



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

*Justice, Peace and Freedom*

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## **Ethiopians in Transformation: Becoming People of Action!** (Part I of a report on the Ethiopian movement for peace, justice and freedom in Europe)

**July 14, 2007.**

**“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”**

**Proverbs 14:31**

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In May, I received an invitation from the European Parliament to speak at the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the African-Caribbean-Pacific- European Union (ACP-EU) Joint Parliamentary Assembly that would be held in Wiesbaden, Germany, from June 25 to 28.

I was told that it would be a very strategic meeting where approximately 200 parliamentarians from Africa, the Caribbean Islands, the Pacific Islands and from the European Union would be represented. I was invited to speak to the group at a general session about human rights and injustice in Ethiopia, what was believed would be an excellent opportunity because most of the participants would be coming from Africa. It was indicated that the Ethiopian Speaker of the House of Parliament, Tesohme Toga would be there, along with some others from 179 countries, including the Ethiopian Ambassador to the European Union, Berhane G. Kirstos.

Even though others may be able to speak about the crisis of democracy and human rights problems in Ethiopia, it would have more impact for an Ethiopian to address them. I was told that the previous year, someone from Zimbabwe had addressed the assembly regarding the human rights abuses in that country and that there was interest in what was going on in Ethiopia.

The main topics to be covered at the assembly would include the Millennium Development goals, good governance, transparency and accountability in relation to the exploitation of natural resources in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and human rights and conflicts—such as in Darfur. Other topics would include HIV, property eradication, the migration of the skilled workers from their respective native countries and its impact on the country’s national development.

I said I would come if we could find funding for the travel expenses. We then started searching for funding. We had sent a letter and word out to the Ethiopian community, seeking funds for the European trip. The letter was even posted on some of the major websites, such as Ethio-media, but the response was very disappointing as it resulted in less than \$600 being given. After a number of Ethiopians in Europe had attempted to find funding without success and when the meeting was only a few days away, it appeared there was no real prospect of going. In order to get to the meeting on time, I would have to leave no later than June 23<sup>rd</sup>. However, by June 22<sup>nd</sup>, it was obvious that there was no chance of going, but little did I know, God had a different plan!

The morning of June 22<sup>nd</sup>, a friend of mine in Saskatoon, Canada, unexpectedly called me to go out for coffee and I accepted the invitation. Let me give you a bit of background on this friend whose name is Clay. By the way, Clay, as you can probably tell from his name, is not an Ethiopian, but is a “white guy.” He has lived in Saskatoon for his entire life.

I met Clay when he called me one day last September. He had been “googling” for information on Ethiopia because of his and his wife’s interest in adopting an Ethiopian child. He had found the website of the Anuak Justice Council and had seen the advertising for the premiere of the documentary film, “Betrayal of Democracy: Ethiopia” that would be premiering in Los Angeles. He could not believe that the phone number given to call for information was the same area code as in Saskatchewan, Canada! He called me and we talked. Later, he came to the film’s premiere that was held in Saskatoon some weeks later. We then talked in greater depth about the reasons he wanted to adopt an Ethiopian child.

He told me that he and his wife already had a biological child, but that they wanted to adopt a child to make a difference in the child’s life, a child who would otherwise be neglected or have no opportunity. As we talked, I learned what an excellent man he was. He was a devout Christian, very compassionate, a loving husband and father and also a good business person. He was very interested in learning more about Ethiopia and so we began building a good friendship. For Christmas, he invited me to join his family for a holiday supper. I had a wonderful time meeting his entire extended family, all of whom were also warm and caring, just like him. His mother was so encouraging, telling me to never give up as long as what I was doing could help make a difference in someone else’s life. I was also touched as his grandparents blessed the food before we ate and prayed for those people without food from as far away as Ethiopia, hoping that God would help them find peace and justice like everybody else. We have maintained our contact ever since.

On June 22 when Clay and I met for coffee, he asked me for an update of what was going on in Ethiopia and if I had any trips coming up. I told him about the invitation to the ACP-EU assembly in Europe and that I was supposed to go, but that the trip was off because we did not have any funding. He asked how much it would be and I told him it would be very expensive because it would be a last minute ticket. He then said he would like to see if there was anything he could do. We finished our coffee and left.

A few hours later, Clay called and said he had talked to his wife and they both agreed that even though they did not have a lot of money, that they felt that God was telling them to pay for the \$1800 airline ticket. I told him it was too much, but he insisted and said he wanted to put the ticket on his credit card and told me to go ahead and make arrangements. When the travel agent located a ticket to leave the next day, Clay and his wife paid for it in full! I later received an E-mail from him that said, “If I can contribute to making things better in the country, it will be better for that child I want to adopt.” He went on to say that the children of Ethiopia should not need to be adopted to have opportunity—that they should have opportunity in their own country and for that to happen, there had to be a good government to protect the children. He explained that this was the reason he and his wife were contributing. He then said he hoped that everything would go well and that God would give me the right words to say. The next day I left for Frankfurt, Germany.

When I arrived in Frankfurt, five Ethiopians greeted me, one of them, Mr. Abebe Bogale, from Brussels, the Judge Wolde Michael Meshesha, from the Commission of Inquiry, currently living in the Netherlands and several others who came from different countries in Europe. We went to Lagano, an Ethiopian restaurant in Frankfurt, to discuss the meeting we would be attending the next day and the anti-EPRDF protest rally that Ethiopians would be staging in front of the building where the ACP-EU Assembly would be held. I was asked to speak at the rally.

The next morning, the first thing I saw as we were driving up to the building for the meeting was an Ethiopian flag and lots of Ethiopians waving other flags. I could hear them shouting and holding placards with slogans such as: **“Justice to Ethiopia,” “We Need Freedom in Ethiopia,” “Please EU, don’t support tyrant government,” “Free our leaders,” “Democracy has been killed in Ethiopia,” and “There are no human rights in Ethiopia.”**

When I looked at these committed people, I was very moved because I saw no one else demonstrating for freedom and justice other than our fellow Ethiopians. The German police were present in the area. From looking at them, they appeared to be very relaxed and comfortable, seemingly very comfortable with the peaceful and respectful way the demonstration was being carried out, yet I was really taken by the fact that they could be killed or arrested in Ethiopia for such a well-mannered demonstration of protest. It struck me that here are Ethiopian refugees in a foreign country—calling for freedom, justice, equality and peace in their home land, despite the fact that they had already enjoyed these privileges in Europe. Yet, they had come together to speak up for their mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and other fellow Ethiopians living under the brutality of the EPRDF.

I could see their love for their country and their love for justice. This I saw as a sign of hope for their country—like torchbearers for freedom! They knew their rights and were calling attention to the lack of those universal rights in their motherland. I felt so proud of these Ethiopians for standing up in this way, especially because I know that although injustice and killing is occurring in many countries represented at the assembly—in fact, all over Africa—regrettably, I saw no other people demonstrating. We hear about the horrors in Zimbabwe where Mugabe is torturing his people. We also have heard much about the genocide where 200,000 have died that is going on in Darfur where four million others are displaced from their homes while the international community seems ineffective in taking meaningful action. Yet, I saw no other people protesting, but only Ethiopians—rallying with all their hearts. This alone made me realize that the policies of the EPRDF would soon be coming to an end. I did not see ethnic groups rallying independent of each other, but I saw them all joined, as one striking rainbow of protest against the evils of this Woyanne regime. Some had driven ten or more hours from the UK and other areas of Europe to speak out for other Ethiopians who have been silenced in their own country by the barrel of the gun.

These Ethiopians are not only my team workers and partners, but most of all, they are my Ethiopian family—my brothers and sisters. I am encouraged by them and am convinced that with God’s help—combined with their courage, commitment and sacrifice—anything is possible. We can reclaim our human dignity and self respect as we work towards our goal of living in peace and harmony with other human beings. It is only then that we can have any assurance that there is a future to this country—that the image of Ethiopia known to the world can change from being one of dead cows and skinny children with big bellies and flies in their faces to one that would reflect the beauty of the people and richness of the land and culture. We, as a country known to be the poorest of the poor, will then be able to change our direction and to utilize our abundant natural resources, the greatest being our people!

Because I would not be addressing those at the rally until later, we entered the assembly hall where I was amazed at how many influential people were present—people like Mr. Horst Kohler, the President of the Republic of German, Mr. Hans-Gert Pottering, the President of the European Parliament, Ms. Glenys Kinnock, Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Ms. Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Louis Michel, a member of the European Commission with the special responsibility for development and humanitarian aid. There were many others there I cannot take time to mention.

As the meetings began, Mr. Abebe pointed out the Ethiopian Speaker of the House and the Ethiopian Ambassador to the EU. They were sitting together way at the back of the auditorium while great speeches were being given. They appeared to be napping—opening and closing their eyes—not paying attention to the speakers. I thought—here they are, not really listening to the speeches about how the world should be—and yet they represent the second biggest country in Africa and one in the midst of a deepening crisis! Understandably, the speakers’ words of freedom and democracy might be difficult to hear when one is practicing active policies of oppression, ethnic hatred and division. In fact, it is exactly under such conditions, that the guilty and complicit would naturally lower the eyes in shame at the sting of such words on their consciences.

After the speeches, I was very moved by the words and ideas, but part of me was in doubt because, if this world could be improved by words alone, it would have become a better world a long time ago. What I mean is, there would not be children dying because of water-bourn diseases—there would be no children left out without schooling—there would not be children going to bed without food—there would be no suppliers of arms meant to kill your fellow human beings. We would live in a world where people could obtain liberty and where development and opportunity would not be given as a political favor based on one’s blind loyalty to the power holders.

It would be a world where women would be respected and the disabled and vulnerable would be cared for. If development could be accomplished by words, we would not be living in a world where every minute, ten children die from hunger. We would not be in world where 80 million children would not see a classroom or hold a pencil. Right now, we live in a world where with our new technology, we can map out human genomes, yet more than half a million women die each year due to pregnancy related problems. These are just examples of what could happen if things were done with words, but unfortunately, we live in a world where many words have been said, but little action has followed. Words of promise come easily and such promises are easily broken.

At midday, I came out to address the Ethiopian community at the rally. I immediately was struck with the presence of three Ethiopian Orthodox priests in their priest’s clothes, who were there among those rallying. I was glad to see them because I believe it is the duty of the religious leaders to speak out against injustice, oppression and the killing of innocent civilians, but regrettably, many of those in most churches, synagogues and mosques of Ethiopia have been largely silent, so seeing them there was inspiring. Some Ethiopians say religion and politics don’t go together, but injustice and oppression are not political issues. Instead, we need people of faith to take a high moral stand, speaking out against evil acts when it threatens to destroy a nation. We need such moral leaders to call the people to embrace truth, love, justice, peace and righteous living as children created by God who will ultimately judge us all.

The priests spoke first, followed by Mr. Abebe Bogale and Wolde Michael Meshesha, the judge from the Commission of Inquiry and an Ethiopian hero. He broke away from the Woyanne and carried all the documents from the Commission of Inquiry with him as traveled to the border of Ethiopia and Kenya, even hand-carrying them through the bush with him as he crossed the border.

When my time came to speak, I told them that I was there to tell the parliamentarians about the injustice going on in Ethiopia, not only to the Anuak, but to all Ethiopians because I strongly believe that justice can never come to the Anuak—or any other single ethnic group—unless justice comes to all Ethiopians. Peace will never come to the Anuak unless peace comes to all Ethiopians. I told them that this was the reason I was there and that I was happy to be representing all Ethiopians. I reminded them of what Mahatma Ghandi told his people many years ago. He had told them to never rest—to keep protesting—daily, weekly and monthly until they achieved the goal of freedom.

In other words, I told them that even though Woyanne are killing the people and suppressing the truth, never let them rest, but instead keep fighting until we are all free—protest until we are all free—speak up until we are all free.

I told them that the action they had taken by rallying, would make the Woyanne not rest. I noted that all of them standing there, coming from different parts of Europe were only unified by one thing—that is their Ethiopian-ness along with the infliction of injustice on all Ethiopians throughout the country. By them coming to the rally, I could see that they were showing they had a powerful weapon with them and that weapon was their voices, their unity and their love of one another. This is the only way they or we can defeat the Woyanne.

I went on to tell them:

You (Ethiopian Europeans) have accomplished a great amount of work and are heroes in the effort. Through your actions, you have mobilized those in the EU to pass some resolutions related to Ethiopia. As history shows, those of you here who are fighting for these noble goals, are no different from those who fought for freedom in World War I or World War II. You are no different than those Ethiopians who fought and died in the Adawa war, from those African-Americans who fought for civil rights or from those South Africans who fought to abolish apartheid. You who are fighting today to bring peace and justice will be among them. You have helped break the silence and this is the message I would like to leave with you.

You must keep on fighting. You must keep protesting and you must keep speaking. Only speak words of love, respect and care for one another. We cannot build a better Ethiopia with hatred and division. We can only build it with love, care and respect. We want to replace injustice, with justice and justice can be only founded on a moral foundation where the value and equality of each person is firmly established in God-given universal truths.

Continue to be dedicated and committed to a long struggle to get the victory as it does not come easily and it takes time. This is the time. Keep on fighting even if some people call the Diaspora extremists. Is it extreme to ask for one's basic rights? Is it extreme to tell the truth about what is going on? Is it extreme to expect life and justice? Do not give up as long as you are an extremist for love. Remember, even Jesus was accused of being an extremist. Keep on moving and struggling and I will be here with you by your side.

After finishing my talk to those rallying for Ethiopia, I resumed my participation at the assembly, including speaking before them on the injustice in Ethiopia. I will have to provide highlights to you on that talk and the rest of the ACP-EU assembly in the next article as there is too much to report on at one time. I can hardly wait to report on an unexpected, but extremely interesting opportunity I had for a private discussion with the Ethiopian Speaker of the House and the Ethiopian Ambassador to the EU. What they told me will astound you and I look forward to sharing it with all Ethiopians in Part II of this report!

For now, I urge all Ethiopians to keep the momentum of our movement for freedom and justice going. Many Ethiopians in Europe and elsewhere have been telling me to help organize an effort; however, I tell them I would be willing to contribute my part, but to do so, requires financial resources. For instance, I would never have had these discussions with these Ethiopian EPRDF leaders, except for my friend Clay and his wife's willingness to financially support the cost of my airline ticket.

In addition to them, three Ethiopian friends each sent me \$100 for my expenses and other Ethiopians in Europe supported my travel expenses while there or took me into their homes and provided true “Ethiopian hospitality!” I was supported by many such high-caliber Ethiopians throughout Europe as I traveled from Frankfurt to Munich, Geneva, Zurich and Stockholm.

I also heard from Ethiopians in Paris, London, Rome, Amsterdam, Berlin, Brussels, Bonn and Copenhagen who would have done the same had I had more time. For your information, I will also be reporting on a discussion I had while in Geneva with the United Nation’s High Commissioner for Human Rights, officials.

All of what happened was made possible because some Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians were willing to take responsibility for the related expenses. Justice is not cheap at all and requires widespread participation in covering the costs. If Meles can spend four million US to try to kill HR#2003 as well as on other lobbying efforts to stay in power, we cannot expect to fight against that kind of effort with no resources. But think about that amount of money for a minute. How many children could have used such funds to prevent many children from dying from hunger or disease? Think about how many schools, clinics or hospitals could have been built with these funds!

Right now, we receive many calls asking for the AJC to act as a mediator in bringing all the factions of Ethiopian ethnic groups and organizations together to form a common front to confront the government regarding the human rights violations that are being directed against every ethnic group and taking place in every corner of Ethiopia, but we are limited because we don’t have adequate funding, nor do we have time to fundraise, something that requires much time or more staff. If you support the work of the AJC, you can help raise funds for furthering the work beyond what is possible now. For instance, if we had enough funding, we could hire others to help.

One example might be a person like Mr. Abebe Bogale who is working fulltime on advancing the cause of freedom in Ethiopia in Europe. He is a radio announcer as well as being the head of the organization of European Ethiopians. His situation is similar to Abebe Balew, the owner of Addis Dimts Radio and many more Ethiopian radio station producers, webmasters of Ethiopian websites and blogs. Most of these people are doing their jobs voluntarily because of the love for their country. Many more could be mentioned as well. We Ethiopians could be helping to cover the costs of this work so that these people could afford to support their families, enabling them to continue to work for all of us!

If you can help, send an email to the AJC or whichever organization you want to support, like HR#2003, a radio station, a website, a blog or some civic or political group. With it, note how much you will commit to a certain amount of support every month and then follow up with doing it! You might be able to contribute to more than one group.

The momentum is mounting, but it will require us to follow up our words with concrete action as well as financial contributions, both of which can ultimately help break the chains of injustice and end the suffering and horror of our people. There have been dark clouds of misery hanging over our ancient land for a thousand years. Rays of the sun are finding small openings in the clouds and we are starting to see some light shine through our present darkness. Our actions will demonstrate if we are those rays of light capable of burning off the clouds until we have full sunlight or if we are mere illusions that disappear like empty words and empty promises—like clouds hiding the sun, but also clouds that produce no rain for a parched land.

Are we any different from those in the international community or western countries who say such words with their mouths while they do nothing or even worse, while their hands provide the Woyanne funds to buy the military equipment and the military training so the Meles army can continue to terrorize our own people? Even if we would never support the Woyanne with arms, are we passively doing so as we fail to provide concrete support to this movement for freedom, justice and peace? Will we be guilty for killing the movement by refusing to give our money in support of the work? Do not be confused, the money for the work is really money being given to pay for the freedom of your families.

Many Ethiopians speak the beautiful words of democracy, rule of law, development and freedom, but do not realize that all of these will not “magically drop out of the sky!” If Meles needs funding to keep tormenting us, so do we in order to stop it even though I am certain we need not spend anywhere close to what he is spending because we have truth on our side. It costs a lot more to suppress the truth because truth has life within itself that empowers it!

You don't have to do what Clay has done, but commit some monthly amount to this effort, even if it is a direct deposit from your check of \$5, \$10 or \$100 per month for the next year. One Ethiopian Mr. Woudeh Worku in Munich said to me, “I have two children and I can afford \$40 a month.” He committed to sending it. We will all be able to see the fruit of his work if his contribution is matched with others, small or large. Don't wait for someone to call you, but instead, if you believe in this effort, commit to helping some part of it on a monthly basis. Don't stop sending help back home to your families, but realize that unless we support the effort to change their situation, you may be sending money home for the next 5, 10 or 20 years.

Just this past week, one Ethiopian told me about his phone call back home to his mother and sister. His family members described conditions that were terribly difficult even though they made 500 birr a month. His sister said that even the cost of just one onion can now be set at most any price and many people can no longer afford an onion. She kept asking him to please tell her, “How long before this ends?” He then called me and asked, “Obang, how long before this ends?” I could not answer him because that answer has much to do with what each one of us Ethiopians is willing to do to bring this misery, suffering and oppression to an end.

Following this call, another Ethiopian called me to tell me that he had just talked to his mother who was also living under difficult conditions in the country. She told him, “If this goes on another couple of years, our country will be gone and there will be nothing left of Ethiopia.”

So I ask each of you—what are you willing to do to bring this tyranny to an end? I urge you to do your share “DIRSHA” in whatever way you can. This is a call. This is what your family in Ethiopia expects of you. This is what your country expects of you. Above all, God has shown us love and care and He wants us to show His love through us by what we do for our brothers and sisters in this world, particularly to those near to us who are in duress and need—our families and fellow Ethiopians. It will take a transformation of our hearts, souls and minds, but I for one, think we are ready! May God find us faithful!

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***“What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed; but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”***

**James 2:14-17**

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