



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

The Anuak Justice Council Wishes All Ethiopians Around the World a Happy Ethiopian New Year

The New Year for Ethiopians is a time to reflect about the past and consider the future. For us Ethiopians, it has been a difficult year, but we have reasons for hope as we recognize we have made progress since a year ago. The future may hold even more precious promise if we carefully consider our errors, correct them and seek to find the best ways to bring about a peaceful and democratic Ethiopia.

There are already many indications that this is starting to happen, but our situation is so serious that the changes must be deep and widespread or it will not reach to the very soul of Ethiopia. It will not be easy, but the effort will be worth it.

The Anuak Justice Council (AJC) has received E-mails and calls from a number of Ethiopian citizens from different ethnic groups, asking for some words of encouragement to Ethiopians for the New Year and also asking for an update on what is happening in Gambella.

First of all, the AJC wants to extend a Happy New Year's greeting to everyone in every ethnic group all across Ethiopia. We think especially of those who are celebrating this New Year without their loved ones around them due to the brutal tactics of the current government of EPRDF.

Our hearts are with the people who are without their husband, father, mother, daughter or son at this time because their loved one has been killed or locked behind bars, living in unsanitary conditions for nothing but standing up for God-given rights.

We think of the mothers who have lost children and of families who still do not know where their family members are or if they will ever see them again, who remember celebrating this same day a year or more ago with their loved one present.

We say these words to all Ethiopians who are living such difficult lives, not having enough food to eat, not having enough money to send your children to school or not having any opportunity for a job.

We extend a New Year's greeting to Anuak still stranded in Sudan in the Alari Refugee Camp, living in difficult conditions for nearly three years, remaining there only due to their certainty they will be terrorized by their own government should they return to their homeland of Gambella.

We also think of the thousands of Anuak villagers who were forcibly displaced these past weeks by Ethiopian National Defense Forces and were left in a state of humanitarian crisis with no food, clean water, shelter or other necessities, just when their crops were almost ready for harvesting. This is a travesty!

We are deeply upset by the constant terrorization of the Anuak and others. This terrorization is so profound that it affects every aspect of daily life, greatly inhibiting the Anuak's efforts to simply survive. Unless immediate and significant intervention is made, the Anuak of Ethiopia may disappear from this land without substantive changes to this government. This critical situation has been verified by an unreleased human rights report completed by a major UN entity who allegedly have been threatened to be kicked out of Ethiopia if the report is released. What a shame!

We are also distressed by the thousands of displaced Ethiopians who have been victims of the flood, losing their homes, property and the lives of family members.

So many Ethiopians are suffering and dying, but our hardship is uniting us as one through our grief as the country we love is bleeding from within because of the actions of the EPRDF who are supposed to nurture and protect its people rather than to terrorize them.

We want to remind the people that we all have accomplished much in the last year since the historical election. The people have persevered and that is why the government is working so hard to silence the Diaspora. This is why the government is sending more government ministers to the United States and elsewhere in order to convince the West that Ethiopia is not ruled by a dictator but by a democratic leader. We know differently!

It is because of the Ethiopian peoples' hard work that these efforts have not succeeded. When the current government recently called a meeting in the US to sway public opinion in their direction, hardly any "public" showed up. Instead of going to hear the propaganda, the Ethiopians in the US rallied, not lifting their voices in support to the government, but their picket signs in opposition to its lies. Those of you who were involved in the rallies, have contributed to tearing down the walls of deceit that have surrounded such events in the past.

We have much to be thankful about, but we must remind ourselves that there still remains a lot for us to do. It requires all of us—young and old, educated and uneducated, from the minority ethnic groups and from the majority ethnic groups, dark-skinned and light-skinned, people of all faith persuasions and from areas all over the country of Ethiopia, and wherever Ethiopians are found in the Diaspora, to contribute even more to the effort.

We are doing better than we were before, but we need to do more to work together, to respect each other, even if in total disagreement, to love each other as fellow human beings, to support others regardless of ethnicity and to genuinely celebrate our diversity as we create that Ethiopian garden of flowers, made up of flowers of different sizes, shapes, colors and textures, yet all contributing to the beauty of the landscape.

The change is not as easy as it is to give you these words. Let us pray to God for a miracle that He will bring changes to Ethiopia during the next year, making it possible for Ethiopia to become a place where our children can be raised without fear of getting shot, arrested, being taken away from the family because we or they disagree with the government, belong to a different ethnic group or hold to a different political view.

As we celebrate this New Year, let us pray for those who have lost loved ones, for those who have little hope of getting out of prison and for those living in a constant state of fear due to the brutal tactics of this regime.

Let us pray that God will give us more strength to work together to break the chains of oppression and to restore the soul of Ethiopia, lightening up the sky of darkness hanging over our beloved land.

May each prayer coming from Ethiopians all over the land, be like the lights from the millions of stars that individually, provide only a small twinkling light, but together, light up the sky with great panoramic beauty.

Our greatest challenge is ourselves, and what we have become. Most everyone knows how selfish we have become, losing our sense of humanity towards others outside our circles. Our current society is seriously damaged. We are a traumatized culture whose foundation is built on hate and fighting, on deception and lies. We have participated in dividing each other so much that we have lost our souls, hearts and hope. It requires that each of us ask for forgiveness from God and others.

We will never be free and prosperous as long as we do not value our neighbor as ourselves. We must see the happiness of others like our own. This must extend to our neighbor, those of different faith, ethnicity, geographic location, gender, economic means, talent, physical ability or disability.

This may be a worthy goal, but it will be too hard to accomplish on your own. We Ethiopians are facing an obstacle that will be impossible without help from God. We have been indoctrinated for years with the Marxist-Leninist thinking that dominated communist countries. Look at these countries now. They are also falling apart.

How we think influences who we are as people. Who we are as people influences how we behave in a society. Right now we are sick and spreading our disease to each other. We must change the thinking that is destroying us.

In the book of Exodus¹ in the Bible, God says he was going to help his people take possession of the Promised Land. Some of what he says, may have application to our plight.

“See I (GOD) am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared.”

But, the promise was conditional. The people were to follow God’s appointed angel that he had sent to lead them.

“Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what he says and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land.”

God himself promises to send terror and confusion to the enemies of his people.

“I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and Hittites out of your way.”

God says he would deliver them from their enemies, but that he would do it “little by little” or other serious consequences may occur that would hurt the people.

“I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.”

¹ Excerpts from Exodus 23: 20-30.

We Ethiopians have become a culture that is so suspicious, greedy, self-serving and divided that if our government fell, we might fall into such chaos and infighting that we could self-destruct. Until we are ready for democracy, God may be protecting us from greater harm that we could cause to each other. We must be ready in our hearts, minds and actions not only for freedom and justice, but we must be ready and able to sustain this freedom and justice for all, not only “our own groups,” but especially for the weak, suffering and marginalized people of Ethiopia, like the Anuak and others.

God says in Joel 2:17: **“Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all our heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”..”Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.”**

If we begin the healing process between us Ethiopians—if we begin to value our own lives and the lives of others in our communities, ethnic groups, and country—we will be ready for freedom and democracy. To do this, we must go back to God. Once we are back to God, he will provide a way for us to sit not apart, but together at the same table, enjoying the bounty of a harvest of peace, prosperity and respect for each other. Then the sky over Ethiopia will become like the roof that shelters all the land, as we all sit under one roof as one family in one hut. You must contribute to this vision by spreading it to others. That is what we are calling on you, my brothers and sisters, to do. That is what your ancestral land is asking of you. That is what the future children of Ethiopia will want you to give to them.

In Africa, we have something very precious, more than our natural resources, and that is how we have valued life. We have heard about it countless times from those who visit our continent and come back changed people from their contact with us. Yet, we are losing this and have become confused about who we are. This has been the result of having leaders who take the life and identity away from the people through greed, corruption, brutality and widespread terrorization of the people. This is what has happened to us and we must do something to get out of this mess.

We cannot look to the East, West, North or South for answers to Ethiopia’s problems. Outsiders cannot do it. They can help, but we must lead. It involves our lives, not theirs—our issues, not theirs. We must take responsibility and be accountable for our mistakes. With God’s help, we must seek to end the division and begin the reconciliation. Once each of us takes action, others will join you and before you know, it will spread like a wildfire throughout the land.

The greatest journey we Ethiopians face begins in our own hearts as we seek to find healing for our wounded souls. We crave satisfactory answers to the legacy of hate, fear, shame, despair, and guilt that has plagued us for so many years. We will not find the restoration of the soul of Ethiopia through more fighting, blaming, power-grabbing or violence. In fact, as was said previously, this atmosphere is probably a major reason Western countries hesitate to do more—for what reason would they want to see a new government, if more chaos than we currently have, would result?

Instead, we must not make surface changes that would only look different than the EPRDF for a while, but we must start making the deep changes in our thinking that would result in deep changes in our actions. We must be transformed, and as we are transformed, our country will change with us.

As you celebrate this New Year’s Day and look forward to the next year, do not let another day pass without encouraging and strengthening each other to be part of restoring to Ethiopia its soul and heart.

We encourage you to light a candle of hope in your homes and then carry it on to the homes of others until the glowing lights coming from millions of homes throughout the country, become so bright that it pierces through the dark clouds hanging over Ethiopia, revealing the beauty of a new Ethiopia.

May God bring justice and peace to Ethiopia!