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Davra Lambu,
Head of Africa Bureau Executive
UNCHR
Rue de Montrillant 9, 1202 Geneva

Dear Mr. Lambo,

Thank you again for being so willing to help the Anuak people who are in an immediate crisis, one that began five months ago. This man made disaster has caused over a thousand lives to be lost. Now a humanitarian crisis is taking many more lives and the world does not know about it. We are especially concerned for the innocent women and children in the refugee camp in Pochalla, southern Sudan and those who are dispersed in the bush in the rural areas of Gambella, Ethiopia.

On December 13, 2003, a van carrying eight Ethiopian government and United Nations refugee camp officials was ambushed near Gambella. There is no evidence that Anuaks carried out the attack but the Ethiopian government's defense forces brought the mutilated bodies into Gambella, displayed them to highlander militias to incite them, and then conducted frenzied massacres of 424 unarmed Anuak civilians during the next three days. The government claims that "only" 57 Anuak were killed and blames the murders on "ethnic conflict" between Nuers and Anuak but the Nuers had nothing to do with the killings. This is not an ethnic conflict between Nuers and Anuak. We have the names and ages of all those who have been killed. 121 were buried in a mass grave and this was witnessed by the government-appointed governor of Gambella.

Since December 13, 2003, extrajudicial executions constituted the most obvious and numerous violations of the right to life. They took the form of massacres or individual, "selective" killings. Although a high percentage of the executions appeared to be politically motivated, in some cases the characteristic traits of the practice known as "ethnic cleansing" were identifiable. The majority of the massacres were committed during violent paramilitary raids, many of which resulted in the forced displacement of the local Anuaks inhabitants.

The international human rights organization, Genocide Watch, declared a Genocide Watch for the Anuak on January 8, 2004 and sent a team to Pochalla, Sudan to interview eyewitnesses to the Gambella massacres. I went on that mission. I refer you to our detailed report, "Today is the Day of Killing Anuaks," available on the Internet at <http://www.genocidewatch.org>. The evidence collected by groups like Cultural Survival and Genocide Watch meets the definition of genocide. Eyewitness accounts confirm that uniformed Ethiopian troops have targeted and killed Anuaks. Currently, there are more than 20,000 Ethiopian troops in the Gambella region.

I would like to take this opportunity to provide more concrete information regarding the humanitarian situation in Pochalla, Sudan and Gambella, Ethiopia. First, pertaining to Pochalla, it has been difficult to ascertain the exact numbers of refugees in the Pochalla area, but it is believed that there may be approximately 10,000. Anuak refugees began arriving five months ago. It may be helpful to know that Anuak ancestral land is divided in two by the Ethiopian-Sudanese border. During crisis, it is common for them to move from one country to the other.

The Anuaks exodus to southern Sudan began after the mass murder of many educated Anuak men from Gambella, Ethiopia by the Ethiopian defense forces. As a result, many fled to southern Sudan, along with some who themselves, had been refugees to the Gambella region due to the civil war in southern Sudan. It should be noted that seventy-five percent of the refugees are under the age of twenty; twelve percent, under the age of ten. Between five to seven percent are orphaned or unaccompanied. These are the ones most at risk.

Since the refugees first started arriving, there have been two food drops; one on January 28th and another on March 12th. On each of these occasions, the food has not been even close to being adequate. I {Obang Metho} who gave a statement to the UN Commissioner of Human Rights yesterday was in Pochalla the last week of January on a fact finding mission. I have prepared a humanitarian needs report based on numerous interviews with Anuak refugees. A copy of my report is attached. Although they have been given refugee status, when I was in Nairobi, I was told by Nairobi UNHCR staff that the UN did not want to set up a permanent camp in Pochalla because they expected, or wanted, the Anuak to return to Gambella.

I have continued to receive regular reports of great need amongst the refugees; however, there has been a lack of responsiveness on the part of UNHCR in Nairobi, despite the obvious poor condition of the refugees. It appears that the lack of attention and care for the people by the UNHCR may be related to the expectation that the Anuak will soon “go home”.

However, this seems seriously idealistic in the face of the continued murders and atrocities being perpetrated against the Anuak, especially in the rural areas where it is “unseen” by the world. Even if peace were to come, the amount of destruction of their homes, confiscation or destruction of their property and the burning of their fields and granaries, leaves little prospect of being able to survive in the near future should they return. Their overall health is so poor that they lack the physical stamina necessary to travel. To date, the Ethiopian government reports it has sent peacekeeping troops into the area, but the reality is that it is these very forces that have been identified by victims and survivors as the perpetrators and fomenters of the genocide. Thus, it seems highly unrealistic that the people will return in the near future.

Pochalla is located in one of the most rural areas of southern Sudan. It is the “bush” of the “bush”. There are no marketplaces to buy sugar or onions. There are no roads. Access is by air or by foot through the bush. This traditional Anuak area where some have relatives, has been overwhelmed with the informal provision of food and help by the locals while waiting for the UN food. These locals may now also be at risk because of this. Although there is wildlife, the Anuak were disarmed years ago and many of the refugees are not used to hunting in the woods, let alone with no hunting guns. Some of the more endangered wildlife may be at risk due to the desperation of the people.

There may be a plan in the works to finally establish a “temporary” refugee, but the location is so close to the border and so much further “into the bush” that many refugees are opposing it for good reason.

Currently, the reports we are getting from the Anuak refugees regarding the desperateness of the conditions, may be different from what the UN field officials in Nairobi know or are reporting to the headquarters in Geneva. Even though the numbers of refugees have been inflated, there is good evidence that they are not getting enough food and care.

Three days before we arrived in Geneva on April 5th, I have received a call from an Anuak refugee who reported the critical nature of the situation. The inadequacy of the distribution and overall lack of appropriate care to the refugees was later confirmed by Myron Jespersen, the head of World Relief, the only NGO in the area. He reported, “A sign of desperation is that people for the last few days after the UN distribution, were sweeping the airstrip runways, hoping to collect any leftover grain.” He has also seen a degree of malnutrition unseen in the area in the past.

The following information was learned through other sources.

- The current food distribution is not being monitored by the UN and many of the weakest and most vulnerable, especially the orphans and unaccompanied children are not getting any food. Children and others have died already due to malnutrition and sicknesses related to their weakened state of health. This may be related to the practice of the WFP policy of dropping food by air and not seeing the situation for themselves. Reportedly, these food drops will occur only every three months and the situation of the people will decline with little notice.
- There is only a very small, understaffed and undersupplied medical clinic for thousands of health compromised persons. This clinic has been provided through World Relief.
- Supplies are insufficient:
 - One tent is provided for eleven people.
 - One blanket is provided for two people.
 - One dish is provided for four people.
 - One water container is provided for four people.
- Newcomers to the camp are registering, but not given any supplies or shelter.
- There is no access to clean water.
- There are no toilets, forcing people to go to the bush, creating a sanitation disaster.
- Cholera has already broken out.
- The rainy season is now coming and will cause further serious and life-threatening contamination of the water supply.
- Many refugees are now sleeping in the open with no blankets or mosquito nets, exposed to the elements and mosquitoes that will increase as the rains come.

This is already a human disaster, but the ongoing consequences of the unmet humanitarian needs may take more lives than were even lost by active crimes against the Anuak. Because of this, immediate assistance is crucial. The Anuak are being pushed from both sides with no safe place to go.

Secondly, in the Gambella region of Ethiopia, the status of the crisis is less well-known. Since the genocide began on December 13, 2003, many Anuak have been internally displaced, running to the bush, forcing them to depend on wild animals and what they can forage.

The situation is most critical in the rural areas. The government has restricted their freedom of movement. NGO's have been denied access to these areas. There are no phones, no electrical power, little access to clean water, no health services, no school for the children and a heavy military presence. These Ethiopian defense forces have established illegal checkpoints in the region under their control. Not only are roadblocks used to check the identity of travelers and to restrict trade in goods, but they are strongly associated with subsequent extrajudicial executions, raping of women, forced disappearances and imprisonments and the forced displacement of people. On March 22, 2004, four young men returning to Gambella due to the lack of food in the refugee camp were stopped at these checkpoints by the Ethiopian military and when they attempted to run away, they were shot and killed. We may be seeing more of this if the situation is not improved in Pochalla.

Another concern is that within the next couple of weeks, the people in the remote areas, where most Anuak live, will be seriously endangered due to the rainy season combined with the total lack of food. During this season, villagers are cut off from each other and the outside world. Rivers overflow into low-lying areas. This may force those hiding in the bush to come out to higher ground. The food supplies always saved for this time of the year have been burned by the military, leaving people with no other means for human survival. They will have no shelter, no access to clean water and no protection from exposure to water born or mosquito born diseases such as chlorera, typhoid, malaria and meningitis. There are other means to accomplish genocide other than guns, machetes and pangas.

The Ethiopian government is publicly reporting that the situation is improving even though we have reliable information to the contrary. The capital city of Gambella is the only place where the situation has improved. This is also the only place where outsiders (NGO's, etc) have been allowed access. Only here can phone calls be made to the outside world. Yet, only a minority of the Anuaks live here.

The UN has been formed to save lives of people in situations such as this, but first they must know about the problem. The Anuak are a very small, indigenous and forgotten ethnic group. They number only about 100,000. They have not had access to the outside world where people are willing and able to help. We are now informing you of this impending human catastrophe. This disaster is endangering their very survival. We greatly appreciate your generous offer of assistance. We look forward to working with you.

For more information, please contact us at the address, phone or email listed above.

Sincerely yours,

Obang Metho,
Executive Director
Gambella Development Agency Inc.