



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Obang Metho's Message to Ethiopian Muslim Leaders

Badr 8th Annual Conference in Toronto, Canada

"Challenges and Opportunities for Ethiopian Muslims as Advocates for Human Rights in Ethiopia: Ethiopia Needs You!"

July 25, 2008

Assalamu alaikum wa rahmatu Allah wa barakatuh - -Peace be onto you!

I want to express my deep gratitude for giving me the opportunity to offer you some words of encouragement at your conference entitled: Ethiopian Muslims': Challenges and Opportunities. I regret not being able to be with you in person to get to know you better and to affirm your important role in Ethiopian society, but hopefully, I will have that pleasure in the future.

First of all, I am excited that this conference will provide an opportunity to Ethiopian Muslims to consider the contributions that Ethiopian Muslims have made to creating a unique environment in Ethiopia where Muslims, Christians and Jews have lived in harmony for centuries as well as to consider the challenges and opportunities ahead and consider what you could do about them.

May Allah/God bless this conference, giving wisdom, peace, truth and courage to you so that those blessings might overflow to bless our nation, Africa and the world. As it says in your holy book, the Qur'an and similarly in the holy Bible: [1:5-6] **"Thee do we serve and thee do we beseech for help. Keep us on the right path."**

I know this event is covering many relevant topics: Islamic history, Ethiopian Islamic faith and identity, health-related issues, current affairs and youth issues. Inter-related to all of these is something I would encourage you to seriously focus on something that is close to my heart and passionately believe in and that is human rights.

For those who do not know me, my name is Obang Metho and I am the Director of International Advocacy for the Anuak Justice Council, a small human rights organization. I have been involved in human rights ever since December of 2003 when Anuak—my own ethnic group—were massacred in a genocide perpetrated by Ethiopian National Defense Forces and some militia groups in Gambella, Ethiopia. The Anuak, as a tiny minority group, had no voice and their pain, suffering and misery was ignored by most everyone other than fellow Anuak.

As I attempted to advocate for them in the international community, I became keenly aware of the suffering of many other Ethiopians undergoing similar injustices, human rights abuses and oppression. As I did, I realized that until justice comes to all Ethiopians, justice would not come to the Anuak. I realized that until freedom came to all Ethiopians, freedom would not come to the Anuak and I realized that until the human rights of all Ethiopians were respected, the human rights of the Anuak would not be respected. That is why I am now speaking out for all Ethiopians regardless of ethnicity, culture, regional background, religion or gender and it is the reason I am sending this statement to you.

Right now there are human rights atrocities going on in the Afar region, in Oromia, in the Benishangul-Gumuz region, in the Southern Nations and especially severely in the Ogaden and into Somalia. These are not just violations of human rights, they are violations of Allah/God's law and principles and people who

fear Allah/God and value human life, should show that they care about such injustice through their actions.

When the Anuak were killed, no one spoke out. It is now our chance to speak out for those now suffering in our country. If someone is wounded at the side of the road, we should not first ask the wounded person if they are from the same tribe, region, culture or religion before we help them.

I am a strong Christian believer who believes our faith should influence the way we live in everyday life—for the little problems and the deep crises. I believe you would agree with me. Ethiopia is now in such a deep crisis and it is worsening to the point it may explode. How can we be part of the solution?

Our people are suffering from the north to the south and from the east to the west due to gross human rights violations and related humanitarian crises like in the Ogaden, which has been called “**a silent Darfur.**” Ethiopians are starving due to crop failures from drought as well as due to corruption, human rights violations, mismanagement, denial of the problem and the lack of good government. People of faith should be at the forefront of intervening for the good of the people. Our people are being wounded and are lying on the side of the road. We cannot ignore their plight.

Ethiopian religious leaders have a critical role to play in confronting these human rights crimes and by helping those in need. In Ethiopia, Muslims and Christians are the two dominant religious groups, each making up approximately 50% of the population. If there is one thing I would like to accomplish today through this message to you is to encourage Ethiopian Muslim leaders and Ethiopian followers of Allah to take a courageous moral stand for freedom, human rights, justice, equality and the rule of law for all Ethiopians. If we compromise what we believe, we may be judged later not for our actions, but for our inactions.

Human rights is founded on the fact that all human kind are representative of Allah or God—that includes the Oromo, the Tigrayan, the Amhara, the Afar, the Ogadeni, the Anuak and all of the eighty different ethnic groups in Ethiopia. It means the rich and the poor, the uneducated and the educated, the Muslim and the non-believers, the TPLF and the non-TPLF. As it is written in the Qur’an, when a person sheds blood of another human being, it is taken as that person is killing all human kind because human life is so precious.

Allah loves all of those He has created. That means there is no 99.9% human. Every human being is 100% human and is precious in the sight of Allah. What does this mean for those of us who are people of faith, wanting to live righteous lives in submission to Allah in Ethiopia or as Ethiopians in the Diaspora?

For many centuries, Ethiopia has been so unique in Africa and in the world because of the way Muslims, Christians and Jews have lived in such a peaceful manner as close neighbors to each other, including their frequent intermarriage. Ethiopian Orthodox priests and Ethiopian Muslim imams have shared buildings or only been separated by a fence in many places throughout Ethiopia.

However, today, some politicians are using religion to advance their own self-serving political agendas such as Meles claiming to be fighting a war on terror when he is terrorizing his own people. They purposely create division and hatred between different groups of people to gain power or access to support and even religious groups have fallen victim to this at times. We must clean out our mosques, churches, hearts and minds of anything that is not honoring to Allah.

As it says in the Qur’an, **[49:13] O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).**

For instance, until Meles came to power, there was not a history of such a thing as a Muslim killing Christians or Christians killing Muslims in Ethiopia. But now Meles is justifying his attacks on Muslim civilians in the Ogaden and Somalia by claiming to be searching for terrorists. As he does, some, but not all, within the Ethiopian military are agents of destruction and are attacking Muslim civilians, including women and children, with impunity. Women are being raped and homes, cattle and crops destroyed. This is morally outrageous and we should be speaking out loudly with one voice.

Preceding the December invasion of Somalia, incidents of violence were set up to look like religious violence between Muslims and Christians in the Oromia region. However, I personally spoke to witnesses of those tragic incidents and they reported that they were able to identify some of the perpetrators and knew them to be Meles supporters, members of the military and some security forces who were behind the violence in order to make it appear like religious conflict. Such conflict was used as a pretense to attack Somalia.

As a Christian, I was personally outraged by these injustices against my fellow Ethiopian and Somalian Muslim brothers and sisters and did my best to expose this deception in an article you can find on our website:<http://www.anuakjustice.org/061101PlanToDivideMuslimsAndChristians.htm>. Or <http://www.anuakjustice.org/070525EthiopianReligiousLeadersCallOurPeopleToPrayer.htm>

It should not matter what religious background in order to speak up for justice. For example, since the massacre of the Anuak, many Ethiopians have come forward to personally express their support. This includes my Ogadeni, Afar and Oromo Muslim brothers and sisters.

We Ethiopians must take purposeful action to educate others within our faith so Ethiopians do not fall for this deception purposely planned to overpower us by stirring up dissension between religious groups. We will not easily fall into this trap if Muslim leaders such as you who are here today stand up for truth, justice and right and if we look at the lessons of history like in the former Yugoslavia.

That is one reason I am so happy that you have organized a Muslim organization that can positively affect Ethiopia by reclaiming the historical legacy of living in harmony. Not only that, but the fact that this organization is for all Ethiopians who are Muslim, regardless of ethnicity, cultural background or political views, makes a very strong statement to others who refuse to work together simply because they might come from a different background. From what I have heard, those of you attending have come from all over Ethiopia and from many different countries in the Diaspora. What an accomplishment!

We Ethiopians can be one family with diverse parts and personalities—a garden of Ethiopia with many flowers of varying color, shape and size. Differences in religion—should it be Muslim, Christian, Jewish, traditional religion or atheist—should not make us enemies. We should be able to work together for a better Ethiopia for our children. As you gather here, you are in a position to pass on this belief and I encourage you to start immediately to pass it on to others when you return home.

As it says in the Qur'an, Muslims, Christians and Jews all have the same roots in the Allah/God of the Torah.[2:136] **Say: 'We believe in Allah and that which is sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Moses and Jesus and the Prophets from their Lord. We do not differentiate between any of them, and to Him we are submissive (Muslims).**

We are our brother's keeper. It says it in the Qur'an as well as in the Scriptures that we are to protect the weak, the widows and the orphans and to practice justice and benevolence. We are to speak truth, give

mercy, administer justice and reach out in love towards one another. If someone becomes filled with hate and anger and wants to become radical, educate them on how this could poison the future of Ethiopia.

We do not want to become like Nigeria where one kills another and then the other retaliates in an endless cycle of violence. We do not want such hatred to break up our families and society. Instead, Ethiopian people of faith who show other Africans and the world how to live together in peace will become a mighty river of blessings to the world and an example for others to follow. As it says in the Qur'an, **[49:9] If two parties of believers fight, reform between them. If either of them is insolent against the other, fight the insolent one till they revert to the order of Allah. If they revert, reform between them with justice, and weigh with justice. Allah loves those who weigh with justice.**

The order of Allah/God gives value to human beings and that it is why He **“loves those who weigh with justice.”** It is for Ethiopians to defend one another regardless of faith. If someone is prejudiced against others, help correct their views. You do not have to be a Muslim to defend a Muslim or a Christian to defend a Christian. Neither do you have to be an Anuak to defend Anuak, an Amhara to defend Amhara or an Oromo to defend Oromo. Ethiopia is a nation for everyone. It is a home where we extend hospitality to not just our family, neighbors and kin, but to the wayfarer.

Meles and his EPRDF are trying to steal the real Ethiopia from us and make us to be divided. How can we stop him from breaking up our families and keeping future generations in bondage? We can stop him by loving our neighbor as ourselves. We can do it by refusing to tolerate hate, corruption, injustice, genocide, greed, lies or doing nothing. As it says in the Qur'an, **[2:263] “Kind speech and forgiveness is better than charity followed by injury; and Allah is Self-sufficient, Forbearing.”**

The anti-slavery movement in Britain, as well as the civil rights movement in America, were both grounded in Biblical principles that sprung out of the churches.

Malcolm X emerged with the message of justice and equality from the Muslim community and led African-Americans to arise and struggle for equality, civil rights and justice.

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. fearlessly spoke out about peaceably breaking down the walls of prejudice and discrimination through following the teachings of Jesus.

Ghandi promoted a non-violent struggle for freedom in India using principles from various different religious sources that instructed his people not to take revenge as he said, “taking an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth would leave the world blind and toothless.”

Humility and a lack of hatred for his oppressors led Nelson Mandela to free his people from the evil apartheid system without destroying the society.

The Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet recently led a non-violent struggle for freedom, equality and justice of his people.

All of these examples point to Allah/God as having created a yearning in the human soul for freedom. At times like these, such freedom may come at great personal cost.

The people of Ethiopia are looking for such courageous leadership from their religious leaders as the pressures around them increase to go the wrong way. In the Qur'an it says: **[4:27] “And Allah desires that He should turn to you (mercifully), and those who follow (their) lusts desire that you should deviate (with) a great deviation.”**

There is a battle taking place in the hearts of people between following Allah/God and following the pressures of the world. In our case, we have to refuse to give in to becoming part of a system of tyranny. May the esteemed teachers among you interpret this verse for us as a needed lesson for us at such a time as this.

Our mosques and churches are where Ethiopians are looking for teaching on how to live righteous and loving lives in a world that is polluted with evil or the failure to care about others. Many of the more fortunate in our society believe they can ignore the poor, weak and oppressed without sympathy, but this is not the way of the genuine believer. We are all precious children of Allah and He sees and knows all and His ear is especially open to those who cry out to Him in need. Let us also listen to those cries that Allah/God hears and have generous compassion towards them.

In the Qur'an it says:[3: 92] **“By no means shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love; and whatever thing you spend, Allah surely knows it.**

Ethiopian Muslims could make a tremendous difference in our country during these very difficult times. Can you imagine what would happen if out of this conference came a movement to reach out to Muslims throughout Ethiopia to stand up for human rights, justice, democracy and freedom?

Can you imagine the impact Ethiopian Muslims would have if out of this time together emerged a movement to call together a conference for religious leaders from all different faith backgrounds—Muslim, Ethiopian Orthodox, Jews, evangelicals, traditionalists and others—to work together in advancing these goals within Ethiopia for a **New Ethiopia**?

We would invite you to be part of our call for a **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia**. The faith community is essential to bring reconciliation and lasting peace to our country and the Horn of Africa.

We should not be afraid to influence the future of our country as people of faith. We are not saying that the faith community should be the government, but people of integrity should shape the government and hold it accountable.

On the other hand, government should not intimidate, control or prevent the religious community from doing its job—leading people to live righteously, not just inside the mosque or church but outside it as well.

Meles and his EPRDF government has succeeded in some places in controlling the Muslim and Christian leaders from doing their jobs through fear tactics, bribes, intimidation and manipulation because they know that faith can be a mighty obstacle against injustice. They are more afraid of moral courage and truth than of physical courage and insults. In doing so, they are pressuring leaders and believers to not live out their faith according to the Qur'an and the Bible.

Faith cannot be forced into cooperating with an unjust system—sometimes by intimidating it into silence—or it loses its genuineness and becomes worthless in affecting a life or society. Both the Bible and the Qur'an condemn belief that is not freely given to Allah/God because it is meaningless if it is not sincerely believed and lived out. In the Qur'an it says: [2:256] **“There is no compulsion in religion....”**

In the teachings of Jesus he warns that believers should not lose their “saltiness” in flavoring and preserving what is good and right in society, regardless of the costs. If more people lived by the principles

in the Bible and in the Qur'an, many of our societal problems would improve and there would be much greater respect and love between people.

Ethiopians will always be a diverse people with diverse cultures and beliefs. If Ethiopia is to be their home, where they and their children are to live and flourish, we must learn how to live together and Ethiopian Muslim religious leaders are needed to help.

I hope you will take the initiative to help your own followers as well as to invite other people of faith to join together to reclaim the legacy of harmony we have enjoyed for years. We need your contribution in rebuilding our broken society and healing our wounded hearts.

This is a critical time for us if we are to survive as a people and as a nation. This is the challenge and opportunity of our time and we cannot wait for others to do it or ignore the warning signs because the road ahead is long and difficult and without the help of Allah/God, working through His people, we will never succeed.

If Ethiopian Muslims can lead the way in such peace-making, they will be teaching others in the world a precious lesson of history in the making that will tear down the ignorance and prejudices of society about Muslims and free our societies to live in peace.

May Allah/God find us faithful to Him in all that we do and may He bring peace, justice, freedom, morality and most of all—the fear and love of God—to our beloved country of Ethiopia!

May Allah/God because of His great mercy and love, give courage, wisdom, strength and blessings to Ethiopian Muslims as you seek to meet the challenges and opportunities of today and of tomorrow!

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

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