



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

April 8, 2006

Ambassador Fesseha Asghedom Tessema
Ambassador Charge d' Affair
Embassy of Ethiopia, United States
Washington DC

Dear Ambassador Tessema:

At the recent US House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operation's hearing on March 28, 2006, Obang Metho, Director of International Advocacy for the Anuak Justice Council, was invited to testify regarding the subject, "Ethiopia's Troubled Internal Situation." In a later memo you wrote to Christopher Smith, Chairman of the House Subcommittee, you expressed your dismay regarding the way you were questioned and expressed your opposition to the participation of the Anuak Justice Council (AJC), pointing out that it was "an obscure organization" which "lacked credibility."

As others have already responded to some of your comments, we will attempt to mainly focus on your own comments and questions regarding the Anuak Justice Council.

First of all, we do agree with you that the AJC is a small organization with limited resources, incomparable to those resources within the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE).

In addition, we have represented a very small ethnic group in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia with a current worldwide population of approximately 100,000 to 150,000. Probably fewer than 75,000 Anuak (*Anywaa* or *Anyuak*) live in Ethiopia at this time. They have a history of being marginalized; therefore, we do understand that it was quite surprising that the Anuak were given an opportunity to speak at such an important event as the hearing held by the US House Subcommittee on Africa.

It may also have been surprising that the AJC did not only speak for themselves, but for the many who are also suffering under your regime amongst the more than sixty other ethnic groups, some large and some small, within Ethiopia.

We also bring it to your attention that although the AJC may be obscure to the Ethiopian general public, we should be known to you through various communications and legal cases; one legal claim, which was already accepted by the African Commission of Human & People's Right and the other, being considered by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague. As you know, the basis of these claims allege that the FDRE government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has perpetrated crimes against humanity towards the Anuak as documented in the investigative report completed by Human Rights Watch.

As you should also know, the Anuak have been calling on the FDRE to cease the killing, imprisonment, torture, rape and other such gross human rights crimes against the Anuak that have been going on for years, but became full blown on December 13, 2003 with the massacre of 424 educated Anuak leaders within three days by Ethiopian Federal Defense Forces, Regional Police and some highlander militias.

During your testimony at the hearing, you never mentioned the massacre of the Anuak, the thousand or more Anuak prisoners of conscience still incarcerated or the over four thousand refugees (Ethiopian citizens) in Pochalla, southern Sudan, who still do not feel safe enough to return to their homes. We recognize that it is a difficult subject for the FDRE and again, we did not expect you to discuss it. However, because of this ongoing lack of acknowledgement of these acts of violence against the Anuak by the FDRE, the AJC was grateful for the opportunity to be heard at the House Subcommittee hearing as we are becoming increasingly aware that the suffering of the Anuak is indicative of the widespread suffering of many others within the greater family of Ethiopians.

In your letter to Congressman Smith you state, “Prior to the hearing, we conveyed information to the subcommittee staff that at least two of the witnesses on the announced agenda lacked credibility.”

The second witness you mentioned apparently refers to Obang Metho of the AJC. You state, “Another was one who claims to represent an obscure “*organization*” that seems to have no one other than himself on its staff. It is hard to take seriously claims made by such an idiosyncratic entity.”

Yet, the overwhelming response the AJC is receiving from persons of widely different backgrounds and representing all the major ethnic groups from within and without Ethiopia, indicates that we might not have such an *idiosyncratic*, or “peculiar and unusual” message as you have implied. Instead, we are discovering that oppression, similar to that of the Anuak, is not an aberration, but is standard practice in controlling Ethiopians everywhere who may not agree with this government. Because of this, the “message” of the AJC may apply to not only Anuak, but to millions throughout our beloved Ethiopia.

However, it is unimportant to the AJC whether we are “obscure”. Instead, what matters is if we are speaking the truth for people who are otherwise silenced. What is important is whether they feel that they have been heard. What is important is whether we stand for principles of truth, freedom, the intrinsic value of each human being and the equitable application of the rule of law as not only laid out in the Ethiopian Constitution, but as has been established by our Creator.

Truth cannot be forfeited for “diplomacy” even if it creates discomfort, especially since discomfort is usually the mother of positive change. Most of us do not transform our ways without it. Therefore, we must listen well and work together to find the best solutions for our time, based on the foundations of truth.

The AJC also strongly believes that we should not determine our own credibility, but instead, as one of our witnesses declared, “You do not have to go out and preach your own beauty, leave it to others to decide.”

We of the AJC hold that we all must truly listen to the voices of the Oromo, the Gurage, those from Sidama, the Mursi, the Dizi, the Suri, the Majengir, the Me'en, the Tigrayan, the Amhara, and those others whose stories are yet to be told. What is important is whether Ethiopians unite together to stand up for truth, liberty and the rule of law, making Ethiopia a safe haven for humanity. It is our hope that all Ethiopians who value human life will stand in the gap for their brothers and sisters who are harassed and oppressed. May God bless Ethiopia.

Respectfully yours,

Executive Board Members of the AJC

CC: To the Office of the Honorable Christopher Smith
Chairman of the Sub Committee on Africa Global Human Rights and International Operations

CC: To Members of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations

CC: To Mr. Donald Y. Yamamoto, deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs