



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

EPRDF Government Displaces Anuak in Over 12 Anuak Villages— Is the End of this Regime Near?

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Enough of this power struggle between the brutal government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian people! Does the EPRDF not know that they cannot find enough force to hang on forever when the people all over Ethiopia are saying—enough? Can they not see the signs of the end and give up? Must they be so relentless in hanging on to the last threads of a dictatorship doomed to fail! They must be recognizing their fragile condition as they have become increasingly relentless in worsening the situation, a move that some see as the last desperate moves of a dying regime. Yet, as they do, increasingly more people are suffering.

As the African proverb states, “the deepest darkness exists right before the dawn.” Might we be in such a darkness? I think so. Discontentment is rising up all over Ethiopia. We are hearing about it. Be prepared, because as it starts to promise the full light of morning, the EPRDF may take out all its weapons and carelessly aim at anyone, out of their own fear of their impending demise. The Anuak may now be experiencing this as they react to another onslaught from the EPRDF.

The hypocrisy of the government’s actions is stunning if it were not so tragic! As Meles Zenawi fights Somalia “to overcome terrorism” and as the Gambella Regional government sends 100,000 birr to help Ethiopians devastated by floods, this same government has created a humanitarian crisis that has again been aimed at the Anuak.

Now, the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) have ordered the Anuak in over 12 villages in three districts in the Gambella region of Ethiopia to immediately leave their homes, property and crops. They say they want to root out any Anuak rebels who may be finding support from the locals.

This is a critical time for the crops, which are almost ready for harvesting. Now these farmers who have worked all season to provide for their families throughout the coming year, will have nothing left. It is a time when constant supervision of the crops is necessary due to the wild animals, like monkeys, from the surrounding woodlands that raid the fields. In some villages, reports indicate the ENDF have already destroyed their crops, cutting down the corn and sorghum with machetes.

Some farmers who refused to leave were beaten and taken to detention centers. Anuak were warned that any persons venturing back into the area would be killed. This all happened with no warning and may likely occur in additional villages throughout the Gambella region. The Anuak in the districts of Abobo, Dimma and Gog, mostly women, children and elders, as most of the younger men had fled to Sudan in late 2003, were forced to move from the villages where they have lived for generations, to larger towns in their respective districts.

Instead of relying on farming their land to sustain their own needs, they were left under trees in the center of these towns with no food, clean water, supplies, clothing or shelter. Heavy rains, along with mosquitoes carrying malaria, are further worsening the seriousness of the situation, causing extreme hardship and suffering to the displaced Anuak.

The International Red Cross (IRC) has been given permission by the regional government to provide plastic sheeting for shelter, but no food, clean water or other supplies have been given. Travel in and out of the area is very difficult due to high water, mud and high grass.

Yet, at the same time, the Gambella Regional government, which is responsible for the displacement of these people as they collaborate with the defense forces, donated 100,000 birr to displaced flood victims in other parts of Ethiopia. This is not to say that these flood victims are not in need of much help, but the pretense of “caring about the people of Ethiopia” is absurd in light of secretly being the active agent in causing suffering to another group of Ethiopians!

These actions by the ENDF, supported by the EPRDF, exacerbate already horrible living conditions for the Anuak. Reports by a major UN entity, not yet released, indicate that every aspect of Anuak daily life (obtaining water, firewood, farming, traveling to market or for health care in some other village) is so profoundly compromised due to ongoing issues of security related to the intense terrorization of the Anuak by the EPRDF troops, that the Anuak of Ethiopia are facing a crisis of survival that threatens their very existence. In fact, it is reported that refugees from other countries, such as Sudan, living in the refugee camps in the Gambella region, are far better off than the Anuak of Ethiopia. Instead, the Anuak have been the victims of a manmade humanitarian catastrophe at the hands of their own government. Their life-threatening crisis has now intensified with this latest displacement of thousands of Anuak.

The villagers were told that Anuak rebels, resisting the government, would no longer be able to come through the area and obtain any food or supplies, yet it is believed that the rebels may have greater opportunity for freedom of movement now with no one in the area. The villagers have been terrorized as they have been caught between these two forces. The Anuak insurgents sometimes killed Anuak, suspected of being government sympathizers, along with ENDF troops. When the ENDF were killed, the troops would retaliate against innocent civilian Anuak. They usually targeted Anuak farmers, working alone in their fields, or Anuak traveling alone or in small groups between villages on roads and footpaths.

Ever since the genocide of the Anuak that began on December 13-15 of 2003 when 424 Anuak were brutally massacred in the town of Gambella by ENDF troops and militias, with many more being killed in the rural areas, the current government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has continued to perpetrate what Human Rights Watch (HRW) has classified as “Crimes Against Humanity” against the Anuak of Ethiopia. Some believe the total of Anuak killed since that time may have reached two thousand or more.

Another major human rights abuses report from Gambella is expected to be released soon that will document further ongoing crimes against humanity at the hands of the EPRDF government of Meles Zenawi. These kinds of reports of human rights abuses are coming out all over Ethiopia to the chagrin of western countries such as the US and Britain who have viewed PM Meles as a partner in the War on Terror.

To date, none of the actual perpetrators are known to have been held accountable. No compensation has been given to the Anuak who have lost family members, homes, property, crops or have damages been paid to those who have been raped, beaten, tortured or illegally detained in prisons and detention centers at the hands of the EPRDF government.

As things look better to outsiders, insiders know that the tragedy of December of 2003 has never ended and may be worsening as this government falters. Instead, Anuak continue to be killed almost daily in this remote area of Ethiopia, which is rich in oil, gold and other natural resources that the government has begun to develop on indigenous Anuak land.

In July of 2006, the Anuak Justice Council (AJC), a non-profit human rights organization dedicated to protecting the rights of the Anuak, has received reports that 21 more Anuak were killed in July alone. In actuality, the number may be higher as information is sometimes difficult to obtain from the most remote areas of the region. In addition, many more Anuak have disappeared and are believed to be dead or detained in secret detention centers. In one district alone, Abobo, since the beginning of the year, 31 Anuak have been reported missing.

Some of the villages included in the displacement are: Bääṭ Gilø, Gari, Aliew Gari, Ablëen, Oleeny Obwør, Dumbäng, Pø Wääṭ Alaam, Tier Dangnge, Obay, Afïio and Omeetbööki/ Bääṭ Ojëen.

All over Ethiopia, the people are ready to be done with this government that appears to have no intention of leaving. Instead, they are using increasing force against any possible pockets of resistance, in an increasingly desperate power struggle that can only lead to its own inevitable downfall. They seem to be at a loss for options even though the most obvious one, levelheaded negotiations, have eluded them from the beginning. Most do not believe that negotiations with such leadership would ever produce more than another cosmetic manipulation in order to battle on for its own survival no matter what the costs for the Ethiopian people.

Who is left to support the EPRDF? It appears the only government in Ethiopia has been reduced to Meles Zenawi and a handful of his henchman backed up by the Ethiopian military. Now this source of life and strength that has sustained them these last years finally seems to be falling apart with the defection of a top general and many additional troops. No wonder! Although some in the military have learned to thrive on violence, losing their own sense of humanity along the way, many others that comprise these forces are the sons and daughters of those being persecuted all over our beloved country and may not see a way out. Some were forced into the military at young ages and may believe they have no hope for the future after such participation. This thinking must be confronted with the truth that change is possible—the heavy load of alienation towards God, others and self can be lifted, one’s own humanity can be restored even while coming to terms with one’s own culpable actions.

There are countless examples in history of how human beings have changed for good. No matter what each soldier has done or how brainwashed and threatened into conformance each might have been, those expected to hold up this brutal regime may be rethinking their allegiances and the costs of dying to one’s own beliefs and values. If the military stopped holding their guns against their Ethiopian brothers and sisters who want nothing more than to live free of oppression, the chains of injustice would fall.

Those holding the guns are some of the most oppressed because the cost to one’s own humanity is so great. Yet if Ethiopia were free, their own lives would also be freed. The greatest freedom of all, freedom of conscience is available even now. It is time for those holding the guns to realize that a society based on guns and violence is one where not only lives are lost, but where one’s own humanity is sacrificed.

Each will some day be held accountable by our Creator, if not in a court of law, for crimes committed against the innocent. Where will those commanding such acts be? As we know from history, many dictators escape the country, taking with them the money they have stolen from the people and live in luxury in other countries until they die. Others, who have been used to hold them up, become expendable, sometimes paying the price for following orders that are considered “war crimes” by the international community.

Yet, the greatest costs of such actions are usually the moral and spiritual costs. Yet, even now, those holding the guns can release their own chains of bondage inside their souls by turning to God, refusing to commit human rights crimes against innocent civilians. Once those holding the guns join with the people this horrible terrorization of Ethiopians by the EPRDF will end.

So often through the conviction of individuals' consciences and the power of renewed faith, personal transformation is possible. When that happens one by one, until more and more are added to the numbers, the floods of doom devastating Ethiopia may turn into the green pastures of freedom, reconciliation, peace and democracy for all Ethiopians.

It may be time for such a change, but it must come quickly. The Anuak are undergoing incredible suffering. Some will die as a result of this displacement. Many other Ethiopians throughout the country are in similar conditions. The human toll of natural disasters, such as the devastation caused by the recent flooding, cannot always be avoided, but our own government should not purposely create human catastrophes.

Each of us must exert our utmost effort to intervene for those being robbed of their property, lives, health, education and futures at the hands of the EPRDF. Days may make the difference. Do your part. Do not be discouraged.

Even the ENDF troops do not need to lose hope, but to ask themselves how long will they support this kind of oppression of their fellow Ethiopian people? They should do the right thing or they will become prisoners of their own consciences, being haunted day and night and for the rest of their lives.

People are losing hope, thinking that this government will last until 2010, but that, although highly unlikely, can only happen if those holding the guns continue to point them at the innocent, using force to maintain control by a few. Those holding the guns must understand that they are making a choice when they pull the trigger against the innocent and enforce continued suffering and injustice to Ethiopians. Those with guns have a key to open the door to the future where the oppression by the gun is replaced by the rule of law, liberty and democracy, creating a new future for the children of Ethiopia.

Let us pray that God will walk with us through the next valleys we face as we look forward to the time when the real soul of the Ethiopian people is restored and vibrant life returns to our homeland.

Desmond Tutu, that great South African leader writes in his book, *GOD HAS A DREAM*, that “the Apostle Paul in the Bible became the greatest missionary of the church he persecuted.” So can the many Ethiopians who have either participated in acts of hatred, intolerance, injustice or in doing nothing to stop it, change the course of the future by deciding to take a different path.

We have seen what seems to be a pervasive sense of guilt amongst Ethiopians—a group shame that is eating away at our core identity. It is dividing us into factions where we can group together for survival, blaming others for things that may be within our own grasp to change. These “survival tactics” have backfired on us now and we are falling apart from the inside. Instead of taking positive action, we find reasons to stay “stuck” in the muck of seeing the faults of others and competitively vying with them for opportunities, threatened with others' successes and taking advantage of those same “others” whenever possible.

We can avoid looking at ourselves, instead always finding examples of those who have done worse acts, blaming them for what is wrong in Ethiopia, but if we never face our own part of what is wrong with Ethiopia, we will remain powerless to be change agents. We must hold ourselves accountable and do so with great courage. We are suffering, but that suffering does not have to lead us to despair. It can lead us to a God who refines us and perfects us through our difficulties, giving us compassion towards the suffering of others as He has compassion on each of us as the lost sheep for which He is searching.

Each of us is important to God in our flawed condition. Our despair, shame and guilt should lead us to Him rather than drive us away for He knows our weakness and loves us anyway. It is sometimes those most alienated from God, self and others who are most changed through the undeserved mercy God offers.

Those who already understand this, should reach out to their “enemies” and extend a cup of cold water or words of blessing to encourage these “lost sheep of Ethiopia” to be found. It is in mercy that the most profound and lasting change can occur—because it is so undeserved. Force can accomplish compliance, but often it is accompanied by secret resistance. Look at all the resistance groups throughout Ethiopia. However, it is undeserved kindness and forgiveness that most often opens the heart to real change.

Desmond Tutu once said, “There is no future without forgiveness. “Those who are forgiven can become the most grateful for it. Without forgiveness, mercy, restoration and reconciliation, Ethiopia will fall to the enemy—not Meles Zenawi and others like him, but to the poisonous fruit of hate, violence, division, blaming, bitterness and death.

Tutu writes in his final exhortation in his book, “All over this magnificent world God calls us to extend His kingdom of shalom—peace and wholeness—of justice, of goodness, of compassion, of caring, of sharing, of laughter, of joy, and of reconciliation. God is transfiguring the world right this very moment through us because God believes in us and because God loves us.

What can separate us from the love of God? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And as we share God’s love with our brothers and sisters, God’s other children, there is no tyrant who can resist us, no oppression that cannot be ended, no hunger that cannot be fed, no world that cannot be healed, no hatred that cannot be turned to love, no dream that cannot be fulfilled.”

Ethiopia needs such a transformation and it starts with each person. It must start with you and me until our society and country is transformed and healed. Reach out to God. Reach out to your neighbor. Reach out to the Anuak. Reach out to the flood victims. Reach out to the Ethiopian Somali, the Afar, the Tigrayan, the Nuer, the Gurage, the Amhara, the Sidamo, the Oromo, the Borana and the many others. Reach out to the Ethiopian son or daughter, brother or sister taken hostage by the ideology of hate, violence, and anger who are avenging their losses and fear through acts of terror against others. Reach out to your enemy and offer them a cup of cold water.

Start now and you will see the structure of evil, rampant in this society, collapse before your eyes! Dictators can fight with weapons, but they have no understanding of the “warfare of mercy, forgiveness, spiritual conviction, personal transformation and reconciliation that starts with one person—you and me!

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