



**ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL**  
*Justice, Peace and Freedom*

---

## **Call to Ethiopian Canadians: We Need to Organize!**

**May 4, 2007.**

We call on all Ethiopian Canadians to organize a coalition movement for the advancement of human rights for those in Ethiopia as well as for the rights and well being of every Ethiopian in Canada and in the Diaspora. Ethiopian Canadians are all of you who call Ethiopia your motherland, but who now live in Canada. If you fit that description, we need your participation in organizing a Canadian civic organization that is unified beyond our ethnicity, our religion and our political views by this common factor of being Ethiopian Canadians.

Most of us are first generation immigrants and therefore we know that when we came to this great country of Canada, most of us did not come by choice, but instead, we came to escape death, imprisonment, torture, repression, misery, poverty, lack of educational and economic opportunity in Ethiopia and to find a better life here. Many left because of the repression and the lack of basic freedoms—some of us during the time of Haile Selassie or Mengistu and some more recently because of Meles.

Some of our fellow Ethiopians are still trying to escape from the same things we ran from, but as we all know, the situation has seriously deteriorated, leaving our beloved family members, our friends and our community members in a worsening economic crisis and in greater jeopardy due to the rampant human rights abuses going on all over the country.

We Ethiopian Canadians are extremely busy—working, going to school and raising our families; yet, probably not a day goes past without each of us thinking about our country and our loved ones back home who are struggling to survive. We reportedly send more support money to them by Western Union than what the Ethiopian government (EPRDF) spends on helping their own people.

It has been emotionally difficult enough to worry about our family members having such basics as a roof over their heads, adequate food, an education and health care; however, now, we are worried about the increasing repression, violence and terror, especially since it moved from the rural areas of Ethiopia to the city streets of Addis Ababa and other major cities.

Those in the country—politicians, journalists, human rights defenders, educators and other leaders, who were looking for change and speaking out for it, are now locked up in prisons. Our country has become a police state with its 77 million citizens locked behind the bars of oppression, fear and deprivation. The situation is worsening rather than improving. If we could, most of us would bring our families to Canada; however, since that is mostly unlikely, what can we do about making Ethiopia a country where its citizens want to remain?

Many, both inside and outside of Ethiopia, have already become freedom fighters, devoting their lives to this work so that other people can have a better life. You might be one of those struggling for freedom and democracy or it might be one of your family members doing so back in Ethiopia. There are so many ways we can sacrifice, not only for those in our family, but for those others back in Ethiopia.

Many in Ethiopia do not have family members from Canada or other western countries who can help them. But we can help them by contributing to the struggle towards good governance, something which can give widespread improvement to the lives of people. Therefore, we are calling on Ethiopian Canadians to work together.

You can maintain your connections to your political party of choice, to your ethnic group, your religious group and to your community, for what we are suggesting is a civic organization that would work together on advancing the basic human rights and personal freedoms that we enjoy here in Canada, to those citizens of Ethiopia. There are valuable things we have learned from our new Canadian friends and neighbors that would benefit and empower our people in Ethiopia.

At the same time, we can utilize a system of government here in Canada that is built on the idea of representation of the interests of its citizens and taxpayers—this includes Ethiopian Canadians. Because our hearts are daily burdened with the crisis that is going on in Ethiopia, we can present these concerns to our Canadian government representatives. It is part of their job definition to respond to the interests of Canadians, which could mean working with us to help solve the multiple problems facing Ethiopians. Ethiopia is a country of great interest to Canada and should be even more so because of the great numbers of Ethiopian Canadians living within its borders.

So far, our efforts in bringing awareness and action to Canadian government officials have not been very effective. We need to ask why this is! Part of the reason may be because we have presented it in factional groups with factional concerns. Our own divisions may not be very well understood or received, undermining our efforts. Or, we may not be telling the Canadian government clearly and often enough for them to really have the information they need to proceed.

In response to this, we are proposing that we form a coalition, which can provide a coherent and comprehensive plan, from a cohesive leadership team, so that we can best represent the needs and concerns of Ethiopian Canadians. This may include the same kind of plan and team presentation to the media and other power groups and decision makers who can take more action because of the well planned out approach and stronger, more representative leadership for all of Ethiopian Canadians.

We can encourage Ethiopian Canadians to participate more with their representative parliamentarians as well as to encourage their registration as voters. We have an upcoming election and we should take advantage of our right to vote and our right to let our elected officials know our interests.

We need to ask them why our Canadian government's foreign policy has not been on the side of the Ethiopian people, despite the massacre of the Anuak in Gambella, despite the killing of the election protestors in Addis Ababa and despite having more repression of the media and imprisonment of journalists than most any other country in Africa!

If the liberal Canadian party locked up the leaders of the conservative political party in prison, or vice versa, most Canadians would never tolerate it, but this is what is going on in Ethiopia! Why are elected officials not speaking out more loudly on these issues? We must take a good look at ourselves and at our approach. We are obviously not getting our message through to those most capable of do something about it.

This is why we believe it is time to meet with our small groups from our ethnic groups, our civic groups, our political groups, our religious communities, our student and faculty groups in educational settings, our women's groups, our youth organizations and other such groups, in order to discuss these issues, pulling in non-Ethiopian experts when appropriate, so that we might think through solutions to our current impasse.

Then, we are suggesting that a delegate be sent to meet with other delegates as well as with some of the non-Ethiopian experts, in order to share ideas and then to take the best ones to develop a strategy of action. As we arrive at some consensus, the outcome we need is to find a small team from among the delegates, to be our representative voice to talk to key strategic people and organizations within our government. This way our effort will be coordinated and more representative of all of our groups.

We can tell them how many of us Ethiopians are registered to vote or how we Ethiopian Canadians are organizing around common goals. We would be better able to do this effectively if we were empowered to be the voice of Ethiopian Canadians, something far more powerful and understandable to our Canadian leaders than multiple voices coming from multiple groups with factional interests—sometimes which even oppose each other!

We can unite over the goal of working towards getting Ethiopian Canadians to become active in their new government of Canada as well as to use that impetus to advance the cause of freedom, justice and the rule of law in Ethiopia. We need to have a powerful voice and that voice will not be heard unless we speak together.

Oftentimes, we cannot speak with one voice because we do not agree on certain issues, but the issues of justice, reconciliation and freedom are not divisive and instead should bring us together to achieve these God-given values on behalf of our fellow Ethiopians still living in our motherland. The outcome that we would want to accomplish through such a coalition will be most possible if we could work together within a well-organized structure, with a well-supported plan arrived on my mutual agreement and presented by a small team of leaders who could work with Canadian government officials to press Ethiopia to come to the table to resolve this crisis affecting all of us Ethiopians in Canada as well as those back in Ethiopia.

This would also include developing a strategic plan to attack Ethiopia's problems with the lack of democracy, including the lack of political representation, the lack of justice, HIV/AIDS, poverty, the lack of clean water, the lack of education, the lack of business opportunity and the lack of health care, making us useful emissaries between Ethiopia and Canada in implementation of any solutions.

We also encourage Ethiopians who live in free societies such as the United States, Europe, Australia and South Africa. In the US, we acknowledge the great work of people like Professor Alemariam and Meron who, along with a number of others, are tirelessly working with elected US officials at the state and federal level, in particular with human rights for Ethiopia in the bill HR2003. There are thousands of Ethiopians abroad, who are bright, hardworking and well educated, who can contribute in similar ways.

We cannot sit by and wait for others to do the work because they may be waiting for you to lead the way and each of us may have a unique contribution to be made that others cannot offer. It is your country and you do not need someone to tell you to take action. You never know where your action will lead and what a difference it may make in the lives of Ethiopians at home as well as back in our home country.

There are advantages for all involved. An Ethiopia that is free, which promotes the respect and human rights of its people, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender or political affiliation, is an Ethiopia that will more greatly prosper and care for its own people. It would also be an Ethiopia that would be equipped to genuinely partner with our great country of Canada.

We Ethiopian Canadians can bridge the gap between these two countries and peoples so that all parties can benefit. Let us start the process by organizing our groups at the ground level. Many Ethiopian Canadians are already standing by, waiting for the call to start the process! Get ready to come together as a unified group of Ethiopian Canadians!

May we pray to God that He will help us to accomplish His purposes in Canada, Ethiopia and wherever Ethiopians are found, lifting the yoke of suffering off those who are living under its heavy burden until we are all free!

If you have ideas for what you see could help us in this effort, please email those thoughts and suggestions to: [advocacy@anuakjustice.org](mailto:advocacy@anuakjustice.org)