



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Remembering Reverend, James Edward Orange: The Dream for Justice Lives On in Us!

February 23, 2008

On February 16, 2008, Reverend, James Orange, a great civil rights leader and a top aide to Martin Luther King, Jr., died in Atlanta, Georgia. Rev. James Orange, chair of the Africa/African American Renaissance Festival. Hired by the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as one of the first field staffers, Orange was instrumental in mobilizing youth throughout the civil rights movement, making a significant impact on the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

In his death, Ethiopians are among the countless others who will mourn the loss of a great friend and advocate of justice, love and respect for all people! He stood up for the Ethiopian people in their time of great need, even organizing a candlelight prayer vigil in Atlanta for the release of the Ethiopian opposition leaders and political prisoners in 2007.

As is true of great man of faith, passion and calling, his impact on the world around him carries on and will not die at his passing. He has touched and inspired many and I am one of them!

I first met Reverend Orange in January of 2007 when he and other African-American and civil rights leaders reached out to the Ethiopian Diaspora by organizing International Human Rights Symposium in Atlanta surrounding the observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

I was privileged to have been given the opportunity to participate in the symposium at Ebenezer Church, to help lay a wreath on the tomb of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and his wife, Coretta King, to march with Reverend Orange, civil rights leaders and thousands of other people and finally to stand before them to speak to them about the injustice going on to their brothers and sisters of Africa.

During that time, I had the opportunity to have numerous meaningful conversations with Reverend Orange about human rights and injustice around the world. It was then that I learned what a great man he was. That time together impacted me and my work with the Anuak Justice Council, an Ethiopian human rights organization that began after the Ethiopian government massacre of Anuak in 2003. Through this, we built a friendship and he became a mentor, a role model and encourager to me to carry on the human rights work, assuring me that things can be changed despite the obstacles in the way.

Reverend Orange was a genuine believer in God—a real man of faith and a strong man of prayer. Before doing anything, he prayed. He told me, “Even if it looks impossible, God can make it possible. He said, “The problem of Africa, with all its misery and suffering, looks like it cannot be changed—that it is beyond ourselves—but, God can change Africa!”

He told me that the problems of Africa would never be conquered through ethnic hatred and division. Instead, he said that Africa needed people to teach love, respect and care for each other if Africa was going to escape its misery.

He said I was already on the journey and that I was now ‘on duty’ or ‘called’ to speak up for the suffering of everyone wherever I saw it. However, he cautioned me to never go forward without praying first for God’s help, but then to not be afraid of the challenges or the difficulties ahead.

We Ethiopians know we have never needed these words more than just now when we are so divided and overcome with discouragement. Even though this great human rights champion is gone now, he has left us with this vision of being your neighbor's keeper—a protector of all human kind. We now have a job to do and it is up to the living to carry on until our time on earth comes to an end as well.

Rev. Orange knew how to pass on to others the “dream” of justice and equality of all people. He grounded it on his firm belief that God created all men and women in His image, making them all precious children of God. His message of wisdom, his great reliance on God and his enormous capacity to love and forgive will live on in those many others, like myself, African-Americans, Americans, Ethiopians, Africans and all human beings to whom he reached out to encourage, guide and support all over the world. Reverend Orange has shown the world how to be a real neighbor to those close and far.

Reverend Orange probably never anticipated that what he helped start along with Martin Luther King, Jr and other civil rights leaders would lead him to reach not only across America, but across the ocean to deal with the apartheid system in South Africa, the human rights abuses in the Horn of Africa, the injustice throughout the entire continent of Africa as well as to other places of injustice in this world. May we honor his memory by following his example.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5: 17)

Let our sympathy be with his wife, children, grandchildren and friends as they lay his body to rest today Saturday, February 23, 2008, in Atlanta, GA.

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You can get in touch with Obang Metho by email at: obang@anuakjustice.org



The Rev. James Orange and Obang Metho, left, pray after helping to lay a wreath at the tombs of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr and his wife Coretta Scott King at the King Center for non-violent Social Change Friday, Jan. 12, 2007, in Atlanta. Officials and civil rights leaders urged Americans to spend the King holiday, coming up Monday, making real his vision of racial equality. (AP Photo/John Bazemore)

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