



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Ethiopians in the Ogaden Need Our Help—Let Us Stand United Against the Terrorism of Our People!

July 9, 2007.

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As most Ethiopians come out with outrage to the guilty verdict against the Opposition leaders and other political prisoners, we should come out with outrage to the killing going on in the Ogaden against our fellow Ethiopians living there. Human Rights Watch and a few others in the international media, like Jeffrey Gettleman of the New York Times, have reported on the numbers of women and children being killed daily by the EPRDF-controlled military. Although the EPRDF Minister of Foreign Affairs, Seyoum Mesfin, used the website Ethio-media—blocked within Ethiopia by his own administration—to berate Gettleman’s report as being outrageously false, we know differently! Lies, in the company of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, are nothing new for this regime!

In that article that appeared on the front page of the Times, Gettleman reported that in addition to women, children and elders being killed, any men—even elders and the young—are seen as a threat. As a result, numbers of them are being killed or arrested for only “looking suspicious.” Villages and homes are being burned and property is being destroyed. Their cattle—the main life support of these nomadic people—are being killed, creating certain suffering and hardship that has led to a humanitarian crisis where many other innocent Ethiopians will die. Now, many thousands are displaced, without food and basic necessities, and the Ethiopian National Defense Forces are preventing humanitarian supplies from reaching them.

Justifying their actions because of the recent attack on the Chinese oil workers by the ONLF, the EPRDF-controlled military, with all their weapons and equipment, are now intensifying their attacks on helpless, unarmed and vulnerable people. They seem not to care that they are merely targeting proxy victims rather than those in the ONLF. Do not think that such killing of innocent civilians was not going on preceding the attack on the Chinese. Instead, this aggression against the Ogadenis by the EPRDF has been going on for 17 years, but with much greater intensity in the last months and year since the invasion of Somalia and the discovery of oil and petroleum in their region.

It is not surprising that the ONLF resistance movement has taken more serious steps in an attempt to stop the destruction of their people. In fact, some might make the case that the ONLF is acting in self-defense against government forces that are destroying them in order to gain access to their natural resources. They are not alone. During the Meles regime, many insurgency and separatist groups have arisen in response to the brutal oppression by the current regime of the EPRDF.

We strongly condemn this widespread killing, rape, torture, arbitrary detention and destruction of property that the EPRDF-led military troops are perpetrating against Ethiopians in the Ogaden region of our country. It is beginning to look like an ethnic cleansing. We condemn any violence against civilians by any groups, but what is shocking is the hypocrisy of the EPRDF who condemns the ONLF while committing worse atrocities itself! They have asked the US State Department to add the ONLF to the list of terrorist international organizations. Does the same apply to them?

Some day they may be standing in International Criminal Court for charges of *crimes against humanity* and *war crimes*. Therefore, we ask, on what moral authority can the EPRDF stand in accusation of others over the same terrorism that they are ruthlessly perpetrating against Ethiopian citizens?

Remembering back to 2003 in the Gambella region, the situation is nearly identical to what happened to the Anuak. At that time, the human rights abuses against the Anuak started simultaneously with the oil drilling activities of the Chinese oil company, Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPEB). In a well-calculated plan, EPRDF-controlled military troops and militia groups massacred Anuak leaders who had spoken against being excluded from the oil development plans in their region. This followed many years of federal control over the affairs of the Gambella region.

Arbitrary detentions, beatings, torture and extra-judicial killings all were used to “discourage” dissent, leading to the development of numerous resistance, political or civic groups—some of them being armed separatist groups like the Gambella Peoples’ Liberation Front (GPLF) or other rebel groups, a few of which committed atrocities against innocent civilians themselves while most the GPLF only attacked the military. Regardless of the targets, after such actions by armed rebels, it was routine that innocent civilians were murdered in cold blood by EPRDF-controlled military.

In addition, any “suspicious looking” Anuak men or women, just like in the Ogaden, especially those close to the oil drilling sites, were killed or arrested. However, many of the latter have never been seen since. (See AJC updates from 2004 and 2005.) To date, no one has been held accountable by the EPRDF other than a few scapegoats. The Anuaks were at times, also purposefully displaced, causing great humanitarian need.

This is all now being repeated in the Ogaden and again appears to be in close association with the exploitation of the natural resources. In the case of the Anuak, a “deal” was made with the oil company with the EPRDF, where the EPRDF reportedly agreed to pay twenty-five million to the company should any worker lose his life to armed resisters. It is believed that many human rights violations were committed in pre-emptive actions to avoid any losses and subsequent payments. No workers were killed, but many innocent Anuak suffered needlessly to ensure it. Is there another such “deal” now in the Ogaden? Supposedly, security in the oil/natural gas areas in the Ogaden are under high security, reportedly now aided by satellite surveillance since Jeffrey Gettleman was found in the area—and was later arrested and detained for five days.

While the EPRDF-controlled military are mercilessly killing our people in the Ogaden in silence, Meles is trying to distract us with his deceitful maneuverings surrounding the guilty verdict or release of the Opposition leaders and other political prisoners. We have a moral duty to speak out against this like we are doing it for our own ethnic group! Our leaders from all political parties, human rights organizations, civic organizations, religious leaders-- including Muslims, Jews and Christians—should condemn this killing and exert pressure on the Meles government to stop!

He is doing this to our people! Remember, our people are not only those imprisoned leaders in Addis Ababa; nor are our people only those in our own ethnic group! Our people are all Ethiopians. If you are a person, leader or activist criticizing the Woyanne government, you have an obligation to show it right now by speaking out and condemning what is going on—recognizing that those in the corners of our country are fully within our borders. They are fully Ethiopian and we have responsibility to care about them!

Right now, reports indicate that the people of the Ogaden are under the greatest onslaught from the Woyanne of any of the groups within our country. It is time to act as one people—united under shared values and principles. In the past, we have suffered alone while others have not cared or cried for us. For example, when the Anuak were killed, no one cried for the Anuak except the Anuak. The same is true for countless others! This must change! It is time to cry for each other and to stand up in their defense! Until we do, we will never attain freedom. Instead, the powerful will take their turn to eat while the rest of us languish, alone and alienated from each other, until another dominant group overpowers it and again exploits the weak in a cycle of **“dog eat dog politics!”**

This is a doomed model of government--systemically evil—that must be abandoned for a new model of government that respects the humanity and God-given rights of all citizens, not just the few in power! No longer should we simply pay **“lip-service”** to addressing injustice. No longer should we fall into the manipulative traps of ethnic division set for us by the Woyanne—traps meant to keep us separate—traps meant to weaken us—traps meant to prolong their own power and to defeat us, one ethnic group at a time!

The goal of this struggle is to bring dignity and equality to all. We will not succeed if we struggle only for our own group. We must include all Ethiopians in our struggle to save the soul of our nation and the soul of our people!

If you are Kinijit, OLF, Hebrat or part of any other political group or organization, do not sit by as a spectator when you are hearing about other Ethiopians being killed and being treated with such brutality! Resolve your internal conflicts and focus on the people of Ethiopia—time does not permit such distractions! Remember, any injustice committed towards any of our people should be considered injustice being committed to ourselves! It is time for political leaders, civic organizations, economic leaders and religious leaders to mobilize behind this noble cause of defending our people.

Division has been the lifeblood of the Woyanne. They want to divide us so that when they kill us, we are alone. They want us to die alone, cry alone and fight alone. But, if we want an Ethiopia based on equality, humanity, justice and the rule of law, then every ethnic group has a moral responsibility to fight for their brothers and sisters because the next time, it will be you. Do you want to be alone or supported by other Ethiopians at your time of need?

For years, we in our individual ethnic groups stood alone in our suffering and oppression and no one cared. No wonder so many felt alienated and neglected by the main stream of Ethiopia. No wonder so many formed separatist groups. It only makes sense under such conditions for “you find out who your friends and family really are during your difficult times by seeing who is at your side.” It is time to come alongside our brothers and sisters in the Ogaden. We do not have to share the same culture, lifestyle or religion to know them as our own fellow Ethiopians. Other Ethiopians should be making noise on their behalf. The isolation of their region is no longer an excuse. Ethiopians should be standing up and show themselves to be people of good will instead of people of ill will. As we stand up for them, we are showing we are a changed people, willing to stand up for each other in order to create a more humane and just Ethiopia—one fit for human life! When something happens to one in a family, it affects everyone.

Pay attention to what is happening to others and tell the truth about it, even if it is hard to admit. We cannot heal without the truth being known. Hiding it can bring greater destruction, not only to individuals, but also to families, communities, ethnic groups and nations. We must condemn wrongful things even if we have a son or sibling in the military who may be involved. Support them in choosing not to commit such human rights crimes as they could be held accountable some day in a court of law. Yet, we know that many in the military are not participating in these crimes while others may be ordered or pressured to do so against their will and consciences.

Let us speak out so they understand that the child of the Ogaden is their Ethiopian brother or sister—a fellow human being of worth and value in God’s eyes. Speak out so they can refuse to cave in to rape a sister Ethiopian. Speak out so they have the courage to refuse to kill and destroy another human being’s life. Speak out so the cruel and merciless, those whose consciences have been hardened, especially those giving the orders, can be brought to justice under a fair court system.

It is time for every Ethiopian to say we refuse to hate and kill. It is time to put an end to the cycle of violence and to instead, help find a way to make our country a place where we can live together in harmony without hate and fear—creating an Ethiopia that respects every living human being. We need such a change in our souls that empowers our lives, through God’s grace, to change. Then we can reclaim dignity, justice and our God-given rights that have been denied by this government for so many years.

Each and every one is needed to fight for such an Ethiopia—for adequate homes, basic necessities and education that are not taken away at the whim of a mercenary government. Such an Ethiopia cannot be achieved by dishonesty, hatred, deception, but only through honesty, discipline, understanding, organization and sacrifice—not only for oneself, but for all of us!

I believe many of us are ready for such action, as much has changed among Ethiopians in the last year or more. We are becoming more capable and ready than ever to launch a united response against the terrorism, corruption and injustice we are facing together. Wherever I go and speak to Ethiopians, when I talk to them on the phone, when I hear comments on PalTalk or read articles and comments written by Ethiopians on the Internet, I am sensing a newness of thinking!

Put that change of mind and heart into practice if it is real. Our response to the terrorization of the Ogadenis will show us if we are really ready for a real democracy where all people are included or if we simply want to take power and privilege for ourselves! I am convinced that if we stand up as Ethiopians against the terrorism of our people of the Ogaden, it will strike terror in the hearts of the Woyanne! It will be a nightmare for them!

Think back nearly four years. When the Anuak were targeted and killed, there was hardly a word about it anywhere—not only from international media groups, but also from fellow Ethiopians. Why? Perhaps because we Ethiopians were so ethnically divided at the time, combined with the devaluation of the Anuak as a minority group thought of as “Barias.” Perhaps this is why if anyone did notice, they did not care enough to do anything. However, Ethiopia is not the same today as it was then—much has changed. Has it changed enough that we can express our outrage and willingness to stand up for the people of the Ogaden? Today is the day we are being tested to see of what we are made! Will we Ethiopians pass? Have we learned what it means to be truly human? Can we stand up as one people for others among us who are in jeopardy?

Right now, the Gambella region is much calmer and safer. For the most part, the troops have been moved out of the region. Where are they? They are in the Ogaden region and in Somalia. Unfortunately, the same troops that used to be terrorizing civilians in the Gambella area—harassing, torturing, killing, arresting, raping and destroying property—are now in the Ogaden doing the same to them and over the border doing the same in Somalia. As a result, the Gambella region is freer of terror, but their “terror” has now moved to terrorize another group of Ethiopians.

Many other Ethiopians will know what we are talking about. It is the same kind of horrific crimes against civilians that have been perpetrated against the Ethiopian Sidamo, the Ethiopian Afar, the Ethiopian Oromo, the Ethiopian Amhara, the Ethiopian election protestors, Ethiopian non-EPRDF Tigrayans and many other fellow Ethiopian citizens throughout our country and even into Somalia now.

The evidence is building for another case of “**crimes against humanity**” committed by the EPRDF against its own civilian population to later be heard in International Criminal Court! If an investigation takes place later, there are countless crimes against humanity that could be used to bring him before the International Criminal Court—the crimes in Awassa, Gambella, Addis Ababa, Somalia and in the Ogaden. These are just to name a few because there are many others directed at other Ethiopians throughout other regions.

Our response to this current tragedy will inform the world whether we Ethiopians have changed! We must ask ourselves—have we really left behind ethnic division and become one in our struggle for liberty, justice, equality and democracy? Have we become a people who stand up for each other when harm is committed against those in our greater family of Ethiopians? If so, it is time to prove it! Don’t be discouraged. If we all work together, we are laying the groundwork for a healthy, well-functioning society and much good can come to Ethiopia under these conditions!

If we are really a changed people, ready for a sustainable democracy rather than simply another Meles or Mengistu, we will show it by doing all we can for our brothers and sisters in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia—they are us! No longer can we allow the brutal regime of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to silently kill our people at the corners of our country, as they stand alone! No! Enough is enough! Alone, we are forever vulnerable; however, together, we can change Ethiopia!

Therefore, it is our moral duty to decry this cold-blooded murder and destruction among us! If we fail to act together, we fail not only them, but we fail ourselves, our children and our grandchildren—all of whom will face the future consequences of our present action or inaction. We cannot achieve our goals alone while we stand by, isolated from each other.

Right now the time is urgent. Let us stand by our Ethiopian family in the Ogaden and Afar regions who are under the terrorization of Meles Zenawi, a well-known terrorist to us, posing as a democratic leader. We call on the United States State Department to add him and his co-facilitators of terror to the list of international terrorist organizations—they are a threat to the entire region. The evidence is abundantly clear—Meles and the few in the ruling elite are in the process of maiming or exterminating an entire generation of people in the Ogaden. It is under our watch and we cannot stand by! It is time to act!

I hear there is a demonstration planned on July 16 in Washington D.C. on the same day that the political leaders sentences are expected to be given. I urge Ethiopians to come out in great numbers. I also hope that all Ethiopians express their outrage against the murder of the Ogadenis by Meles. The same thing is happening to our Ethiopian brothers and sisters in the Afar region. Let us stand up for these Ethiopians! Good people can no longer be silent or we may find that the next victim may be you or your child!

In conclusion, do not lose hope in our struggle to bring freedom to Ethiopia. Even though there continues to be division within the Kinijit as well as in other political groups, we cannot give up now—we have come too far! We must continue to concentrate on the fight against Woyanne. Be patient and do not be discouraged. Our struggle is no longer about individuals. It is about the nation!

Every time you are divided, stir up division or create your own new organization rather than trying to better work together, you are sabotaging the completion of our work. Instead, we must continue to focus on our goals if we expect to succeed—something that is absolutely possible. Even though the chaos and division we see can divert our attention or discourage us, do not give up or lose hope.

It might seem like Woyanne are winning, but we can pick up the momentum through hard work, concentration and sacrifice. Remember, they are spending millions to stay in power, undoubtedly, because they are sensing increasing danger from the alienated Ethiopian public.

Their international image is falling into greater disrepute as their horrific acts against our people, like the Ogadenis, are coming to light. Their lack of any semblance of justice in the courts of our country towards the Opposition leaders and other political prisoners is making heroes out of the prisoners while making those outside of Ethiopia, gasp at the lack of any legitimate legal process towards innocent defenders of freedom.

We should take heart—the Kinijit started building a bridge to freedom in 2005 when they mobilized millions of people to come out to rally and vote for a new Ethiopia. Now, they are locked up and we are the ones who must finish that bridge which is standing, half-built, in the middle of the river.

Let us finish the work until the bridge reaches to the other side, connecting us to new Ethiopia, new peace, justice, equality and reconciliation. We all know that a bridge cannot be built without many hands. Be patient and diligent. Be one of those who helps finish the bridge until we have a way to reach the other side.

Just like we walk on roads others have built, our children of the future will cross the bridge we have built if we do not lose this opportunity. The bridge needs your hands along with the hands of the Ogadenis, Afar, Gaadson, Hamar, Surma, Hawadle, Dorze, Komo, Welayta, Konso, Shanqella, Guji and all those in the 88 ethnic groups that made up the one family, family of Ethiopia.

May God help us to better love, value and care for our Ethiopian brothers and sisters from every ethnic group throughout our beloved land. Together, may God help us build a bridge to **NEW ETHIOPIA** where freedom, peace, justice, equality and respect is shared and enjoyed by all!

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For additional information, please contact:
Mr. Obang O. Metho,

The Director of International Advocacy:
Phone (306) 933-4346
E-mail: advocacy@anuakjustice.org