



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Open Letter to the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: Concerning Ethiopia.

July 18, 2007.

U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6225

"Like our Statue of Liberty, she reminds us that the flame for freedom burns in every human heart, and that it is a light that cannot be extinguished by the brutality of terrorists or tyrants. And she reminds us that when an ideology kills tens of millions of people, and still ends up being vanquished, it is contending with a power greater than death. She reminds us that freedom is the gift of our Creator, freedom is the birthright of all humanity, and in the end, freedom will prevail. (From President George W. Bush's recent speech at the dedication of the memorial to victims of communism in Albania.)

Dear Chairman Joseph R. Biden and other members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations:

I am writing this letter to you, not only on behalf of concerned citizens of the United States and Canada of Ethiopian heritage, but as concerned citizens of the world who are standing for justice. We call the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Foreign Relations on Africa to call a hearing to review foreign policy related to Ethiopia.

I am the Director of the Anuak Justice Council—not part of any political party—but heading up a human rights organization that has been working for nearly four years, initially on behalf of the Anuak ethnic group of Gambella, Ethiopia and later broadening the scope of our work to include all the people of Ethiopia due to the widespread human rights violations throughout the country which are being perpetrated by our United States ally in the War on Terror, the EPRDF government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

We have reached a critical point where we are questioning the world we live in and asking—do the poor people in isolated parts of the world, like in developing nations such as Ethiopia, have a future and is democracy in that future? We say no as we are seeing the future hopes and dreams of Ethiopians for a free and productive society being sacrificed by the current US administration's policy in this country and their strong allegiance to a tyrannical government that is repressing its own people.

We are hoping those of you in the Senate will stand up for the values and principles upon which America is founded and take action to cease from any recognizable means that the U.S is taking to actively hinder the cause of democracy in Ethiopia, including any suppression of information regarding the gross human rights violations, the political manipulation of the judicial system, corruption, repression of the press, repression of other freedoms, the countless number of political prisoners and other related governance issues.

The United States, the superpower of this world—has not only been turning a blind eye and a deaf ear, but indirectly—whether some know it or not—is actually contributing to sustaining that injustice through our current U.S foreign policy. Instead of using our strength and wealth to support and protect the vulnerable and the weak, we have demonstrated a pattern of stifling the cries of the people in favor of our own interests. We have aided and abetted in advancing a culture of death and destruction in one of the poorest and most repressive countries of the world instead of helping create a culture of peace, justice and equality that we ourselves enjoy in the US. Have we, the richest and mightiest of all countries in the world, lost our soul?

This is why we are coming to you at this time. In the past, you have already demonstrated your willingness to stand up for the Anuak during their most critical time of need in 2004 following the December 13-15, 2003 mass killing of the Anuak in Gambella town, in the southwestern region of Ethiopia. In their subsequent investigation, Human Rights Watch later documented possible crimes against humanity, perpetrated by Ethiopian National Defense forces against civilians. Because I was close to many of those targeted, I became and have remained involved to make sure they did not die in vain and so such killing does not take place again to the Anuak, the Ethiopian or to others. Until today, no one in has been brought to justice and the Ethiopian government has never publicly acknowledged what they did wrong.

As part of that initial work, I worked closely with United States Senators like Senator Norm Coleman, Senator Russ Feingold, Senator Patrick Leahy, Senator Sam Brownback, Senator John McCain and many more which led to non-partisan action. For instance, thirteen Senators sponsored a letter to the Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 2004. Senator Leahy followed this action by proposing to the Appropriation's Committee, which he chaired, a resolution that urged the Ethiopian government of the EPRDF to respect the human rights of the Anuak in Gambella, Ethiopia or the Appropriation Committee would reconsider the present funding allocations for military assistance and military training to Ethiopia.

As a representative of the Anuak Justice Council, I come to you now because of this crisis unfolding in Ethiopia. Only yesterday, July 17, 2007, the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on African, chaired by Senator Feingold, brought up the topic: **Democratic Developments in Sub-Saharan Africa: Moving Forwards or Backwards?** To answer the question addressed in the title of the hearing, in the case of Ethiopia, without any question, **we will say it is moving backwards with alarming speed!**

We trust that as you review the current U.S administration policy concerning Ethiopia and the ample evidence of the ill-state of democracy in the country, the may be incumbent on the part of the US Senate to change our policies to better address the gross human rights abuses and the repression of the democratic process in the country. Many victims of such injustice are ready to tell their stories. Some of the most extreme cases of human rights crimes that are going on right now, are coming out of the Ogaden region of Ethiopia, ironically, just where the U.S and the Ethiopian government is working together to “fight terrorism,” yet Ethiopian National Defense forces are being accused of committing such terrorist acts against their own civilian population. Imagine if this kind of killing took place in the United States by its own military? What is our moral obligation when U.S help may be actually promoting injustice and terrorism?

In May of 2005, twenty-six million Ethiopians voted to change their government to one where they could gain greater freedom, justice and peace like was found in the United States. Just like the American founding fathers envisioned, they chose the ballot box, not the bullet. When the Opposition Party (CUDP) won the election, their victory was denied and the current ruling government declared themselves the winners, all of which can be verified by the evidence of international election observers who reported that the election did not meet international standards.

As Ethiopians went out on the streets in peaceful protest, according to their rights in the Ethiopian Constitution, not picking up arms, but peacefully standing up for justice with their feet as they marched in Meskel Square and with their voices as they protested the rigged election, they were instead shot and killed by Ethiopian National Defense troops and security forces. Approximately 46 protestors were killed, most of them by shots to the head. Conditions continued to deteriorate as the EPRDF took greater measures to suppress the Opposition leaders.

When some civilians again protested in November of 2005, more killing resulted at the hands of Ethiopian military and security forces, now totaling 193 civilians, including those killed in the previous protest in June of 2005. Thousands—some report over 30,000 in number—were rounded up and sent to detention camps where they were detained, some for months and others are still there. These were mostly young student protestors who were then forced to have their heads shaved, using the same razor for countless many, despite the high incidence of HIV in the country—a shocking violation of human rights!

Then the Opposition leaders, human rights activists, journalists and other civic leaders were arrested and put in prison, accused of trumped up charges of attempted genocide, inciting violence and treason even though they stood for non-violence in their pursuit of freedom and justice. Most of these leaders are American educated citizens, professors who wanted to bring the same freedom and liberty to Ethiopia that they were enjoying in America. These are people who know and value the rule of law and appreciate the value of human life.

Ethiopians hoped for a reaction of outrage from the U.S and other freedom loving countries, but instead there was silence. In President Bush's inaugural speech in 2004, he spoke about the US standing up against tyranny and by those struggling for freedom and democracy in other countries, but when it came to Ethiopia's time of need, where was the U.S?

This is when we saw the failure of America to live out the principles lifted up in their everyday rhetoric and instead, Meles proceeded, not only with impunity, but instead with increases of financial aid for military weapons and military training. The U.S budget to Ethiopia in 2007 is almost double that of 2006 despite the gross violation of democratic principles closely accompanied by gross human rights abuses going on daily throughout the country.

This all has sent a disillusioning message to the people of Ethiopia who have interpreted this as meaning that the ideals in that lofty speech and espoused by the American founding fathers, were not to be applied to Ethiopians. Instead, Ethiopians saw that the principles were applied "politically" in compartmentalized fashion, rather than integrated into the mind and soul of what used to be a great moral nation. Now, "tyranny" only was acknowledged when convenient—as a weapon against so called "enemy countries," like Venezuela and Iran, but never to allies in the War on Terror, such as Ethiopia. Even our U.S State Department's negative findings on the dismal state of human rights in Ethiopia, was ignored.

Furthermore, our mainstream U.S media seems to be following this same path—making one wonder about collusion with the press in a mass cover-up regarding the state of affairs in Ethiopia—making it look like there was a coordinated effort to keep the American public in the dark about these double standards in US foreign policy. Just check back records of major news sources regarding their press releases related to Ethiopia and you will see asymmetrical reporting on the evil of Hugo Chavez related to Meles Zenawi. Meles is usually only mentioned in relationship to fighting terrorists in Somalia and ironically, is almost never criticized despite the countless reports of human rights abuses and the active repression of most every freedom in Ethiopia. Despite the similarity between the repressive tactics of Chavez and Zenawi, Zenawi has gotten a free pass—Chavez has not.

In Ethiopia, where Meles Zenawi rules the citizens with terror, injustice and uses razors with possible HIV to punish innocent civilians who broke no laws, we fail to even notice as we send more aid for HIV/AIDS and as we turn a silent ear when North Korea violates its UN regulations by sending arms to Ethiopia, some of which undoubtedly were used to commit human rights violations against the civilian population in the regions of Ogaden and Afar. The Ethiopian regime recently detained a New York Times reporter, Jeffrey Gettleman, who was reporting on the government's terrorization of the civilian population in the Ogaden and the story was supposedly intentionally suppressed in the U.S mainstream media to prevent the exposure of what Human Rights Watch has called possible *crimes against humanity*. What kind of a one-sided War on Terror is this?

Yes, we know that the U.S, like every government, has its own legitimate interests as a nation and that the interests of others are secondary, but when these self-interests begin to support the tyranny, death and destruction to another people, we have gone too far and God will hold us morally accountable. It goes against all our cherished American principles that we hold dear. Most every politically active Ethiopian believes that Meles Zenawi's undemocratic regime would never last without the support of the U.S government. If we continue to follow this course, we may be making a dangerous choice—particularly because we are sacrificing our own ideals and values as we sacrifice the lives of Ethiopians, a country of 77 million human beings.

We are alienating the Ethiopian people who used to call us good friends. What kind of hostilities are we creating in this strategic country on one of the chief transportation and supply routes in the Middle East? In a geo-political landscape that is shifting, can we afford to discard the people and embrace the man responsible for their terror and tyranny, suppressing the peoples' efforts to democratically change their leadership?

Ethiopia is boiling under the surface and for the U.S to choose to side against freedom, democracy, peace and justice, can only be a foolish decision in the long-run, particularly because the prospects for regime change, via armed violence, is increasing daily as the desperation and the anger of the people increases. Internal decisions of the EPRDF, such as the recent life sentences of the Opposition leaders, only further intensifies the outrage and despite the recent remarks from the U.S State Department against the sentencing, the U.S is perceived by many Ethiopians to be part of a staged drama that will culminate in pardons in exchange for the leaders giving up their rights for political involvement—further repression of democracy!

Ethiopian people are becoming increasingly cynical about U.S motives and it is only further tarnishing the image of the U.S amongst them. This is certainly not good for future U.S-Ethiopian relations once this regime comes to an end. Instead, our current U.S foreign policy in Ethiopia, accompanied by our funding of it, could breed more hatred and terrorism towards the U.S—something we are using Ethiopia to fight against in our War on Terror in Somalia. Let us re-examine our foreign policies towards Ethiopia and rethink what we are doing before we lose a more strategic ally than the Meles regime—the 77 million people of Ethiopia.

This is why we are coming to you in the U.S Senate. The founding fathers of America were wise when they separated the powers of government. Many in the Congress have been working hard on a bill, HR#2003, to exert pressure on the Ethiopian government to make progress towards halting the human rights crimes and building up democracy and the rule of law; however, the Senate also can make a difference—before it is too late to recover our threatened relationship with the people of Ethiopia.

We hope to find common ground between the interests of Americans and the interests of Ethiopians so that the children of Ethiopia can be in true partnership with the children of the United States, a partnership based on mutual respect, honesty and integrity rather than participating in the deception, repression and destruction of a society. Americans have the responsibility to not leave a legacy of damaged relations, hate and anger, but instead one of friendship and the appreciation of God-given universal values that should apply to all, not just to us in the U.S and a few other selected, privileged and powerful few! We urge the U.S Senate to hold up the values and principles of the American people by protecting human life and not being party to its wanton destruction in Ethiopian society.

A recent article that appeared in AllAfrica News gives credence to plans for a continued close relationship between the governments of the U.S and Ethiopia. With that, it brings into question whether our future U.S foreign policies will advance the repression of the people or their liberation. The article reports that plans are underway to build the largest U.S building in all of Africa on the current grounds of the American Embassy in Addis Ababa—a new 140 million dollar building, along with a 100 million dollar embassy in neighboring Djibouti. This is a huge investment in the Horn. Interestingly, the design will supposedly depict a ship, quite confusing since this might be flaunting a very sore point with the Ethiopian public who blame Meles for Ethiopia becoming landlocked when he allowed Eritrea to become a separate country from Ethiopia in 1994.

Why would such a design be chosen? Is this some symbol of promises made between government heads for something in the future that would even further cement the tight relationship the U.S has with this totalitarian government of Meles? Is some access to the gulf being planned? For instance, war is going on in Somalia now and there are rumors of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, curiously, both of which have access to the gulf. Is some deal in the works?

In addition, no location has yet been made public for the proposed U.S plans for an African Command site on the continent, but the investment in this building, raises questions as to whether Ethiopia might be the planned country for its location. It is certainly in a strategic location, but I am concerned, that if that is the case, what positive or negative effect will it have on the current oppression of the Ethiopian public and the cause of freedom and democracy?

The Ethiopian people cannot tolerate such oppression forever and some reports coming out of the country indicate that the current political situation is a powder keg. What happens to this investment if the crumbling veneer of stability, held in place by brutal controls rather than by repair and restoration, breaks into pieces? Would it not be better to strengthen and reinforce the pillars of democracy, human rights and justice that could bear the weight needed to build a sustainable foundation of peace, harmony and stability in Ethiopia that could benefit not only Ethiopia, but also others in the Horn of Africa and even in greater Africa?

In light of all of this, we urge the U.S Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, in particular Senator Joseph Biden and the Minority leaders, Senator Richard Lugar, to set up a hearing on Ethiopia to delve more deeply into these matters of utmost concern to Ethiopians and Americans. The Secretary of State, Condoleeza Rice and the Ambassador to Ethiopia, Donald Yamamoto could be invited to attend.

There are many Ethiopian Americans, Ethiopians and other experts who could also come and testify, including the Chairman of the Commission of Inquiry of the massacre of the protestors who, along with others on the commission, now have sought asylum in the U.S and in Europe. They refused to change the true findings in the case to please the Ethiopian ruling government and their lives were threatened as a result. There are many others like him. They are heroes of freedom who are standing up against tyranny and injustice.

At such a time as this, Americans are being put to the test as to whether we still stand by the principles established by our founding fathers. Are we people only of rhetoric or people of moral courage, willing to speak for truth, justice, equality and freedom of others, not only ourselves? Our actions today towards Ethiopia, in the Horn and in greater Africa, will affect the future children and grandchildren of America as well as of Africa. May you in the Senate take non-partisan action to prove that American values and ideals are still strong, being vigilant to turn them over intact to the next generation of Americans.

As President George Bush said in his speech at the dedication of the memorial of victims of communism in Albania, "... freedom is the gift of our Creator, freedom is the birthright of all humanity, and in the end, freedom will prevail...by remaining steadfast in freedom's cause, we will ensure that a future American president does not have to stand in a place like this and dedicate a memorial to the millions killed by radicals and extremists in the 21st Century. We need to hold ourselves accountable for our words.

May God help us to be people of virtue, integrity, compassion and justice.

“Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and establishes a town by crime! Has not the LORD Almighty determined that the people’s labor is only fuel for the fire, that the nations exhaust themselves for nothing?” Habakkuk 2:12-13

Respectfully yours,



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