



Unusual Attack on Anuak Raises Questions of EPRDF Involvement

For immediate release: April 26, 2007

On April 10, 2007, a small ethnic group from Sudan, the Murle, crossed over the Ethiopian border and killed 37 people, mostly men, and injured more than 60 others from the Anuak ethnic group. The incident occurred in the oil-rich Jor District, a remote area within the Gambella Region of Ethiopia. When regional police officers were dispatched to the area, seven of the police officers were killed—most of them also of Anuak ethnicity. When calls for help went out to the federal government for backup, they were refused. Now, many are left wondering why a government that is supposed to protect its citizens was not even responding to the murder of its police officers!

At first, outsiders might think this is just another case of ethnic conflict, but many Anuak believe differently. Instead, they point out a number of contradictory factors that cause them to believe that the attack may be linked to the current EPRDF government headed by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who have been known to support such aggression by proxy. In fact, many Anuak will attest to an EPRDF practice of disarming one ethnic group while arming another, the latter who then carries out the dirty work of the regime against the ethnic group, thereby eliminating them, controlling them or in other ways, disempowering them in order to advance EPRDF interests.

This is essentially what happened in respect to the massacre of the Anuak of December of 2003. Prior to the massacre, the Anuak were disarmed, (except for Anuak in the remote Jor district). After being disarmed, 424 Anuak leaders were killed within three days by armed militia groups and Ethiopian National Defense Forces. Many of those targeted had been speaking out against the federal government's exclusion of the Anuak in the development and implementation of a plan to start extracting oil from indigenous land in the Gambella region.

In response to the massacre and other ongoing human rights abuses to the Anuak, human rights investigators have named the EPRDF as responsible for inciting and participating in the massacre and other crimes against humanity. Therefore, it is not out of the realm of possibility that the EPRDF may want to avoid international criticism by sending emissaries to do their dirty work of displacing the indigenous people and suppressing their voices by using the Murle to do it by proxy.

Since the time of the massacre, the Chinese oil company, Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau, has been drilling in two different locations, one of them turning out to be dry well. However, it is believed that expansion is planned into the Jor district and that this might be part of the motive behind the attack that essentially was without explanation. In fact, just about a month ago, the Murle had gone into another potentially oil-rich district (Jikow) where another ethnic group lives, the Nuer, and had killed and displaced many people with little understanding among the local people as to the motive of the attack.

For instance, when the Murle have attacked these groups in the past, the motive has been to steal cattle, women, children or property. If people were killed during the attacks, it would be connected to the raid. During this last attack in Jor, the attack was unprovoked and nothing was stolen.

The Murle traveled about 400 Kilometers to the Anuak district to attack and then left to return to southern Sudan. They had, what some described, as new, more sophisticated weapons, like grenade launchers, that are not commonly seen in the area. Never do locals remember the Murle attacking under these conditions.

The Murle do know that the Anuak in the Jor district have been disarmed since early 2004, following the massacre of the Anuak in 2003. This has left them very vulnerable to other groups who still have arms. Even the farmers have no way of keeping wild animals away from their crops, sheep or cattle and this hunting community has no way of killing animals for food as they used to do in the past. Instead, they must use antiquated methods for hunting such as spears in the 21st century!

Disarmament, something that is much promoted by peace lovers in the international community has a very dark side. Authoritarian dictators, greedy for power and wealth, understand very well how to use disarmament to minimize resistance for the accomplishment of their own purposes. Another example of where there has happened is in Darfur. In this case, the Fur people were disarmed prior to becoming victims of the Janjaweed, a group who was being supplied with arms to kill, suppress and displace the indigenous dark-skinned Africans from their oil-rich land by the Arab controlled government of Omar al-Bashir.

The Murle, the Nuer, the Anuak and others in the region of southeastern Sudan and southwestern Ethiopia would jointly benefit from refusing to be used in these ways despite any incentives offered by exploitive governments. These governments cannot be trusted to not betray us despite any promises they might make. We must choose to do the right thing towards each other. We can all lose together or we can join together against such evil. May God help us to see the truth and to do right to our brothers and sisters of the Nile.

=====
For additional information about the Anuak Justice Council (AJC), please visit
<http://www.anuakjustice.org/>.

For Immediate Release: April 16, 2007
For additional information, please contact: the Director of International Advocacy:
E-mail: advocacy@anuakjustice.org