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## MEMORADUM

### Meeting Notes

**Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of Gambella Development Agency Inc.**

### **Briefing to the Human Rights Caucus, The US House of Representatives.**

Wednesday, October 27, 2004

Approximately 8 people attended the briefing including Congressman Frank R. Wolf from Virginia. (I was told that he was very strong on human rights in Africa)

I gave the overview of the situation in Pochalla

- Approximately 7,000 refugees have fled from Gambella and are living in Pochalla.
- World Relief interviewed Anauk refugees and compiled testimonies (I will send you a PDF file with compiled testimonies). Testimonies paint the picture that the Ethiopian military was directly involved in the killings.
- Refugees afraid that if they return to Gambella they will be put in jail as many of their relatives are now "political prisoners."
- UNHCR doesn't have a presence in Pochalla and have not registered any of the 7,000 refugees. Reasons given were that refugees were too close to the border and UNHCR hopes they will go back.
- WFP is providing food to refugees.
- There are no signs that the refugees are arming themselves to go back to Gambella and fight.
- Refugees need food and health services. There are no schools in the area so they are trying to organize schooling. I'm planning to go Pochalla in the next three weeks to organize the classes and the UNICEF will fund the trip.
- Pochalla is a sparsely populated area, there are no roads and the soil is relatively fertile. Refugees are growing maize, sorghum, and sugar.

### **Concerns**

- Refugees need adequate assistance in the short-term.
- There needs to be a resolution to the killing in Gambella in order for refugees to return to Gambella.
- Keep pressure on Sudanese Gov't regarding the North-South peace process. Darfur conflict is reducing pressure on the government to maintain the peace process in the North-South. If the process deteriorates, this could affect the refugees in Pochalla.
- WFP response not adequate but enough that people are not starving. Receiving grain and wheat and some lentils.
- Not clear what is being done, if anything, by the Ethiopian government to help refugees return home.

I did not have a good assessment of the situation in Gambella so I gave an overview based on what Oxfam has been saying to date: 50,000 IDPs; people sitting under trees; Oxfam helping 1,500 people but more needs to be done; USAID said that they are in a position to move supplies and help IDPs but need security ok from UN in order to do an assessment of the needs of the population; and gave an overview of the political situation.

### **Questions/Comments**

- Congress man Frank. R. Wolf from Virginia- wanted to know if there was a dialogue and confidence building between Ethiopian government and the refugees so that they can return home.
- Mr. Wolf went on to say that understandably there is a fixation on Darfur but the situation in Gambella seems like it could be resolved and needs our attention.
- Some refugees are reported to be in Kenya as well.
- Ethiopia government is concerned about bad publicity.
- Mr. Wolf will talk to the State Department about where things currently stand in Gambella.
- Ethiopia provides many of the peacekeepers needed in conflicts on the continent, but at the same time have a horrible human rights record.
- Mr. Wolf said that he will be contacting the State Dept and will write a letter to the Ethiopian government to ensure immediate access for humanitarian agencies and independent human Rights monitors and Journalists.
- Mr. Wolf said he will ask the US mission to the UN to press the UN to asses the security situation in Gambella in hopes that it can deep the area secure enough for USAID to do a humanitarians assessments.

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