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Dear friends,

I write with some exciting news to share. Last Friday afternoon, our brothers in Ethiopia, Daniel Bekele and Netsanet Demissie, were finally released from prison.

As you may recall, Daniel and Netsanet, are both civil society leaders and coordinators of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) in Ethiopia. They have been detained for the last two years and five months for their peaceful civil society work, particularly related to their involvement in coordinating legitimate election monitoring activities by local civil society organisations during the May 2005 election. Since then, CIVICUS and GCAP, along with many other organisations around the world have been calling for their release. We were hopeful they would be released on parole earlier this year, but that never eventuated and a recent appeal from the prosecution team caused fears that their detention period could extend.

We are therefore extremely pleased that recent negotiations bore fruit and that they were released on 28 March. I was in Addis Ababa when they were released and joined their families at Kaliti prison to bring them home - an intensely emotional moment and one that I will remember for the rest of my life. While we mourn the loss of those two and a half years they unnecessarily spent in prison, we are thrilled they are finally free and reunited with their loved ones once more. I would like to take this moment to pay tribute not only to Daniel and Netsanet and their courage and commitment to Ethiopia and social justice causes, but also to their partners, Yemi and Pepa, their mothers and wider family who have stood so resolutely beside them in their struggle. I feel incredibly privileged to have been there to witness that moment when they were reunited.

I know that you have been closely following the case over the last few years and so wanted to share with you our joy on this news, as well as to thank you for all your support. Many of you have been involved in our solidarity events and campaigns in different ways – from signing postcards at the CIVICUS World Assembly, to organising International Days of Solidarity, joining us in meetings with the Prime Minister of Ethiopia and other leaders, writing letters of protest to the authorities, paying tribute to Daniel and Netsanet during your events, sending messages of support to their families at Christmas, to forwarding press releases and alerts on their case. Please know that each of these actions has contributed to the news I share with you today. From Kampala to Geneva to Accra and beyond, your actions and support have made a difference.

Let us take courage from this – not only that freedom is theirs once again, but that truth and justice can win over intimidation and injustice. Thank you for standing with us in support of Daniel and Netsanet and I know that you will stand with us again as we wish them and their families all best wishes for resuming their lives again.

In solidarity,

SECRETARY GENERAL

Kumi Naidoo
Secretary General, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation