald M. Payne (D-NJ), ranking member of the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health on the Committee for Foreign Affairs. Congressman Payne gave his state and his nation nearly a quarter of a century of dedicated service as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. He was first elected to Congress in 1988 as the first African American congressman from the state of New Jersey. The last two decades, he served the institution in leadership positions.

The Organization of Eritrean Americans would like to recognize his relentless effort to help bring about peace to the war-ravaged Horn of Africa, and its people who have been subjected to death and destruction. To this end he worked closely with the Eritrean and other Horn of Africa Communities in the Washington, DC area to advance peace, stability and security in this critical part of Africa.

And his work for peace in the Horn and the rest of the continent is greatly appreciated. According to a Reuters report, days before he died of cancer, “it wasn't the phone calls of encouragement from presidents that cheered him. It was when a Washington hospital orderly recognized the New Jersey congressman as the only U.S. official to visit his village in the African nation of Eritrea.” Quoting Congressman Payne's brother William, the report added, “hearing from the orderly how much the visit had meant, and knowing he had made a difference in the lives of people struggling against violence and poverty — from his native Newark, N.J., to sub-Saharan Africa — was the reason why Donald Payne had dedicated his life to public service.”

In his relentless quest for peace, Congressman Payne with Representative Tom Lantos (D-California) introduced H.R. 2760, the Ethiopia-Eritrea Border Dispute Act of 2003, which called for Eritrea and Ethiopia to abide by the final and binding Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission (EEBC) decision. Unfortunately, the Ethiopia, through its Washington lobby blocked the Bill, and the EEBC's decision, ten years after it was rendered, remains unimplemented and the region's quest for peace is held hostage. We regret that Mr. Payne passed away without seeing peace in the region he tirelessly worked to help. We hope people heed his clarion call for peace and work hard to make his dream come true.

In a Washington environment of indifference, Donald Payne provided a glimmer of hope for the betterment of US-Africa relations in general and US-Eritrea relations in particular. He will be greatly missed. America lost a statesman, the Horn of Africa lost a genuine voice for peace and Eritrean-Americans lost a friend. May God be with his family and colleagues at this moment of sadness.

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