



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

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Speech at the Crown Plaza at the United Nations Hotel, New York,
September 22, 2006**

First, I would like to thank you for coming to this rally today. Some of you did not know there would be an opportunity at the end of the rally to see the new documentary, *Betrayal of Democracy: Ethiopia*. This documentary is about the betrayal of democracy and the human rights abuses in Ethiopia.

I already have said a lot regarding the documentary when I was in Los Angeles and it is now posted on the Internet so I will not go into that as you can read it there if you want to do so. But I will say, what you will see is very sad, but I hope you will learn from it and pass information on to other people regarding the massacre of the Anuak, the persecution, imprisonment and other human rights tragedies going on all over Ethiopia to its people. Having said this, I will now focus on why I thought it was so important to come to New York.

One of the main reasons I am here is because of Berhane Tsehai and I would like to say a few words about him. When I was in LA, he called and told me that he was one of the guys who was organizing this rally because Meles was coming to speak to the General Assembly at the UN and if I could come, he would like me to show the documentary. I told him I would come if he found a place to show it. We talked three to four times a day before he finally found this location at the Crown Plaza Hotel at the UN, so I accepted and came on Thursday night by train. When I arrived I called him and he was there waiting. As we both talked, I asked him where he was and we talked until we found each other. I was surprised when I saw him because he was such a young guy, only in his early twenties.

His friend, Girum Yemane, who is also a very young man, then joined us for dinner at the Queen of Sheba restaurant. I asked Berhane why he got involved in what he was doing. He said, "If I don't-- who will?" He went on. "I want you to know, I am in America where when a dictator comes to this place, I am free to go out and protest without fear of being killed, not like in Ethiopia!"

I asked him what motivated him to be engaged. He said, "Nobody. I live with my mom and sister and they didn't want me to be involved in politics, but I feel I have a responsibility to contribute to bring peace and freedom to Ethiopia because freedom is not something you get in the mail-- you have to work for it. I've been following what's happening in Ethiopia since the last election and it is so sad. But being sad all the time and not doing anything is useless. That's why I organized this rally."

"There are so many Ethiopian people who are so passive and only complain. I don't want to be one of those so I decided to organize this rally. That is why I am here today!"

I then asked him the last time he had been to Ethiopia and he said when he was ten. He added, "I grew up here in America, but my heart will always be in Ethiopia!" His friend, Girman, was the same. He is wanting a better Ethiopia.

When we were done eating, he told me he did not know what kind of hotel to book, whether a 2-star, 3-star or 5-star, which could get very expensive in New York. I told him I did not need a hotel-- I could sleep on the couch of someone's home or even on the floor if I had some blankets. We then decided to go to his home for the night. His family had a pullout bed with blankets. It was a very good bed and I slept very well!

I learned a lot, especially that if everyone would do what these guys have done, we would have a better Ethiopia. It requires one person at a time doing one thing and then another. I told them that I started my work just like he did. If we all would do their part, this injustice and oppression would end. Each person can make more of a difference than they ever expected. Our nation's greatest resources are the people and these guys are an example of being great human beings.

The worst thing a father or elder could say is to wish their child to be successful because it is not enough. Fifty years from now, no one will remember successful people, but becoming great means making difficult moral decisions to do what is good and right and working hard to make the world a better place. It is often because we do not work hard enough to reach our potential that leads us to where we are now.

Right now, Ethiopians are seen by outsiders as victims, much because of our corrupt and oppressive leaders, rather than as hardworking, creative, entrepreneurial people that we could more easily become with a more open and free society. In fact, much of Africa is seen this way because of its leaders.

Instead, because we want better opportunities and freedom, we ourselves, have become the greatest exports of our country. Ethiopians want to leave the country for the West to find freedom, prosperity and a better future for their children. Some, unfortunately die on their way or in refugee camps. Only a few made it, all the way out of the country to wherever we are now, like you and me. Think for a moment how you got here. Think about the struggle. Each of us has a different story about how we left our motherland to seek freedom.

Most of us here work very hard, many times at minimum wage, struggling with a new language and culture, but regardless, we are willing to endure because we want the freedom. Most of us would rather go back home if freedom, peace and opportunities were there. How long must we be like exports like so many other Africans? Unless our leaders bring freedom to our homes, there will always be those coming to escape from suffering and oppression.

Leaders like Prime Minister Meles are here at the United Nations to speak untruthful things. Until we have a leader who is a servant, who will put truth first, who sees the people as the children of God, there will be more casualties, not only from us, but from our children and grandchildren who will die on their journey to freedom and opportunity in the West.

I have also just met another young man, Birhan Awol, who read an excellent poem earlier. He told me he had come on his own from Washington DC to the rally and I asked why? He said he wanted to bring peace and freedom to Ethiopia. He said he had come to the US in 2001 and this was his 39th rally since that time-- never missing one opportunity to participate. He explained that in 2000 he had been arrested in Addis for 17 days-- that he had been very politically active from an early age.

Ethiopia needs to realize that these three young men are national treasures. They have to treat themselves as precious, beautiful and unique human beings and then extend this to their families, neighbors, communities and to other human kind. This truth is what the African leaders have failed to do. Knowing that there are many other young people like these three, Ethiopia has a bright future ahead.

The election of 2005 has given Ethiopia a taste of what democracy is like and now they will not settle for anything less. They have tested it, felt it, seen it, it in the winds. We now know that freedom was the state God intended for human beings and that it is an inalienable and God-given right. On Tuesday, President George W. Bush addressed the UN and what he said would apply very well to Ethiopia: "Freedom, by its nature, cannot be imposed -- it must be chosen"

Ethiopia needs a movement, especially as we see attention diminish in regards to the political prisoners such as the elected opposition leaders. Civic organizations need to start a reconciliation movement. Now, there are only a few active civil organizations, but more could become involved and people like Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu could be invited to address Ethiopians in Europe, Canada or the US. We could talk about reconciliation and about our thousands of political prisoners. The Western media will come and maybe more in the international community will be drawn to do more. We need to think creatively to make our problem more visible.

The Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, will be coming to the United Nations this week to take a place amongst other international leaders in the world. What will he say about Ethiopia? How will he describe the condition of our country? Will the people of Ethiopia recognize the country he describes? How will he address the popular concerns of today?

For instance, will he bring up the tragedy of HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia? Will he explain how serious this is while calling out for more money from donor countries to fight it? While doing this, will he describe how the EPRDF treated many young student protesters who were detained in EPRDF camps?

Will he describe how they were forced to have their heads shaved with the same dull razor blade used for many at a time? Is this AIDS prevention or simply another terroristic tactic where you can accomplish two things at once-- raising money for HIV/AIDS (or the deep pockets of corrupt leaders) and intimidating (and perhaps eventually killing) dissenters? Does Bill Gates know this-- or Bono or others who have taken on the cause of HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia and Africa?

Will he speak of how to manipulate the rule of law so as to control the whole system of justice in Ethiopia, like charging victims of injustice with crimes and giving criminals more benefits and favors? Will he talk about how to massacre, imprison, drive into exile educated leaders that might oppose him? Will he give instruction on how to look good while inciting one ethnic group to kill another by supplying one side with the power tools--like guns, political favors, government positions or economic benefits?

Will he explain how to eliminate or repress an ethnic group by creating a manmade humanitarian crisis or those who resist your attempts to control and corrupt a system of regional government, especially if they have rich natural resources like oil in Gambella or natural gas in Ogaden? Will he give the historical background of how education and health care denied can be another way to advance your own interests while limiting the potential of others from ever doing the same?

Will he speak of the thousands of displaced Ethiopians, displaced not from the floods, but by force of the Ethiopian government in Gambella? Will he speak of the need for clean water, education and health care after EPRDF troops destroyed the infrastructure of Gambella, Oromia, Ogaden and elsewhere?

What PM Meles is doing would never be tolerated by any other Western country. The real question now is, why, when others who are learning of the hypocritical language this government uses to cover up its widespread human rights abuses, do they remain silent? Why is the romantic language of dishonest and brutal dictators acceptable in such places as the UN where many put faith in carrying out its stated mission?

Why is Sudan used as an example of a repressive, genocidal government that has or is hosting terrorists and Prime Minister Meles is being referred to as a partner in the War on Terror to the US? How can we be "friends" with someone who is also aligning himself with Omar Bashir?

What may not be commonly understood is how these two leaders are very similar and have worked together to sabotage the peace between various groups. It is known by the people involved how the current Ethiopian government stirs up division, not only between ethnic groups in Ethiopia, but between ethnic groups in other countries in the Horn of Africa, contributing to the fragility of these failing nations.

When the United States is pushing for democracy in the world, why is Ethiopia not described for what it may be-- a terroristic regime that could destabilize the whole region? Does the US foreign policy of democracy building only apply to places like Iraq and Iran?

Last year, prior to the National Election, nearly two million Ethiopians came out to rally for a change of government. No one was hurt. No one was killed. Not one window was broken. No one took over the parliament, but instead they chose to wait for the election. This was one of the most peaceful demonstrations in Africa as Ethiopians chose to rally for a change of government by way of the election, by the ballot, not the bullet-- by going to the voting booths rather than by a coup de tat. But instead, the election was stolen from the people in a real betrayal of democracy. Why have so many in the international community, including the media, chosen not to cover the story?

It seems as if choices are being made regarding who gets freedom, justice and democracy based on the national interests of the more powerful global players rather than on the core principles on which these superpower countries are founded. As long as this happens, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness may be sabotaged by those having divergent interests even while holding those values for themselves. For example, the EPRDF government is a partner in the war on terror with the US, but it appears to some that PM Meles Zenawi is sabotaging peace in Southern Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia. Yet, if he can pawn himself off as a helper in fighting terrorism while creating "a need" for himself through fomenting division and conflict, he is empowered, regardless of what he is doing to his own people. However, he is creating a new ripe environment for terrorists as his victims become enraged and angry, leashing out at him and the innocent bystanders caught like the grass between the two fighting elephants.

We Ethiopians are in a mess, but be persistent. Do not give up. Believe in God. God is bigger than Meles, he is bigger than the West and all the superpowers. It is a spiritual battle for truth and justice and it begins with you and me, but we need to do it right and to do that, we need to seek God's ways. The world powers, as we know them, are represented here at the United Nations. It is a beautiful concept, but unless the words are followed up with actions based on these same concepts, we will have someone like Meles Zenawi preaching the words of a democracy of which he has no understanding or desire. A real democracy is built on a justice system where no one is above the law-- that is an intimidating threat to you if your hands are steeped in the blood of your suffering fellow country men and women.

On Tuesday September 19, 2006, President George W. Bush addressed the UN and what he said would apply very well to Ethiopia: "when leaders are accountable to their people, they are more likely to seek national greatness in the achievements of their citizens, rather than in terror and conquest"

As the EPRDF and other governments like it have done, they have traded the soul of Ethiopia, selling it for a cheap thrill of momentary self-pleasure that always dies in due time. It is time for us to take the action necessary to give our children a place where they can raise our grandchildren without fear of being terrorized by their government. The answers are not found in the United Nations, in the United States, the European Union or anywhere else but with the average, ordinary Ethiopian, like you and me, and then, it is made possible with the help of God. Only then will we find peace.

Then, we will not be like birds, laying down, unable to move with broken wings. Yes, our wings are burdened with injustice, but soon, if we trust and obey, our wings will be lightened by the power of God who brings us unity, who helps us reach out to others in love and forgiveness and who restores our relationships and strength.

Then, we will be able to start gently moving our wings until we can fly out of injustice, corruption, evil and the poverty that is frequently caused by these things into a better future for Ethiopia. Right now, we look paralyzed, but do not think about that, thinking you are helpless and needing someone else to take care of our problem for us. Instead, look for help from God and start moving. We are the ones who feel our pain. No one else will know it like we do. Even when we are sick, we must first explain our symptoms to the doctor. Explain your symptoms to the great healer, God, who can bring life to what is dead, who can restore overburdened wings so that we can fly, who can make the lame not only walk again, but run.

If your boat has capsized and you are drowning, start swimming, even if you cannot see the shore. We are drowning in a lake of terror, atrocities, ethnic division, hatred and poverty. We should start swimming or we will drown together. We may not all make it, but some of us will and then our children will have a chance of living in a different Ethiopia. When we once rest our feet on the shoreline, we will feel the dry, fertile beautiful land where we can raise a family and create a future for the unborn while Ethiopians can rest at peace in their homes with their families while Parliamentarians sit together, discussing the things affecting their country like the elders did in the past, who used to sit by the fire and discuss the things affecting their villages.

We cannot wait for organizations such as the UN to bring about peace and justice. In April of 2004, we represented the case of the Anuak at the UN High Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. It was the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda. Kofi Annan stood before the grand session and promised, "Never again! Never again would there be a Rwanda." But, look at Darfur. They were there presenting their case at the same time. It is still going on.

Look at the Anuak, they are still being killed and harassed. Look at Ethiopia. The suffering of its people has been ignored. We cannot depend on those with all the "right words." We must start swimming or we will drown as a nation. Start lifting those hands and reaching out, one at a time until you reach the shore. Call on God to strengthen you. May the kingdom of heaven come to Ethiopia.

Thank you. May God bring peace and justice to Ethiopia.