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## **Senate and House Letters Demand End to Ethiopian Military Campaign Against Indigenous Civilians: Bringing Peace and Justice to the Anuak People**

### **Ask Your Senators and Representatives to Sign today**

On December 13, 2003, without warning or provocation, Ethiopian armed forces launched an attack on the indigenous population of the Gambella province. On this one day, over 424 Anuak people were massacred in Gambella town by government troops and local militia. Hundreds of educated male Anuak were sought out, targeted, and killed in cold blood. Entire villages were burnt to the ground, women were raped, and tens of thousands of Anuak (including the President of the region) were forced to flee across the border into war-torn Sudan.

Since the current Ethiopian government came to power in 1991, hundreds of Anuaks (an indigenous people of the South Eastern Gambella province) have experienced intolerable suffering and abuses of their human rights. The region has been systematically purged of native populations that the state considers racially inferior: women, children, the elderly, politicians and religious scholars of Anuak descent have been killed. If not publicly terrorized, these people have been “disappeared,” tortured, or kept in permanent isolated detention, without reason or hope of release.

The Anuak civilian casualties are mounting rapidly, and village massacres have been reported. Unapologetic, the Ethiopian government continues its program of terror and—so far—has successfully evaded accountability for crimes committed in the Gambella region. This cannot continue if the Anuak people are to survive. The United States has an obligation to do something to stop these crimes, particularly when US-supplied weapons may have been involved.

What can you do to help? The House of Representatives and the Senate will be circulating “Dear Colleague” letters regarding this ongoing tragedy. These letters condemn the military assault in Gambella, and advocate a justice initiative for the Anuak people. Call your Representative and Senators today and urge them to sign these letters! Ask to speak with the foreign affairs staff person in the office. If you don't know the names of your Senators or Representatives, go to [www.congress.org](http://www.congress.org) and enter your zip code. The names and phone numbers that you need will pop up. But if they don't, you can just dial the Congressional switchboard number is **(202) 224-3121**, and ask to speak to be connected to a particular Representative or Senator's office.

#### **Ask Senators to:**

- **Sign the Dear Colleague letter being circulated by Senators Coleman (R-MN) and Feingold (D-WI) regarding the military assault being perpetrated against Anuak in the Gambella Province.** This letter urges President Bush to inform Ethiopian authorities that the Ethiopian defense forces must respect human rights, and cease attacks and intimidation against Anuak civilians.

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It also asks the President to maintain a complete ban on weapons sales, training, foreign aid and support for the Ethiopian military until a peaceful political settlement is reached between the Anuak people and Ethiopian government. Lastly, the Senators urge that this ban be extended until all Anuak refugees who wish to return home have been repatriated, and those responsible for crimes in Gambella have been brought to trial in accordance with international standards.

As FDRE troops are believed to have fuelled much of the violence in the region, withdrawal of federal troops will be a concrete first step by the FDRE in showing that they are serious about making reparations and rebuilding trust with the Anuak. The letter expresses support for a peaceful strategy to be pursued in the conflict.

- Regarding the justice initiative for the Anuak people, the Senators' letter urges Secretary of State Powell to support international independent inquiry for the Anuak massacres. The United States should ensure that an independent inquiry is made into events from December 13 through the present. This investigation should outline precisely what happened, who is responsible, and what actions can be taken to ensure such violations do not happen again in Gambella. Such an inquiry must be truly independent, its members comprising, among others, international lawyers well-versed in human rights and humanitarian law. The investigation teams must be established as soon as possible, before information and evidence disappears, and be empowered to recommend prosecution by an international or hybrid tribunal. The U.S. must ensure that those who perpetrated rape, murder, sexual slavery, and other widespread forms of violence against Anuak men women in Gambella since December 13, 2003 are held accountable.

***Senators should contact Michelle D. Gavine of Senator Feingold's staff at (202) 224-5323 or Duc Traong of Senator Coleman's staff at (202) 224-5641 to sign on.***

#### **Ask Representatives to:**

- Sign the Dear Colleague letter which will be circulated by Representatives Royce (R-CA) and McCollum (D-MN), expressing deep concern about the Ethiopian military campaign in Gambella and major human rights abuses committed against Anuak civilians. This bipartisan letter urges President Bush and Secretary of State Powell to ask the Ethiopian government to halt all military operations against the Anuak people immediately. It advocates the use of U.S. pressure on the Ethiopian government to withdraw its defense forces from rural Gambella; to provide security for international organizations to resume operations; to provide aid for Anuak communities; to hold Ethiopian forces and militia responsible for gross human rights violations committed in Gambella; and to cooperate with U.N. efforts to investigate and prosecute crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the region. Lastly, the letter endorses U.S. support of humanitarian aid efforts to Gambella Anuak communities that will have to recover from the ethnic cleansing crisis.

***To sign on, Representatives should contact Malik Chaka of Congressman Royce's staff at 202 225-6854, or J.D. Burton of Representative Betty McCollum's staff at 202 225-6631.***

Please call your Senators and Representative today. Remember, the letters are circulating now and we have limited time to maximize the pressure! You are the key to Congressional support. Your calls do make a difference. Please let us know the results of your calls by contacting Obang Metho, Executive Director, Gambella Development Agency at gda3@sasktel.net. Thank you!

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## **Background**

*Gambella:* On December 13, 2003, Ethiopian government forces launched its largest military offensive since Gambella region was handed over to Ethiopia by the British in October 15, 1956. The government has imposed martial law and restricted access to rural areas. The Anuak civilian casualties of Ethiopian enforced "cleansing," (including children) are mounting rapidly. Over ten thousands Anuak civilians have fled their villages. Educated Anuak males, human rights monitors and nonviolent advocates have been targeted with threats, arrests, attacks, torture, and extrajudicial killing. U.S.-supplied weapons have reportedly been used in the assault.

*Justice for the Anuaks:* Ethiopian defense forces have successfully evaded accountability for crimes against humanity committed in Gambella since December 13, 2004. Primary responsibility for the genocide must rest with the Ethiopian defense forces that dominated the Ethiopian government and planned the systematic extermination and expulsion of the educated Anuak population. At ground-level, the genocide was carried out by thousands Ethiopian troops, along with ordinary Ethiopian citizens (including highlanders tribes) who saw the persecution of the Anuak as an ideal opportunity to conquer Anuak land, plunder it, rape the women, and kill the men.

The massacres, conducted by sophisticated staff officers who knew exactly what they were doing, were well organized. Ethiopian soldiers went about their work mechanically and efficiently, killing defenseless Anuaks until this killing became a habit. There is no doubt that the mass murder of Anuaks in Gambella ranks highly among the most carefully and centrally planned of modern genocides.

Commanders of Ethiopian government forces orchestrated the events: Head of Federal security Mr. Almayeu Almeru, General Commander Mr. Tesegaye Beynene, Head of the Region police Mr. Tadese Haile Selassie, Minister of Foreigner affairs employ Dr. Gebrhab Barnabas, Gambella security chief Mr. Omot Olom; Zone Justice and head of Administration Didumo Omone; and lastly, the intelligence chief General in Gambella region. The genocide and atrocities were also perpetrated by lower-ranking officers and ordinary soldiers. These "willing executioners" were fuelled by an abiding racism, especially against the Anuak minority. The attacks have been ethnic and with one group targeted: the Anuak tribe.

An Ethiopian commission of investigation in May 2004, led by Ato Kemal Bediri, President of Supreme Court and Chairman of Electoral Board, has been characterized by poorly drawn indictments, inadequate witness protection and distortions of events that took place on December 13, 2003. The Ethiopian investigation team has returned from Gambella region without meeting the survivors of genocide. According to our sources, the Ethiopian delegation only met with Ethiopian highlanders (not government military forces) regarding genocide against the Anuak community.

The Ethiopian commission's very limited mandate (representatives were in Gambella city for two days only, and never made it any other town or districts) makes a systematic accounting of the December 13, 2003 violence impossible, and ignores the many atrocities that took place outside of the mandate and prior to December 13. The alleged masterminds of the December genocide, now referred to as a "scorched earth campaign," have not been arrested or prosecuted. The Ethiopian government has completely failed to co-operate with victims and/or international human rights organizations. Thus far, nearly 100 killers have been named by survivors and eyes witness; yet Ethiopian authorities have refused to do anything to help. Indeed, the authorities are still threatening Anuaks on a regular basis.

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The genocide victims are strongly convinced that the Ethiopian government will neither investigate nor prosecute the heinous crimes committed in Gambella. Sadly, even if there were a true investigation by an independent organization, the Ethiopian government's internal judicial system is so under-resourced that prosecutions would be nearly impossible. Successful intervention by the US and international community is needed in Gambella—and remains the Anuak people's only hope.

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