
MEMORANDUM

TO: Human Rights Organizations and International Community.

FROM: Anuak Justice Council (AJC)

DATE: January 12, 2005

**RE: The Ethiopian Government of Prime Minister Meles
Zenawi Continues Opportunistic and Multidimensional
Attacks on the Anuak of the Gambella Region of Ethiopia**

Background

The massacre of ethnic Anuak in the Gambella region of Ethiopia has been going on for a year now. The Ethiopian government defense forces, behind closed doors, have continued the perpetration of massive human rights violations. The crimes committed, have remained unpunished. The Ethiopian authorities, in justifying this massacre, reconstruct a wholly different reality, calling it a legitimate campaign against “anti-peace elements”, thereby giving “reason” to perpetuate their attack on these people. They have called it ethnic rivalry between the Anuak and Nuer, but in the last year, there are no reported incidents of violent conflict between them.

In 2004, Genocide Watch and Survivors’ Rights International conducted two field missions to the Gambella region. They published their first findings in February 26, 2004 report: “Today is the Day of Killing Anuaks.” and in December 13, 2004 report “Operation Sunny Mountain?”.

In the first report, survivors and witnesses of the massacre and other crimes, starting on December 13, 2003, were interviewed in the refugee camp in Pochalla, Sudan, after they had fled there for safety.

The second report involves many survivors and witnesses who remained in the Gambella region and have experienced continued oppression from the federal defense forces now inundating the area. This report also provides documentation that the horrendous events of the last year were plans originating in the top level of government well before December 13, 2003 and were related to gaining control over the rich resources in the region, especially oil, but also includes natural gas, gold, water, fertile land and forests. It documents the presence of an oil extracting company, already active in setting up operations. In fact, this report documents that this plan carried a name, “Operation Sunny Mountain.”

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an updated overview of gross human rights abuses between December 11, 2004 and January 8, 2005 based on more than thirty interviews. It was during this period that the federal troops stepped up its efforts to suppress any public demonstrations or services that might call attention to the tragic events of the previous year. This report summarizes numerous violations committed by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) forces against the Anuak, including fifteen forced disappearances as well as many cases of indiscriminate shootings, imprisonments and the use of force.

The Ethiopian government officials have shown a lack of commitment to a meaningful accountability process by their public statements, by the low number and evidently poor quality of investigations, and by the failure of law enforcement and other government agencies to build an atmosphere of trust among Anuak victims and witnesses. The Ethiopian government officials continue to downplay serious abuses committed in Gambella as "incidental" and "exceptional."

As extra-judicial killing, rape, false imprisonment, torture, disappearances, destruction of homes, crops, granaries and the means for self-subsistence and other actions continue to be perpetrated against the Anuak by Ethiopian government defense troops, the risk of the Anuak taking up arms, increases. The government may fear any reprisal attacks from the Anuak as being a potential catalyst to more seriously destabilizing the area in that others may join them. Perhaps this is another reason that these thousands of troops continue to be deployed to the area in an attempt to control the Anuak with an atmosphere of terror and intimidation as they continue their oil operation on Anuak lands. Sources indicate threats of death or imprisonment are made by the federal troops against anyone who would claim ownership of the land.

The reputation of the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has plummeted during the last year as the international community has become aware of the gross crimes being perpetrated by the government against its own people. In addition to the Anuak, human rights violations against other groups are rampant throughout Ethiopia, demonstrating a generalized policy of horror, terror and brutal governance by a dictator, shrouded in the deceptive clothes of a "democratic leader."

The international community has poured millions of dollars into a "black hole", as Ethiopia remains, despite all the help, the third poorest country in the world. Where is the development resulting from all these "dollars"? Where are the people who have benefited? Instead, how much has it cost this government to imprison more prisoners of dissent than most any other country in Africa? How much has it cost this government to send thousands of troops to Gambella, essentially establishing military rule in the area? Little by little, the illusion of Ethiopia being a "model of democracy in Africa" is being shattered as the light of truth reveals the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to be one of the most corrupt, oppressive and self-serving regimes of our time.

Thousands of New Troops Arriving in the Gambella Region

The international indignation over this ethnic cleansing campaign being waged against the Anuak people of Gambella, is increasing. Yet, as the attention of the world has been recently directed towards the victims of the Asian Tsunami, the Ethiopian government has quietly seized the opportunity to make new threats against the Anuak, similar to those prior to December 13, 2003, believing that the international community will not pay attention.

During the first days of January, thousands of additional troops have been arriving daily in Gambella. It is estimated that 3,000 troops surround the city every night and are guarding all the roads into town. With them are coming more weapons and heavy artillery, strategically placed in open view and pointed towards homes, churches and main streets in town further intimidating local people. Many of Anuak witnessed the massacre last year and are already emotionally traumatized from that experience; however, as they again see a similar buildup, they are living with fear that it may happen again. Now, some want to flee to Pochalla, Sudan. Sources report that federal soldiers are again making threats, telling people, "If you think you are going to resist, we will wipe you out and finish you."

Just as the guilty become tormented with overblown or imaginary fears everywhere they turn, so are these perpetrators appearing to be obsessed with the Anuak, operating as if everyone could be a suspect, capable of being a threat to them or their plans. Stories have circulated about the Anuak's prowess and military ability. Commanders of regiments involved in the previous Eritrea-Ethiopian War attribute victories to a few Anuaks under their command. One Anuak man was said to have fought against and killed sixteen men before being killed.

As is typical, most perpetrators of such crimes are fearful unless propped up by many others. Does this account for the need for so many troops? When fear takes hold of them, forceful control and repression is exercised. Is this why so many are being threatened and arrested? However, fear is that insatiable monster, always requiring more. Sources from within the defense troops have shared that there is worry that thirty Anuaks are armed and want to retaliate against the military for the deaths of family members. Everywhere throughout Gambella state, federal troops are interrogating, imprisoning, threatening and torturing people related to this.

It is now the dry season, making travel possible again, another reason for the increase in activity in the region. In addition to the thousands of troops in Gambella town and on every road leading there, three to four thousand more have been seen crossing the Gilo River, between Pinyudo and Tedo, close to the Sudanese border and to the refugee camp in Pochalla, Sudan. A thousand more troops are reported to be near Jor, looking for "armed Anuaks". There is concern that the troops will actually cross the border into Sudan.

This past week, a 21-year-old Anuak man, who recently came to Gambella from Addis Ababa, was new to the area and therefore was "suspicious". He was interrogated about the "30 armed Anuak" and when he did not know anything, he was beaten in front of a crowd of bystanders by a newly arrived, commander of the federal forces. Accounts indicate that he was told, "Your people were whining and complaining to the international community, making a bad image of our government. But what you don't know is that you are not under the international community government, you are under the Ethiopian government. Where are they (the international community) now?" He was then arrested and detained for being "a suspicious person."

One source just arrived in Gambella from Dimma and reported that more troops have inundated that area, blocking anyone from coming into town that might want food or other support. Older farmers have been threatened that they will be arrested should they provide any help.

On January 5, 2005 defense forces accused Anuak farmers of providing food to armed Anuaks in Pukung, a small town about 70 Kilometers east of Gambella, close to the Oromo area. Most of the residents are from the Komo tribe, but a small number of Anuak also live there. The federal troops burned down only Anuak homes, crops and granaries. Not a single Komo home or property was destroyed. Approximately two hundred people have now come to Gambella seeking food and other basic necessities.

Some Anuak have recently retaliated. On or about December 13, information was received that several young Anuak men indiscriminately killed three innocent teachers, all who were highlanders, in retaliation for what they believed was the indiscriminate killing of three Anuak teens, ages 12, 13 and 17, by defense troops. The victims were on a road when they met up with federal troops who told them to stop. They did not and instead ran. They were all shot and killed. After their burial, four or five teenagers went to an elementary school in Pinyudo and killed three highlander teachers and left a woman, the cook, alive. They told her to give a

message to the federal defense troops that every time they indiscriminately kill innocent Anuak that they will indiscriminately kill the same number of highlanders.

It is not morally justifiable, yet not surprising, that some young Anuaks, have themselves taken up arms and become killers of innocent people, considering their losses of family, friends and life as they knew it. It is exacerbated by length of time this situation has continued without resolution. Their options have been reduced to living under the bleak conditions in a refugee camp in Sudan or returning to their homes either to be killed or arrested.

However, after word of the killings became known amongst highlanders, some picked up machetes and axes in anger and many feared a repeat of the militia mobs of December 13, 2003. However, the federal police in Gambella town told the highlanders to not retaliate or the responsibility would fall on the government. They even had gone to some of the Anuak areas to warn Anuaks to not go anywhere and to report any highlanders to them who might go in to their area. Reportedly, the Anuak felt the federal police were able to control the situation from escalating, something they felt convinced would have been possible on December 13, 2003 if the federal defense forces had not been promoting it.

In reaction to this event, on December 23, 2004, the commander of the federal defense forces called a meeting, requiring the remaining Anuak government workers and other educated Anuak to attend. They were then forced to return to the rural areas, where they were originally from, to talk to the community elders and warn them that they should immediately report the presence of any Anuak insurgents or anti-government persons to the government. They were to tell them that the elders and farmers in the closest villages would be found accountable and punished should there be any attacks on federal troops or highlanders. Over seventy-eight men were forced to participate in this. However, the response of the elders was for them to tell the defense forces that it would be difficult to control some of the young people unless the government defense forces first stopped killing the people. This group of men just recently returned. No other attacks have been reported.

Most Anuak Children Have Not Been in School for over One Year

The Gambella Region has one hundred and thirty-six schools; of those, only thirty-two of them are in session. These are schools in the major towns of Gambella, Itang, Pinudo and Abobo. Many schools in the rural areas of the region are now turned into military barracks. Where schools are in session, some Anuak children are afraid to attend.

Incidents of Rape of Anuak Women and Girls by Federal Troops Continue

At about 9:00 PM on December 31, 2004 two young girls, ages nineteen and twenty-two, were returning home from Gambella high school when one was attacked by three men from federal defense force. This occurred on a major street in Gambella town. One of the soldiers grabbed the girl's hand, putting it behind her back and covered her mouth, as she cried out. Her friend, instead of running away in fear, started screaming and punching the man. As one of the men tried to forcibly take the victim from the area, her friend continued to scream for help before she was stabbed with knife by one of them and fell to the ground bleeding. When neighbors heard them, five federal police officers intervened, pointing a gun at the soldiers. The federal police officers then handcuffed and arrested them. A superior commander of the federal defense troops has now come to where these men were being held and had them transferred to a military site. Now, most believe that nothing will happen to them. This incident occurred in the middle of the town, an area thought to be one of the safest. Many other incidents of rape are going on in the rural areas, but the Anuak have been alarmed that the federal troops involved in these rapes are becoming

more brazen. It may be noted that it has only been Anuak women who have been raped, similar to Anuak men being targeted for other crimes against their person.

Nearly 1000 Anuaks Remain in Federal Custody in Gambella; More Continue to be Arrested

Local sources, including some from within the regional local police force, not wanting to be identified for security reasons, stated on November 25, 2004 that nearly 1000 Anuaks continue to be detained in Gambella Regional Prison, without charges, and without any access to the legal process as laid out in the Ethiopian constitution. Their physical and mental status continues to deteriorate as many of them have now been imprisoned for over a year.

Reports indicate that medical care has been denied and that harsh conditions, including inadequate food and sleeping conditions, further endanger the health and survival of those imprisoned. Apparently, in a room that would fit two or three beds, fifteen men are held. When they sleep, they cannot all fit without being on top of each other. Drinking water comes from the river and many have gotten cholera and dysentery. Others have gotten malaria and tuberculosis. In addition to the poor conditions, many are being tortured.

Obang Media, was the advisor to the former governor, Okello Akway Ochalla, who fled the country in January 2004 and is in asylum in Norway. After he left, Obang Media was arrested and has been detained since. He is a diabetic. Prison officials will not allow him regular medication, but wait until he is seriously ill before providing it. He has lost a significant amount of weight and could barely eat. His condition was so poor that he had to be hospitalized. After limited recovery, his request for medication has again been denied.

Oremi Odeir used to be a driver for the regional government. Reports indicate that he is likely to die within the next few weeks unless he is treated. It is believed he may have tuberculosis. Last week, his condition was so serious, he could not eat or talk. Other prisoners were so concerned they sought help from a prison official but were refused. They then had relatives ask the local Red Cross to intervene. The Red Cross requested medical help for him, but was told the official had no authority to okay the request. So four Anuak women, elders in the community, went to Omot Obang Olam, an Anuak government collaborator, on Monday and he was hospitalized the next day. However, after only two to three days of care, he was taken back to the prison after only minimal improvement.

One boy, Owar Achawo, has been in prison since he was only nine years old. His father, Oluch Achawo, was imprisoned in August 2002 after his son, Obang Oluch, was accused by the government of robbing highlanders in the town of Pinyudo in the Gambella region. When he could not be found, his father was arrested and detained without charges in the federal prison in Addis Ababa, serving as a substitute for him. After only two months, Oluch Achawo died. The federal defense forces then went to Pinyudo and forcibly took his nine-year-old son to now replace his father in prison. However, the head of the prison in Addis Ababa refused him, stating he was too young, forcing them to release him. Two weeks later, defense forces again went back and put him in the regional prison in Gambella instead where he has remained since November of 2002.

Many Anuaks continue to experience torture throughout the Gambella region. Sources describe how men are tied down and beaten with gun barrels, iron bars and metal whips. Most arrested are beaten, often repeatedly and severely. Some of the men interviewed, were tortured with

electricity. While detained they were deprived of food for days at a time and sometimes kept in cells or pits so small that all of the men could not sit down.

On December 12, just prior to the anniversary of the massacre, government authorities warned the Anuak not to participate in any public or private commemorative events or to even mention it. Anuak churches were told not to hold any special services. They also prohibited Anuak from gathering in groups of more than three persons. Yet, eighty-six young Anuak men were rounded up and imprisoned, even though they had not assembled.

One man, Omot Ojullu Abella, had been detained for the past year in Gambella Regional Prison without charges. As three federal police with iron bars and rifle butts beat him, they spoke of retaliating against him due to being related to organizers of a memorial service for the Anuak in the United States, which commemorated the one-year anniversary of this tragic event, which has now possibly taken thousands of Anuak lives.

From the beating, Omot Ojullu Abella was critically injured and then denied medical care. However, after his case was brought into public view through the action of Amnesty International and through the action of the US State Department and the United States Embassy, the Ethiopian government sent their highest official, within the department of the federal police, to Gambella Regional Prison, to apologize in person to Omot Ojullu Abella for the actions of the “barbarians” who, allegedly, did not represent their government.

Government Controlled Nominations for Regional Governor

Omot Ojullu Abella was finally provided medical care for his injuries. He is recovering, yet remains in prison. It is well accepted that once arrested, none of the Anuaks are ever charged, tried, convicted or released from prison. However, there are rumors that Omot Ojullu Abella may be the exception and end up being released. This may be due to public exposure, but those same sources indicated that it would only occur after nominations for the governor of Gambella are closed. Omot Ojullu Abella is a well respected and courageous man, who may well be the “people’s choice” for governor if not carefully controlled. The government now has made it public that the nominating period will end in an unprecedented three weeks. It is rumored that once nominations can no longer be made, that Omot Ojullu Abella may be released. At that time, due to their new policy of shortening the nomination period, he will no longer pose a threat to the government and their plans for who should have the job.

Currently, the “government’s choice” is Omot Obang Olam, an Anuak man who is listed as one of the perpetrators of human rights’ crimes against the Anuak by human rights field investigators due to his collaboration with the EPRDF government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. It is widely accepted that it was he that provided the list of Anuak leaders who were targeted for killing. He has been heavily involved in the arrests and torture of Anuaks.

In fact, just before a federal police officer ordered the three other federal police to beat Omot Ojullu Abella, he had come out of a meeting with Omot Obang Olam. This man continues to enjoy the “special treatment” awarded to such key collaborators who serve as the “right hand” of the Ethiopian government. His nomination is no surprise. Instead of releasing the intellectual prisoners who may be the best candidates for elected office, the government has imprisoned any who might challenge them and have substituted a criminal. The blatant attitude of this

government, where they assume they can proceed with impunity, is astonishing, but clearly visible by these actions.

Disappearances, Detention, Torture and Killings in Military Camps

Between December 11 and 18, 2004 Ethiopian troops conducted exceptionally harsh sweep operations in at least thirteen Anuak villages and five different districts of Gambella. The troops rounded up several hundred Anuak men, mostly without any form of due process, and took them to temporary military bases in or near the villages. According to eyewitnesses, soldiers extrajudicially executed at least four detainees, and at least six detainees "disappeared" in detention. The four former detainees interviewed gave detailed testimony of torture and ill treatment, including electric shock, severe beatings, and being forced to remain in "stress positions." In independent interviews, they said that dozens, if not hundreds, of other detainees had also faced torture and ill treatment. Eyewitnesses gave further testimony about widespread extortion, looting, and destruction of Anuak property.

The disappearance of detainees in the custody of EPRDF forces in Gambella is a major human rights crisis that the Ethiopian government and the international community must address. The discovery of the mutilated corpses of thirteen of the disappeared Anuaks in Tircerow village on December 19, 2004, has substantiated fears that they have been tortured and summarily executed.

The first such case dates back to December 17, 2003. The most recent happened in January 6, 2005. The risk of disappearances affects every Anuak in the region. Victims are predominately male and range from fifteen years of age to sixty-five; among them have been students, farmers, teachers, and public servants. The circumstances and manner of the arrests suggest that they are often executed by units without any pretext of legal authority or regularity. Most of the individuals were arrested and detained while walking on a road in their villages or towns, standing in their front yards, shopping at a market, driving, crossing a checkpoint that they had navigated many of times before, or just sitting in their homes with their families. Othow Oboya was arrested in Gog Depach because he could not provide a clean drinking water to EPDRF soldiers, another man Kwut Cham was arrested in Dumbang because he protested the arrest of his son. One eighteen-year-old Anuak boy was shot while riding on his bicycle in Pinyudo town on December 17, 2004. Another was mutilated in Gog Depach on December 23, 2004.

It is generally believed that many of those unaccounted for, have been either killed or are being secretly detained in military camps in the rural areas where federal troops are based. Thousands of these were young men who had sought safety in Pochalla, Sudan a year ago when federal troops started their rampage of killing or imprisoning Anuaks; however, due to the bleak conditions in the refugee camp, many have attempted to seek relief by returning to Gambella, only to be killed "for suspicious behavior" or detained in military camps on their way back to their homes.

In an area where communication is so difficult, public awareness of their plight has only come to light when some of the bodies of these men and boys were returned to their families for burial. Most had not known that their loved one was in route back to the Gambella. As families recover these bodies, they have seen bruises, cuts and other injuries covering their heads, limbs and torsos, evidence of gross maltreatment. No investigations of the cause of their deaths follow.

Instead, when family members have asked about the injuries, they have ended up being arrested and detained.

According to sources, since December 2003, there is record of 173 Anuaks dying while in the custody of federal defense forces. This does not include numerous others who have died in Gambella Regional Prison or in the Addis Ababa Federal Prison. Many others remain in detention in inaccessible military camps under unknown conditions, just how many is difficult to determine, but it is believed to be a significant number. Federal defense soldiers and police have reportedly arrested some who are judged to be “suspicious” simply because they have old wounds, scars and other injuries on their bodies from gunshots or machetes related to the December 2003 attacks against them. They are arrested and detained as “terrorists”, their injuries serving as “proof.”

One seventeen-year-old, Germa Ojo, is an example. He was a victim of December 13, 2003 and had scars from three bullet wounds, one in his hand, and another in his back and one on his upper thigh. He had fled to Pochalla for safety and returned in August with others, only to be arrested due to these scars on his body. Approximately one hundred sixty others were arrested for similar reasons.

Anuak Leaders Remain in the Federal Prison, Addis Ababa

In 2002, the democratically elected regional governor, Okello Niglo, and four district governors, the mayor of Gambella town, and thirty-eight other elected government officials were arrested in Gambella and transferred to the federal prison in Addis Ababa where they remain even though the Ethiopian constitution that states that any citizen arrested, should be charged with a crime within forty-eight hours, or be released.

Information was received on January 3, 2005 indicating that the governor, Okello Niglo, the Gambella mayor, Mr. Orite Agureria, most of the times known as Ahelemaryarn Tekelernaryarn, Mr. Okok Ojulu former Manager of Ethiopia Social Development Rehabilitation Fund and the former Dimma district governor Mr. Ojulu Akwala, are all ill and in need of medical care. Family members have obtained medication and have tried to provide it to the prison authorities, but their attempts were denied.

Government Still Fails to Accept Any Responsibility

Since the massacre of December 13, 2003, the Ethiopian government has failed to accept any responsibility for the massive human rights abuses against the Anuak ethnic group in the Gambella region of Ethiopia. As of January 9, 2005, the EPRDF forces continued to engage in arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, torture, murder, attempted murder, disappearances, and bribery. Anuak men are arrested on flimsy pretexts, interrogated, beaten, and sometimes thrown into pits in the ground. EPRDF military units sweep through Anuak towns and villages ostensibly in search of Anuaks arms and men. They arrest civilians, shoot into their homes and take their property before leaving.

In the last year, there has been no independent international inquiry into the December 2003 massacred, large-scale violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that are perpetrated on a daily basis in Gambella. Of the many evident cases of disproportionate use of force by EPRDF forces, not one single case is currently under investigation. The EPRDF military claims of jurisdiction over many of the most serious of the reported crimes have posed seemingly

insurmountable obstacles to justice, and good faith investigations have been largely absent. None of the commanding officers that presided over the December 2003 massacres has been arrested nor suspended pending the outcome of investigations. Instead of taking this kind of confidence-building measure, a general of the defense forces who had direct oversight over troops that committed the massacre in Gambella, was awarded the honor of being a "Hero of Ethiopia". Ethiopian legislation undermines the accountability process by creating wholesale exemptions from prosecution for serious violations committed by the EPRDF forces in the course of anti-terrorist operations.

Despite documentation from multiple sources and eyewitnesses, they even failed to arrest perpetrators identified in their own report, completed by their own appointed Independent Investigative Commission. They continue to hide the facts from the donor countries and human rights organizations instead of finding a meaningful solution that could resolve serious peace and security issues in the region.

The Anuak who remain inside the Gambella region live under a reign of terror, in a prison-like environment characterized by arbitrary rules and daily violence. The destruction of Anuak homes and buildings, combined with the atmosphere of terror and insecurity has deeply affected the health and hopes of almost every Anuak. About 70,000 Anuak remain inside Gambella, of whom 51,000 are displaced from their former homes. Today, it is harder than ever to deliver humanitarian aid in the rural areas outside Gambella, because of the deterioration in security conditions for aid workers and the increasingly obstructive bureaucracy. In fear of their lives and without access to assistance in their home country, Anuaks continue to flee in massive numbers to neighbouring Pochalla, Sudan where another 8,000 are doubled up with other families or living in camps, and other inadequate facilities. They have suffered enormous trauma. Clearly, the strategy of providing little assistance to the refugees in Sudan, in the hope that this will force them to go home, has failed. Neither have the difficult conditions halted the exodus. The reality of the numbers of refugees in Sudan and internally displaced persons in Ethiopia must be acknowledged, so that sufficient quantities of adequate aid may be provided to this population.

Ethiopian Government Gives its Plan for Resources in the Gambella Region and Warns Anuak to “Move On”

It appears the government is ready to move on with the next step of their plan to use the resources of this area, with the exception of the Anuak, who are being forced out at every juncture. Sources indicate that the executive branch of the Ethiopian government which is made up of the office of the President, the office of the Prime Minister, and the council of ministers has held a urgent secret meeting in Addis, on January 3, 2005, to discuss the Anuak’s legal case of crimes against humanity against Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

It was decided to send a delegation of seven top officials to Gambella “to settle” the problem. In the history of this government, no top officials are remembered to have previously come to Gambella. On January 7, Mr. Addisu Legesse, the Vice Prime Minister and also the Minister of Rural Development, Mr. Abay Tsehaye, the Minister of Federal Affairs, Mr. Bereket Simeon, the Minister of Information, Dr. Kebede Tadesse, the Minister of Health, Ms. Gennet Zewide, the Minister of Education, Mr. Shiferaw Jarso, Minister of Water Resources, and Dr. Mulatu Teshome, Minister of Agriculture all arrived in Gambella for this historic meeting with the Anuak elders and leaders.

Two meetings were held, one on January 8 and another on January 9, 2005. The majority of the ethnic Anuak and other indigenous people of Gambella were hopeful that it might lead to some resolution, but their hopes were shattered. Instead, they were told that the government was going to be sending more troops due to the open border between Sudan and Ethiopia. Now that there was a peace agreement in Sudan, there would be guns available that could be used against the government in Ethiopia and therefore, the borders would be controlled with checkpoints for those crossing over into Ethiopia.

The second point made was that the government would be creating and training local militias that could protect if anti-government forces attacked and that the defense forces would back them up. They were told to not be surprised or scared if they saw more troops coming, that it was for their own benefit. In response to a question of security from a highlander businessman, it was emphasized that the troops were there to ‘100% protect you and will be opening the door to more highlanders who will be resettled there,’ (on Anuak land). They were also told that the Minister of Defense wants to construct a dam by using the defense forces of highlanders, who otherwise, would not have a job. They were informed that a military camp was to be set up near the dam site in Abobo district. No manpower was needed from local people. It became clear that the area would be dominated by troops. Nothing was said regarding the massacre of December 13 and subsequent actions against the Anuak.

One woman asked if the government had a plan to restore peace and justice to the area, including the holding those involved accountable. In response, she was told that it to the best of his knowledge, all those who committed crimes were now in prison and that it was time to “move on.” He stated that the Anuak should stop exaggerating things that have come to an end or the government will deal with those who are trying to damage the reputation of the government. He added that the international community was happy with the explanations provided by the government and that the Anuak should stop bringing up false information to the international community.

Synopsis of Some Alleged Statements by Government Delegates:

Vice Prime Minister

Vice Prime Minister Adusu Legesse indicated that “true Ethiopians” were those who loved their country and were sympathetic to their government. He told them that anyone who had been nominated by the government for positions as governor of the region or districts should not be resisted, but supported by the local people because the government “trusts” these people and can work with them. In other words, he explained that the government will only work with Anuaks who are “true Ethiopians.” He told them that the local people should work with the government in weeding out anti-peace elements, including any supporters and contacts of these people. The local people should come forward if they overhear anyone speak out against the government and report them to the defense forces immediately.

Minister of Federal Affairs

Mr. Abay Tsehaye, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that the international community had asked them to investigate the ethnic conflict between the Anuak and Nuer. He told them that they had done that, as a good government, by appointing a commission to complete an independent inquiry. He said that they had found and arrested everyone involved and that the international community was satisfied in what they delivered and that it was now time to move on to a different chapter that would bring development and prosperity to Ethiopia. He said that the beginning of the prosperity may begin there in Gambella in that they were sitting on plenty of

resources, including oil. He remarked that they would have seen the oil company and that it will result in bringing wealth to the country of Ethiopia and to Gambella. He warned that anyone who says things against the oil company or to individuals working with the oil company are people who do not want Ethiopia to prosper. He emphasized that the government understood what the international community meant regarding an investigation and the local people did not. He indicated that it would have a bad impact on the local people if the international community came to investigate. He further stated that they will be talking about us and will stop us from moving on to build the prosperity we all have been dreaming about. He warned the local people to be cautious of foreigners.

Minister of Information

Mr. Bereket Simeon, the Minister of Information told the people that the Anuak should not exaggerate and if something happened, that it was not to be shared with foreigners. Instead, if someone suspicious asked them a question, that they should report them to the authorities. They were told that if they saw people being interviewed or someone asked to interview you about the ethnic conflict, that they should report that because those are the people who are destroying the image of the country and do not want prosperity. He stated that “we” have to control the information that gets out from the country by not allowing it to go to outsiders. He indicated that the Anuak who are “true to the country” will share in the prosperity.

Minister of Health

Dr. Kebede Tadesse, the Minister of Health, lamented the lack of other basic services such as doctors, health clinics, clean water and educational opportunities for the people of Gambella. He indicated that he would like to see the health clinics in Gambella improve and to see the Gambella Nursing College upgraded into better college. He told the public that they had a responsibility to respect their government. He indicated that the federal government plan to improve the regional health bureau will be held back if there are people who provide false information that destroy the image of the country.

Minister of Education

Ms. Gennet Zewide, the Minister of Education admitted to the people that the Gambella region had a poor educational system in relation to other areas in Ethiopia. She indicated that she would like to see more kindergarten and elementary schools for the children and to see the Gambella Teachers Training Institute {GTTI} become a university. She also remarked that she would like to see Gambella women benefit from education so that in the future, they could be in a job like hers. She told them they had a responsibility to love their government. She stated that their government was the only government that would give them an education or tell them what was right or wrong.

Minister of Agriculture

Dr. Mulatu Teshome, the Minister of Agriculture remarked on all the natural resources they had in Gambella. He said they had fertile soil, gold, and other resources. He told them that if they cooperated and rallied behind the government, that they would have food available, meat, mild and fish. He further stated that the federal troops can do the job of building the dam and are there to bring food to the table so their children are not hungry. He warned that if anyone was hostile to the oil company or the federal troops building the dam, that they are people who do not want food. He also warned them against sharing any information with outsiders.

We Will Go After the Anuak--Wherever They Are--Who Are Against the Government

Following the meeting on January 9, the elders in the Anuak community were asked to meet separately. They were told that there would be opportunity to ask questions. However, during the meeting, when it was announced that questions could be asked, only one Anuak man Mr. Obango Ogod spoke and it was obvious to the rest that he had been bribed, threatened or both. He spoke Anuak as Omot Obang Olom (the man who has been collaborating with the government from the beginning) translated. He said that the Anuaks were in the wrong and that anyone who did not like the government and participated in any anti-government activities should be brought to the attention of the authorities.

Following his statement, the Minister of Federal Affairs enthusiastically clapped. When another Anuak attempted to ask a question, the question period was ended. Instead, the Anuaks were told that they should tell their family members in Pochalla, Sudan that they should return because it was hurting the image of the government. It was stated, 'We will go after any Anuak, wherever they are who are against the government, even as far as Pochalla. Following the meeting, the officials visited the site of the dam before returning to Addis Ababa.

What the Minister of Federal Affairs may not have shared at the meeting was his own experience in Washington DC in September 2004, when he was under threat of being arrested for his crimes against humanity due to his actions against the Anuak. Sandra Colliver, Executive Director from the Center for Justice and Accountability, a well known international human rights law firm in Washington DC, had contacted him in his hotel room regarding meeting with her to address these issues. He declined.

He was also contacted by the president of Genocide Watch, Greg Stanton, regarding his part in the crimes, which met the definition of genocide according to this expert. He again declined. Shortly after that, he checked out of his hotel. When his picture was posted close to his meeting at the IMF (International Monetary Fund), instructing anyone who sighted him to call Colliver's law firm, he may have realized that what he thought was hidden, may be emerging from the darkness into the view of those who can take action against him as an individual. It may be too late for him to keep the truth from the world.

It also may be noted that on the same day of the meeting, January 10, Abudi Ojud, a 31-year-old Anuak woman, died. She had been tortured one year ago and had never recovered. Her 24-year-old brother Ochugi Ojud had been killed on December 13 and federal troops had come to her home on January 5, 2004 to interrogate her as to where the men in her family were. She reportedly became so upset that she started yelling at them. She was then beaten until she was throwing up blood. Her home was then burned down. She came from a poor family with few resources and never was able to receive medical treatment. Her blind mother is now the only one left. Unfortunately, this young woman has now "moved on," her life and future taken from her.

Ethiopia Receives Debt Forgiveness to Improve the Lives of Ordinary Citizens

On December 30, 2004, the US rewarded Ethiopia with huge amounts of debt relief (\$100.6 million in the next two years) that essentially amounts to 100% debt relief so as to enable Ethiopia to improve the lives of ordinary citizens by strategically reducing poverty through education, health services and other means. It is ironic that after destroying the homes, crops,

and properties of the Anuak, after killing the educated leaders and family wage-earners leaving countless widows and orphans, after displacing thousands of Anuak from their homes, after expropriating schools for the use by federal defense forces, after raping the women and destroying the basic fabric of the Anuak culture, that the Ethiopian government is now going to change its direction and instead build up an infrastructure that would reduce poverty and improve the well-being of the Anuak.

Another question is what has it cost to send and maintain the thousands of federal troops in the Gambella region, the same troops who were responsible for executing the crimes against these defenseless citizens? The international community has a right to ask these questions as the truth about this government becomes well known. The Ethiopian government should be prepared to give the real answer this time.

Anuak Justice Council

In light of the recent events in the Gambella region, the Anuak Justice Council, (AJC) a non-governmental, non-partisan organization, has been established for the protection and well-being of the Anuak people. The AJC is the umbrella organization made up of Anuak in thirty-seven different countries, including representatives from Ethiopia and refugee camps in Pochalla and Kenya. The aim of the Anuak Justice Council is to safeguard the rights of Anuak in Ethiopia, in Sudan and around the world; and, in order to accomplish that, to protect, preserve, and promote a just society through non-violent means. Its primary goal is to work towards the restoration of peace, security, and the rule of law in the Gambella region through non-violent means and to see that the rights of the Anuak are protected as laid out in the Ethiopian constitution.

In its recommendations to the international community, the AJC is calling for the establishment of an international commission of inquiry to monitor, investigate and publicize violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in Gambella. The AJC additionally calls on the United Nations and the African Union to make full use of their respective mandates and mechanisms to establish an official record of abuses committed since the December 2003 massacre in the Gambella region and to hold the Ethiopian government responsible to follow an effective accountability process.

The AJC is in the process of establishing a working committee, the Anuak Committee for Peaceful Resolution, (ACPR), who would work with the Ethiopian government, as well as with the international community, in anticipation of any valid opportunities for peace talks between the Ethiopian government and the Anuak. This committee will be comprised of leading Anuak representatives, worldwide, who are committed to seeking a non-violent, long term and peaceful resolution to the events that have occurred in the Gambella region.

Despite the atrocities inflicted upon the Anuak people during the past fifty years, the Anuak Justice Council is committed to a solution through direct, honest discussions, in good faith, with the Ethiopian government that is in the best interest of all Ethiopian citizens. They will only engage in discussions with the Ethiopian government under the condition that the Ethiopian government puts an end to the events occurring in the Gambella region.

Additionally, the AJC needs assurance that the Ethiopian government will seek to reconcile the suffering and pain caused by the massacre of over 2,000 Anuaks, the rape of over 400 Anuak women, the thousands of internally displaced Anuak as well as Anuak refugees living outside of the country, and the false imprisonment and torture of Anuak leaders and dissenters.

Furthermore, the government needs to provide reparations for the destruction and pillaging of Anuak property and the expropriation of Anuak homes and schools by the Ethiopian defense forces.

The AJC would like to enter into this dialogue with a sincere and positive attitude and with a willingness to take into account the legitimate needs of Ethiopia. The AJC hopes that this attitude would be reciprocated and that a solution could eventually be found that would satisfy and safeguard the aspirations and interests of both parties.

In order for these talks to be successful, it is imperative that third-party mediators and observers be part of the structured talks, thereby holding both sides to equitable standards of accountability. The AJC feels the success of the peace process can be made more certain if the mediators are agreed upon by both parties and the talks are held in a location outside of Ethiopia.

The AJC regard the following as essential elements of any peaceful solution:

1. Respect for Anuak human rights and fundamental freedoms.
2. Right to autonomy and self-determination.
3. Hold the perpetrators of crimes against humanity accountable and bring them to justice.
4. Allow local jurisdiction over education, health, economic affairs and resources.
5. Provide for fair and equitable distribution of power and resources.
6. Allow local jurisdiction over internal defense and security within the region.
7. Provide reparations to the Anuak for emotional and physical injuries, loss of life and destruction of property.
8. Release Anuak leaders, including the 44 democratically elected leaders who are being held in the federal jail in Addis Ababa, for two years without trial, as well as others who are being held in Gambella.
9. Provide access to mass and other gravesites by international forensic experts to exhume bodies, identify those bodies where possible and to give those bodies back to families and loved ones for a proper Anuak burial.
10. Provide economic assistance to support services to address emotional, physical, and psychological trauma.
11. Promote local elections of Gambella regional government leaders, monitored by international observers.

The AJC acknowledges that the negotiations will be a difficult process, but it strongly believes that by carefully addressing these issues, peace, security and the rule of law can be restored to the Gambella region. If the Ethiopian Government is interested in being an active participant in addressing the above eleven conditions of the AJC, the AJC is willing to engage in the peace process.

In closing, it is important to note that the Anuak live in a constant state of uncertainty, poverty and terror--with no end in sight. International pressure is essential. International authorities must act now to secure peace in Gambella before the Anuak way of life disappears forever. The suffering of these endangered and forgotten people of the world has gone on long enough.