



**ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL**  
*Justice, Peace and Freedom*

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**Ethiopians, Speak Out for Your Fellow Ethiopians!**  
**No One is Free until We All are Free!**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**August 27, 2008**

Ethnically-based killing has now erupted in the city of Hagere-Mariam, first starting in the small town of Soyama, sixty kilometers to the west of Hagere-Mariam in the Sidamo region of Ethiopia. Reports I am receiving from people on the ground indicate that the Burji, a tiny ethnic group in the region numbering less than 50,000, are being targeted by some Guji, a much larger ethnic group, numbering over two million, who also live in the area. The local administration in Hagere-Mariam is run by the ethnic Guji.

Despite the vulnerability of the Burji, many are asking questions about the Meles government's possible role in condoning the violence as they have done little to intervene in the face of increasing tensions and threats. According to the reports from witnesses in the area, some Guji are threatening to murder any Burji they find, even warning those from other ethnic groups to place signs or symbols designating them to be of "non-Burji ethnicity" in front of their homes so that they will not be mistaken for a Burji and be killed. Does this remind you of Rwanda?

These two ethnic groups have fought in the past, since the time of Haile Selassie, but reportedly, the Guji are being unfairly favored and empowered by the Meles government who have given them administrative authority in Hagere-Mariam, the main commercial center in the region. As part of this preferential treatment, it is alleged that the Guji have been able to take the offensive against the Burji with impunity. Many also suspect that the TPLF government has equipped the Guji with the sophisticated weapons they are using against the Burji. For instance, on August 25, 2008, a grenade was thrown on a house in Hagere-Mariam by the Guji. There were about 30 people in the building, including women and children who took refuge there for fear of violence. The bomb exploded on the roof of the building and did not penetrate, thereby sparing the lives of those victims!

According to some Burji, the conflict has its roots in the Guji's desire to claim the town of Soyama, known for its fertile land, as their capital. Currently, the town's inhabitants are almost exclusively Burji and they have been "told" to leave Soyama for the small town of their same name—Burji.

The attacks allegedly began at 6:00 AM on August 10, 2008 when 60 truckloads of well-armed Guji, with allegedly sophisticated weapons, attacked the Burji of Soyama. However, apparently the Burji had received advance word of the imminent attack and despite their fewer numbers and weapons, were prepared and successfully held them off. During the fighting, it was reported that three Burji and five Guji were killed. When these Guji attackers returned to the very ethnically-mixed city of Hagere-Mariam, home to 200,000 people, they began their death-threats towards Burji living in the city. It is now clear to those on the ground that this campaign of ethnic cleansing is being conducted with the tacit support of the local administrators and security officials in Hagere-Mariam!

After the Burji appealed to the local government for help, instead of the government taking a powerful approach, controlling or disarming the perpetrators and becoming a fair and impartial referee between the two groups, they have essentially aligned with the Guji.

They have failed to hold the perpetrators accountable and have instead “escorted” Burji men, women and children from their homes, land, property, cattle and crops as they hurriedly leave everything behind to run for their lives. As they seek safety, they are sure to encounter the overwhelming costs of being internally displaced refugees— deprivation, disease, hardship and some deaths because of these things.

Fortunately, due to the efforts of some, the news got out to the German Ethiopian radio station who reported on the conflict along with condemning the government for its lack of constructive intervention. The situation calmed down for a short while, but the Burji’s fears of further violence continue to drive them from their homes.

This past Friday, Burji elders went to Addis Ababa to hand-deliver a letter, a copy of which we have in our possession, to Meles describing the seriousness of the situation and asking for immediate intervention. They were road-blocked. Officials from the Prime Minister’s office reportedly told them that hand-delivered letters would not be accepted due to security concerns. Instead, they were instructed to mail the letter which they did, but they received no response.

The Burji elders then went to the office of the Ethiopian Minister of Justice and hand-delivered the letter there indicating that they had not heard any response from the Prime Minister’s office. The letter was read by some of the Minister’s staff who responded by referring them back to the office of the Prime Minister. After again going to the Prime Minister’s office, they were told that their office staff would look into it. They have not heard anything since.

In the meantime, people in Hagere-Mariam report there are simmering tensions with many fearing that the issue could explode at any moment. Some Guji continue to tell non-Burji to put up identifying symbols in front of their homes to avoid imminent violence, yet the government’s lack of response is fueling the fire.

This is not the first time some of the Guji have attacked another ethnic group in the region with the appearance of Woyane support and Woyane immunity. In 2006, similar attacks were perpetrated by some of the Guji against the Borena.

Ken Silverstein of the Harper online magazine, reports about this situation in his August 2, 2006 article named, “**Ethiopian Generals and Somali Warlords.**” In it he gives reasons to believe that the Meles government is backing Guji attacks against the Borena. He states:

*There's also trouble in Southern Oromiya Province, where violence broke out this spring between the Guji and Borena clans. When the Ethiopian government, keen to secure access to the potential income stream from a gold mine in the Borena Zone, put the mine under the control of the Guji, a group it has historically favored in the region, fighting ensued, and the government aided the Guji. Sources in the region said that the violence continues and that the province is now in the throes of a major humanitarian crisis. More than 100,000 people are reported to have fled their homes.*

One Ethiopian reported to me about an article documenting the history of the TPLF government’s failure to act on previous aggressive actions by some Guji towards other small ethnic groups in the area where some, not all, Guji took control of towns after driving out some of these smaller groups—such as the Gedeo, the Gabra, the Borena and the Amaro—from their homes.

He states, “Unfortunately, as the article points out, for the past misdeeds, particularly with the Gedeo situation as you can read, they plundered unimpeded and the Federal government took no action to correct the injustice that was dealt to Gedeo people.”

He goes on to conclude that unless these aggressive actions of EPDRF- favored groups against more vulnerable groups are “brought to light and publicized to the whole world, thereby pressuring the Federal government to take decisive action, we are at the precipice of an impending blood bath.”

This has been the pattern of the EPDRF government—to divide groups based on ethnic lines, favoring one over the other and sometimes, like in the case this time, where they have sided with the majority group. This is who they are. The divide and conquer, apartheid-style policies, are the way the TPLF have been known to operate since they came to power in 1991.

It is like what happened between the Anuak and other ethnic groups in the Gambella area. It is also similar to what happened between Muslims and Christians a year ago in the Jimma area when TPLF sympathizers attacked either the Christians or the Muslims in the name of the other in order to foment conflict and to set the rationale for the invasion of Somalia. Recently, it happened between some Oromo and some from the Gumuz ethnic group. Many other examples exist and the reader may know of others less well-known.

We need to persuade groups like the Guji that they are being used and that the same snake that is coxing them to believe they can get away with such aggression is the same snake that will turn around and strike them when they least expect it. They cannot flourish in such an Ethiopia. Those of us who can see through this manipulative and deadly game, must speak out to tell Ethiopians what is going on so they are not tempted to become a survival tool for the TPLF. It is now time for every Ethiopian to speak out against the sabotage of our own society.

No one group will be free until we are all free. All Ethiopians must speak for each other, not only for our own ethnic group but for our people everywhere. When their human rights are violated, ours are violated. When something is going on in your local areas, it is up to those in the area to speak up. If you are unable to speak out within Ethiopia, call those in the Diaspora with your carefully documented information, just like the people who called me at 4:00 AM direct from Hagere-Mariam in Ethiopia. Ethiopians must become aware that we will all benefit from establishing a strong multi-ethnic, Pan-Ethiopian institution that can speak for everyone.

I call on any Ethiopians in a position to stop this cycle of murder, suffering and misery to confront the precursors to those crimes—hatred, greed, the desire for revenge and the dehumanization of other Ethiopians. In order to vaccinate a nation against the TPLF virus of destruction which is spread from person to person, ethnic group to ethnic group and nation to nation, we must step out of this life-consuming cycle into a society known to revere life and liberty.

Woyane know how to play “favorites” with people in various ethnic groups, getting them to do their dirty deeds against fellow Ethiopians. It may seem like you can get away with it, but no one can commit such crimes without paying the penalty in their souls. Our children, families, communities and our society may suffer and judge us for our wrongful actions at this critical time in our history or if we rise up with new passion for what is right, we will most certainly leave a legacy of blessing to our descendents.

This does not mean that there are not numerous reasons for legitimate complaints against the others, but murder, destruction and robbery will never bring peace or resolution to the problems between people so that we can move on.

Right now, the Burji are feeling very alone as they face this crisis—the same as many other groups that when targeted with violence, find no protection from their own government. Let us come together in solidarity to speak out for them. We need the concerted effort of many to make a difference and that effort should be well-organized in anticipation of such crises as the Burji are now facing.

I have personally contacted some human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and will send this press release out to the over 4000 people on my email list, but this is not enough.

In order to exert the most power and influence, we need a strong Pan-Ethiopian institution that can speak out against such violence and injustice towards any Ethiopians in our multi-ethnic society and one that also promotes tolerance between diverse ethnic and religious groups. EHRCO and others within Ethiopia have been attempting to do this despite the repression of such messages and message-givers in Ethiopia; however, after the killing of the protestors of the 2005 failed election, Ethiopians reacted by rallying throughout the world. Unfortunately, since that time, many Ethiopian groups have lost their voice and moral and political will to stand up in behalf of others.

For our voice to resound through the international community, it is time that the Ethiopians in the Diaspora rise up together in a planful and organized effort. The meeting of representatives from civic organizations that will take place this weekend in Washington D.C. is an effort to organize such an institution. We hope many will join this **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia!**

May God help us to bring justice and peace to our beloved country.

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If there is a NGO or group interested in further pursuing this, please contact us for more information.

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