

## **Ethiopian Opposition Leader Jawar Mohammed Campaigns in Washington DC**

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Washington, DC - As the political capital of the United States, Washington sees its fair share of public demonstrations. Sometimes, not often, but occasionally, those gatherings come to residential neighborhoods.

This afternoon, Mr. Jawar Mohammed, a contender to be Prime Minister of Ethiopia, came to visit the Ethiopian American community with registration at the Oromoo Community Center, just around the corner from my home.

To my surprise, and apparently to that of the DC Metropolitan Police, hundreds of supporters of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed also came to protest Jawar Mohammed's organizing effort at the community center. The streets were closed to vehicular traffic by hundreds of people without a police officer in sight. An equal number of Ethiopians gathered to hear Mr. Jawar's remarks and cheer on his candidacy also squared off in front of the community center. The Metropolitan Police Department's deployment of officers has been slow but steady. It would seem that either DC's MPD has no ears in the Ethiopian community here or they are tone deaf to the implications of a foreign presidential contender being in the neighborhood.

The Washington DC area hosts one of the largest Ethiopian communities outside Africa. Waves of Ethiopians have sought shelter and applied their considerable skills to building our country. Each wave has brought immigrants of differing political hues and loyalties. That was made abundantly clear this afternoon.

Today's participants fell mainly between two political camps, but, as I learned today, their differences have been fueled by a recent attempted arrest of Mr. Jawar by Prime Minister Abiy's security forces, in the dark of night. That botched raid descended into ethnic fighting between two groups of supporters. While Prime Minister Abiy won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to restore liberty and press freedom, he has fanned ethnic divisions in the country. The Oromoo are now believed to be strongly supportive of Mr. Jawar despite having delivered Abiy to the office of Prime Minister.

The Oromia Media Network is owned by Mr. Jawar. This gives him great reach to potential supporters, particularly among the Oromoo. In this new exercise of freedom, Jawar's goal is to create a political party among dozens of ethnic groups and win enough seats to be elected prime minister. Mr. Feyissa Gindaba proudly waved his t-shirt signage emblazoned 'I am Christian. I stand with Jawar Mohammed.' He went on to comment that he believes Mr. Jawar presents the best possibility for all Ethiopians to work together as one country.

Based on today's gathering, the Ethiopian American supporters of Prime Minister Abiy and Mr. Jawar are motivated and engaged for the coming contest. Let's hope it stays peaceful, earnest and honest, here and in Ethiopia.

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**WHERE :**

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