



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

Mr. Obang O. Metho, Director of International Advocacy, Anuak Justice Council (AJC) Speech at Gasha for Ethiopians in Washington, DC.

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I thank everyone in this room for coming here today. Before I start, I want to thank Colonial Asnake Engida for the wisdom he has shared with us today in his comments he made preceding my talk. As an elder of 93 years, he has given us a precious treasury of wisdom today about ourselves. He told us that Ethiopians used to live and work together in peace and that the present ethnic division is not who we are nor should it be who we become! His words are a blessing to everyone and have set the tone for this meeting. His message is a sign to us that ethnic hatred and division will not thrive, but will start to decline if we remember who we are. We must seek the counsel of those wise elders among us like Colonial Asnake. Thank you for those words of instruction and inspiration.

I thank all of you here for giving me the opportunity to speak about what we all, as fellow Ethiopians, can do to stop the suffering of our beloved people in every region of our country—to the Anuak, the Oromo, the Amhara, the Gurage, the Somali, the Afar, the Sidamo and the Tigrayan. There are over eighty ethnic groups in our country, many of which are so small, that we may not even recognize their names, but they are suffering under a system that is destroying us all as Ethiopians. Breaking such a cycle of suffering will not be easy.

It has gone on not just during this current regime of the EPRDF, but for many years preceding that. It will require all our Ethiopian brothers and sisters to come together in a new spirit of love, unity and reconciliation. This is why I am here today. I want to invite you to join me, and many others, in working towards this goal. With God's help, we can succeed.

I especially want to thank the Gasha for Ethiopians for organizing this event. The purpose and goal of Gasha for Ethiopians: **is to help unite Ethiopians of all faiths and ethnicities, through education and awareness, to end hatred, oppression and division, so all may enjoy peace, equality and fulfillment of their dreams and aspirations, both now and for future generations.** This is an honorable vision.

I also want to especially thank the chairman of Gasha for Ethiopians Mr. Sultan Alene and the board members who invited me to share what I envision for Ethiopia. I want to recognize the fact that this meeting is a giant step towards achieving that goal laid out in their mission statement! I thank them for courageously inviting me to speak truthfully on what is going on in our country and how we can unite as human beings under God as we are all loved and valued by our Creator.

It is a new, historic and courageous step as many Tigrayans publicly and jointly come forward as Ethiopians, separating from the policy of ethnic hatred that Meles and his TPLF has used to stay in power and instead are joining other Ethiopians in their struggle towards freedom, democracy, equality, peace and the rule of law in Ethiopia—not only for one group, but for all groups. Among these Gasha for Ethiopians leaders, I want to give recognition to Mr. Abraha Belai for the work he is doing as head of Ethio-media, a primary and much utilized source of Ethiopian news around the world. What is particularly important to know is that Mr. Abraha Belai is Tigrayan. For the last five to now almost six years, he has courageously stood up for the truth and for what was right even though it meant alienating some within his own ethnic group.

Mr. Abraha, you say you are a man of God. I can see that. I believe God has given you a mission where you have been called to this work. This, I am sure, is what has helped you to carry on the work without wavering, despite the death threats you have received from the Woyane. Others here should know how the Woyane threatened to ‘hunt you down and to not kill you once, but to kill you twice’ if you continues fight against TPLF! It shows all of us how fearful the Woyane are of the power of love, unity and mutual respect! You are my brother and a hero of the struggle!

Before I go on to the heart of what I will be saying, I would like to emphasize that I do not belong to any political party. I am simply a human rights defender—an individual who wants to contribute to the betterment of Ethiopians and of humanity. I have been brought to this earth by God and have been given a purpose by Him, as He has done for each of you here. It is up to us to do it. I do not fully know my purpose yet, but I do know that He compels me to help my people, not only the Anuak, but also, you my fellow Ethiopians and my fellow human beings.

You may know that I am a follower of Jesus, the reconciler between God and humankind. He has convinced me that He loves and cares for not only me, but also for all of you and that He wants you to know that there are no ethnic groups left out in His invitation to life. This belief and conviction is the reason behind what I am doing. I am not the most educated here nor am I the most mature by age; neither am I perfect. Because of all of this, I expect that some of you may disagree with me on some or on many points; however, if there is anything you agree with, I ask you to pass it on and nurture it for yourselves. That with which you do not agree, please discard it.

I did not expect to be invited to such a meeting, but I should not really be surprised because there are Tigrayans who, just like Anuak, understand that unless all Ethiopians are free, they, the Tigrayans, will never really be free. They realize that all must join together so that peace and harmony is what is passed on to the next generation; not death, hate and suffering. Without reconciling together, we will not be able to move on as a people and as a country.

What happened to the Tigrayan, the Oromo, the Sidamo, the Somali, the Afar, the Amhara and many others is a threat to their lives and is also a threat to me and my offspring. Therefore, that is why I am willing to work with any group in Ethiopia so that I do my best to leave behind an Ethiopia where my children won’t be in danger due to my action or inaction.

As in human history, the fruits we enjoy in a humane society are due to the work of those who came before, who sacrificed for us, disciplined us and then passed on the responsibility to us. Even though we have failed to a large extent, we can still change our course. It is now the time for us to plant the seeds for others to benefit. The moral decisions we make today and the ethical actions we take can be our legacy. However, sadly, the lack of such can chart a course to destruction. Let us choose the courageous path and go forward without fear, trusting in God.

The name of the Gasha organization has great significance. It means shield—a shield to protect from harm. This shield is not only for the Tigrayan, but also for all Ethiopians. This shield does not leave me, an Anuak, out and means protection for my life, my health and for my well being. The strength of all Ethiopia is our oneness—our unity—our love—our respect for each other—what a symbol this shield is for all!

It should represent the protection for us from more years of misery, from the image of our country of death, famine, skinny children, prostitutes, beggars, of hopelessness, injustice, inequality, ethnic hatred, revenge, envy, division—all symbols of evil that have come as a result of our wrongful attitudes towards God and each other. If we look at it all honestly, we are worse off today than we were a hundred years ago.

We are more divided, more filled with hatred and tribalism than our ancestors were. We have become a nation of strangers—like a family standing together inside elevators where no one talks to anyone else—as if it were a social rule that applied to us! This lack of reaching out to others and making meaningful relationships, across ethnic boundaries, is why we are where we are today—all suffering!

We Ethiopians really need to wonder why we care so much more about ethnicity than before—what has happened? Why do we devalue others? My answer is that our politicians and leaders have inflamed these feelings. They carry banners of revenge for the benefit of their own agendas to gain power, wealth, oil and land. The deaths that result from these agendas do not resolve our conflicts, but deepen them. Right now we Ethiopians have been seduced into this kind of thinking that must be rejected individually if we ever are going to see all of us sit down together. If we do not change our thinking, we will end up a nation and a people in ruin as we listen to the Hitlers of our day. We will be responsible for increased suffering across every ethnic line even if we just sit by and do nothing.

In my own life, I have heard the testimony of the suffering of the Oromo people. They have told me how terribly they were treated during the kingdom era—dehumanized and marginalized. Now, they are still dying. They are being killed and their bodies are being left outside to be eaten by the hyenas. For my Oromo brothers and sisters, I have witnessed your pain. I feel it and I am grieving with you. I am willing to work with you to see that this injustice ends.

The Amhara people have endured so much. I have heard your suffering. Even today, I heard from you how the Woyane cadres are treating members of the Derg regime. I know the suffering you have endured only because you are Amhara. I have heard your testimony of your agony and hardship, your imprisonment and deaths. I have seen your people mistreated for speaking out against such actions. I have heard your pain. I feel your pain and I am grieving with you. I am here and willing to work with you to help bring such suffering to an end.

I feel the same for the Tigrayan. As a teen, I saw the thousands of Tigrayans who were dumped in Gambella after being hunted down in their homeland and by force, displaced into an inhospitable land they did not know where so many lost their lives due to the humanitarian crisis that followed. It was like a genocide to the Tigrayans that I witnessed as I saw Tigrayan husbands burying their wives and children and Tigrayan women burying their husbands, sons and daughters in the soil of Gambella. I can still feel the pain they went through—the agony and the suffering. I was there and witnessed their grief just like that of our Oromo brothers and sisters. Dear Tigrayans, I feel your pain. I grieve with you and I am here to work with you to make sure no other people go through what you have suffered.

To the Afar—I have heard about the suffering of the Afar during the last regime. You are now crying out and no one seems to care. You are dying, one by one, like your camels and you fear the impending death of all your people from such neglect and marginalization. You have fought for justice, equality and freedom as the government, which is supposed to protect you, is instead, ignoring your agony, hardship and the threats to your very survival that you daily face. Your land was divided and left you with less than you already had. I hear your pain, your grief and your suffering. I am willing to work with you in bringing an end to the injustice and exclusion of the Afar, joining with our other Ethiopian brothers and sisters as we join together in a new unity.

To those of you in the Ogaden—you are suffering greatly right now. I have heard from you how your people are hunted down by the EPRDF on our own land because of the oil and natural gas resources you have in your region. Because your resources are valued more than your people by the EPRDF and some multi-national corporations, you have been forced off your land and displaced. Your men are executed for simply looking suspicious and your women are raped by EPRDF troops.

Perpetrators are never held accountable and the innocent and vulnerable live in constant fear and terror of such permitted acts. I want to say to you, I feel your pain and hear your cry. I am willing to work with you to bring an end to such intolerable actions by a government who is supposed to respect its citizens and value them as their greatest assets.

To the Sidamo—I have heard about your ordeal and how you have suffered at the decline of the last government under Mengistu and how during our current government of the EPRDF, that you have been punished and hunted down for your efforts of resistance in your fight for justice, equality, freedom and peace for the people of Sidamo. You are part of Ethiopia and I feel your pain and grief from the loss of your courageous young and old and others who have been willing to stand up for God given right. I am here and I am willing to work with you to bring such injustice to an end.

To the Anuak—not only have I heard your testimony, but I have also personally witnessed and felt the pain of the Anuak. I have lived your suffering and I have seen your humanity devalued. I have seen it also in the Sudan—how you are not counted as equally precious human beings. The Arabs of Sudan has viewed themselves as a Muslims, literate, and proud people with historic traditions unlike the darker skinned Africans, “pagan, illiterate chieftaincies of people” who are contemptuously known as **Abid** (slave) that has the same equivalent **Baria** (slave) in Amharic. The legacy of the aggressive policies of imperial remain today despite a more representative government, but the historic attitudes of these people toward the darker skinned Africans cannot be changed by declarations of democracy.

In Ethiopia I have known personally how you have been viewed by the past governments not as true citizens of the country. I have seen it as a young child when an Anuak man by the name Bathia Olok resisted the Derg aggressive policies in village of Lawo in Jor district. Mr. Bathia Olok was executed at the age 36. His head was cut from his body and displayed for all to see as a warning of what would happen to resisters. I remember seeing his rotting head, hanging from a pole, while those who displayed it were smiling as they made told us that any who resisted would end up like this Anuak. It was devastating to me as a young boy and changed my life.

When the Woyane came to power, I saw it happen again to the Anuak in the massacre of 2003. The Anuak who were killed were once close friends, relatives and people who taught me how to be a human being and shaped me to become the person who I am today. I knew them. I have heard the testimony of the Anuak woman who was raped and witnesses of the Anuak men tortured and executed. In the last four years, I have heard of many fellow Anuak dying in refugee camps or as they have run through the bush looking for safety, having to leave their own homes and land for exile. We are such a tiny minority that if this continues, we won't last as a people. For the Anuak, not only did I feel their pain—I have lived it and continue to do so with every breath I take—every minute of my life. That is why I am here and why I am willing to help the Anuak find a better life, but know that it will only come as Ethiopia opens their arms to their own children.

The list can go on. The Mazenger is an even smaller tribe than the Anuak and live near us in Gambella. They have had no educational opportunity to speak of as the Mazenger can only count a handful of their people who have completed high school. The list of our people in Ethiopia would include most every group within our borders that has been hurt in one way or another. All of this pain has been inflicted by ourselves to others—one group against another. Now, we are united by our grief, suffering and common humanity. All of us, not just one single group, are in the same boat. We are all being hurt. Every other ethnic group has suffered so to end this, it will take cooperation. Not just one group is to blame, neither can one group do all the work of restoration.

Consider this—Ethiopia would not be Ethiopia without the Tigray. Ethiopia would not be Ethiopia without the Oromo, the Amhara or any of the numerous tiny minority groups of which you may never have heard. What Ethiopia needs is to respect each other and to love each other, including those who have hurt us. We need to love them as God has intended us to do and as He commanded us to do. He loved us first, before we ever knew Him. Anything less than this will not get us out of the cycle of injustice. Anything less will be passing on the curse, not the blessing, to the next generation. Anything less will keep our whole country in prison. Anything less will put us in bondage to the evil one rather than free to be who God intended us to be.

I would like to conclude by saying to my Tigrayan brothers and sisters who organized this day—thank you! I not only feel your pain, but I feel your love. The love you are showing by coming forward to tell the Ethiopians that you have a shield and it is not only to protect Tigrayans, but it is also to protect the whole country. This will make you to be heroes of humanity because you broke away from tribal loyalties that have been wrongly used to sustain injustice. Rather than side with an unjust government, you are choosing to side with the true advocate of human kind—God. You are breaking the cycle. You have chosen truth, even though it hurts. You have disobeyed a system by exposing the lies and breaking the silence.

You are here to tell the other Ethiopian people that we are one and that we need each other. Your coming out is the assurance to the Ethiopian people that you hear their crying, you feel their pain and are willing to do something about it. Your coming out today is a sign of hope for harmony. Instead of hatred and bloodshed, you are giving the Ethiopian's a sign that there is a light shining in the darkness, a light not only for one ethnic group, but for all Ethiopians—a light not only for the Tigrayans and others we have mentioned, but even for the very tiny ethnic groups of whom you have never heard or seen.

You have now brought this message, by your example, to other Tigrayans. It is time for other Tigrayans to join you and to not be controlled by fear. It is time for other Tigrayans who are ashamed and not wanting to talk about what they have gained under Woyane power. We know, under the Woyane, that the Tigrayans did prosper more than did others. The evidence is out and the truth hurts, but unless we face the truth, as God wants us to do, we cannot recover. Life without truth compels us to keep running for cover, putting all our energy into avoiding the truth rather than dealing with the truth rightly. Regardless, some Tigrayans may not want the truth known about the evil things done by Meles and his cadres, due to tribal loyalty. However, it is time to tell the truth.

For instance, in the Tigray region, many have the opportunity to have an education to the 12th grade. Economic opportunity is more available compared to other parts of Ethiopia. We know that Woyane themselves are better off than others, and other Tigrayans who have not shared in this prosperity worry about bringing embarrassment to their ethnic group. But, it must be exposed to outsiders and it is best exposed by those from within.

The Woyane are using Tigrayans for their own survival while building up animosity in others because of their acts of injustice. As they do, they use “scare tactics” to incite fear in God-fearing Tigrayans that if they expose anything, or if this government **TPLF** goes, that they will be vulnerable targets of other Ethiopians. Yet, it is in condemning the wrongs, evils, and injustices that will best free your souls from an uneasy and undesired partnership to the Woyane. Come out and cry, not only for your own, but for all your brothers and sisters of Ethiopia—seeing them as precious people in God's eyes as are you.

God loves the precious people of Tigray and wants to set them free from this system of evil where they also are the victims. Only faith in God will provide the strong foundation for virtuous and selfless acts that are so needed at this time.

Without virtue, Tigrayans and others will never have the moral courage to give up power, benefits or passivity from fear. Without virtue and moral courage, neither can we have freedom, as our human flaws will lead us to live in fear as victims of the powerful or as opportunists of the weak. These are the pillars on which freedom stands and one of those pillars is the freedom to choose to have such faith as our practice of faith must not be just pretense, nor can it be forced or God will find no open hearted people through which to show His love or people willing and free enough to admit when they are wrong.

For example, I am free because I know that someone bigger than I, that is, God, sent me into this world as I am, fully and equally of value with each other human being, but yet unique, just like each of you. However, being fully human means I will do wrong at times. Because of that, instead of covering it up, I must admit it or I will spend my energy in covering up my wrongdoing and miss my purpose that God prepared for me. Anyway, it is impossible to deny the truth before God as He knows all things.

My point is that I am accountable to God first and if I deny the truth, even if my own family or people do not like it, God holds me to a higher standard and His is the only standard that should dictate the way I live my life. I will love others “better” because of it. Therefore, I refuse to support extremists and opportunists who prey on the fear and ignorance of the vulnerable to advance their own causes. But, I will always be here to work with men and women of good will. I will be on their side wherever they are because I know God will first be on their side.

I speak all the time against Woyane because of their actions, but I feel no hatred towards the Tigrayan. The Woyane will some day be held accountable for the crimes they have committed as will any other Ethiopians who have done similar things. However, being with you Tigrayans these past days, walking with you in Washington DC and listening to you speak your language and hearing the words such as **Tsebook, Kemele** and **Eweh** reminded me of my teen years when Tigrayans were brought from **Raya** district in Tigray region as well as from other areas, without their consent to Anuakland.

The Anuak tried to welcome them, help them and to treat them with respect. You were beautiful, caring and religious people who also helped us Anuak learn more about entrepreneurship and other valuable things. Some Tigrayans stood up for the Anuak during the massacre in Gambella. However, some Anuak have taken the lives of innocent Tigrayan settlers who they thought represented the Woyane government. We must now stand together and condemn the killing of the Tigrayans, the Anuak, the Oromo, the Nuer and all the other vengeful killings of our people.

In the last year since I testified, I have met people I never would have met otherwise—such as the Oromo. They speak a beautiful language and when I am with them, they treat me just like one of them. The same is true of the people of the Ogaden who have treated me with much care and respect. The same can be said about the Gurage, the Sidamo, the Amhara and now of the Tigray. If there is something I have learned it is that Ethiopians are not people of different tribes—they are one tribe with different languages. This is what we should be celebrating at cultural festivals where we can see how great the Somalians can dance their dance, or the Afar, the Anuak or those from the Southern Nations.

To my fellow brothers who are not Tigrayan—our brothers have come to us and God is turning our Tigrayan brothers and sisters to us and it has given us a new sign of hope. This is not what the Woyane want. It is significant for us all to be under the same roof, in this hotel and room. It is a sign that the poisonous venom in this system is draining out.

We are in this struggle together so we must stand tall and reach out to our Tigrayan brothers and sisters, embracing them with love, respect and as fellow workers in bringing justice, peace, love and the rule of law back to our country. You non-tigrayans have a responsibility to play in welcoming them. I heard from a Tigrayan brother that at one rally, a Tigrayan came carrying an Ethiopian flag, but others said, “You don’t belong here. It’s not a Woyane rally!”

We must stop doing this kind of thing. We will be justifying what the Woyane are saying. We should not look at all Tigrayans as Woyane. For example, if I am a bad person, all Anuak should not be considered bad and be held accountable for what I have done. We must break this cycle.

However, sometimes I ask why we are suffering so much and ask God—what have we done wrong? I look at the Sudanese, the Rwandans, the Ethiopians, the Somalians and even to black people as a whole. I wonder if we can “undo” this legacy of suffering and what must be done to do it. I look at our continent of Africa and see us dying everywhere—from HIV/AIDS, from humanitarian crises and from black killing black!

I look from Gambella to Gambia, from Eritrea to Haiti, from Somalia to Sierra Leone, from Sudan to South Africa—it is the whole continent! I even look in America and see blacks killing blacks—the same in Australia and in South America and I ask God, what have we done and how can we stop?

What I now know is that I must not stop asking this question of God until he whispers the answers in our ears and we learn from him how to stop such suffering. What I do know is that our suffering grieves God and that He will hold those responsible at judgment for their actions. Where we are hurting each other, we might be those held responsible unless we seek forgiveness that leads us to change our ways.

Yet, we know that a great amount of our suffering has come from the outside—from our corrupt leaders who join hands with exploitive multi-national corporations who bring killing, fighting, displacement and division in their pursuit of African natural resources. It is the most vulnerable who are most affected and least powerful to resist. Investment and business need not be so detrimental to the people in a climate where our leaders protect the interests of the country and invest in the futures of their people instead of only themselves.

If we do not want this suffering to continue, we must have a groundswell of people who demand more of their leaders and share in making and implementing good law. We also must respect others and realize how we treat our vulnerable is the judge of how well we are doing as a society. This will mean reaching out to other people and groups as equal to you. It won’t be easy.

Ethiopia needs more unity, not based on tribal loyalties but based on loyalty to humanity. Not unity based on hidden agendas, but on honesty—truth not on false words. This is what every Ethiopian should be doing for those yet to be born. We must try to find peaceful reconciliation or our problems will never be solved!

We need to call everyone—our leaders, churches, women, youth and others to have a conference of reconciliation. It cannot be solved without sitting down at a table with those who hurt us and with those whom we have hurt. Then we can move on if we forgive and are reconciled even while not forgetting, as we need the lessons of history so we can avoid the potential traps of destruction in the future.

If we want to change the dark image of our country and continent to one of light, we have to reconcile even with Woyane, who are committing horrendous crimes against our people today—something that some may later on regret and change their ways.

Right now, we Ethiopians are in great jeopardy. What we do in the next days and months are critical. Take the higher road and know that God has affirmed us as precious and important. We can be free in our hearts and souls without having freedom, yet by living out our faith in virtuous ways, our country will certainly change. Because of that, we should not look outside Ethiopia to the international community for help. Each and every one of us has a decision to make for the betterment of our country.

I want you to be a messenger of love, peace and respect and to seek God for help in doing it. We should be proud of our beauty, our blackness and the value God has bestowed on us. That is what I expect of all of you to take with you today. With God's grace, may that day come when we will sit face to face and hear the hurt we have inflicted on one another and forgive.

May God work through our souls to heal the pain that we have been going through until we are free indeed! Thank you.