



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Un-elected Gambella Governor: The Choice is Yours--Exploitation or Apology?

May 30, 2008

The Anuak Justice Council wishes to make it known that the Director of International Advocacy, Mr. Obang Metho, will not be attending the meeting with un-elected and illegitimate Omot Obang Olum in Minneapolis on Saturday, May 31, 2008 or in Calgary, Canada on June 7, 2008 because it is not seen to be a legitimate venue to address the human rights crimes committed against his own people, the Anuak, over the last ten years.

The AJC is open to a genuine dialogue in the future under a legitimate structure that would include truth and accountability for crimes committed against the Anuak and other Ethiopians. We have been working for over four years to bring truth, justice and reconciliation and see this meeting to be a likely obstruction to that process.

We would caution any attendees to be aware that your participation in the meeting may be manipulated to the advantage of the current oppressive regime of the un-elected and illegitimate Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi, who continues to perpetrate similar crimes elsewhere in the country and into Somalia.

Instead, in the last weeks, Mr. Metho and the AJC have been working hard to stop un-elected Governor Omot Obang Olum from entering the United States as he is named as a prime suspect in the massacre of 424 Anuak leaders on December 13-15, 2003 and included countless human rights crimes against the Anuak that preceded as well as followed the genocide---extra-judicial killings, disappearances, rape, beatings, torture, detentions and the arrest of many political prisoners, some which still remain incarcerated.

In actions meant to silence opposition in 2002, he is named as being responsible for the five years of false imprisonment of the former governor and 45 Anuak leaders. Many refugees in Sudan, Kenya and elsewhere still are fearful to return to Gambella.

The United States has policies about admitting such criminal suspects and we are doing our best to warn them and to provide all the supporting documentation, of which there is a significant amount from highly credible sources such Human Rights Watch, Genocide Watch, Survivors' Rights International and the International Human Rights Clinic at Harvard University.

We are also attempting to arrange for news coverage of the event should Governor Olum be given admittance into the United States.

We strongly contend that the evidence against him regarding committing crimes against humanity, should be heard in a court of law, not in a tightly controlled meeting that will steer clear of these primary, but volatile issues.

The wounds from the Anuak are still bleeding. Simply covering over these wounds will not heal them. A genuine process of healing and reconciliation must include truth and justice, but it is extremely unlikely that first steps towards such an outcome would be undertaken. Why is this?

It is clear from the last meeting on April 26th when an advance team of Gambella's EPRDF team came to Minnesota to meet with the Anuak, that the purpose of the meeting was to sway people to forget about the past and to instead, work with the government.

This meeting is not expected to be any different in repressing the truth and strongly avoiding the heart of the problem—the genocide and other human rights crimes. The last meeting was tightly controlled and questions regarding the genocide of Anuak leaders and the countless human rights crimes committed were not answered. Misinformation was given regarding development that we know to be untrue.

The Anuak attendees' hopes that there might be some admission of wrongdoing from these government delegates, leading to a genuine dialogue, were dashed. Instead, the Anuak listened to propaganda—mostly in Amharic—and had no real opportunity to ask the questions that were most on their minds.

As to be expected, simply coming to the meeting was interpreted in the Ethiopian media as Anuak support for the government. This was later evidenced on the website controlled by the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Walta information, where they reported four to five times more people attending the Minneapolis meeting than actually did and reported that the Anuak in the Diaspora were now willing to move ahead to work with the government.

However, this does not mean that un-elected Governor Omot Obang Olum could not publicly take the higher ground and admit to his wrongdoing. Anuak would love to be so surprised—if it were deemed honest and sincere. Former President of Ethiopia, Mr. Negassa Gidada did so before the Oromo Community meeting in front of many hundreds of his fellow Ethiopians last summer. The effect was overwhelming due to this unexpected confession and is still rippling through the community as an example of accepting responsibility for one's choices. If Governor Olum would do this, it might be the opening to forgiveness.

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.
(Proverbs 28:13)

If he does so and wants to meet or if the Ethiopian government in Gambella or in Addis Ababa genuinely seeks a dialogue to address the genocide, human rights crimes, the destruction of property and reparations, the Anuak Justice Council should be officially invited to do so. However, justice for the Anuak will not be sustainable until there is justice throughout every region of Ethiopia and we will not rest until that time comes—God willing for God is our only real hope and deliverer! May He open the way!

“Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.”
(Proverbs 19:21)

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