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The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights
Plot #902, Coastal Highway, Brusubi
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Dear Chairman, Emmanuel V.O. Dankwa,

We want to express our deep gratitude for what you have done for the people who are suffering from human rights abuses. On multiple occasions, your office has made your staff available to listen. Their work has been very encouraging to the Anuak and others who sympathize with the plight of the Anuak people in the Gambella region of southwestern Ethiopia. Several of us recently met with Mr. Ndiaye, Director of Office in New York, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Physicians for Human Rights, Canadian and US government officials. You were recommended by many to lead the way. We therefore come to you to urge you to take the leadership on this issue. **We ask you to meet with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi while in Addis Ababa, asking him to urgently address a crisis which** could destabilize the balance of power in Ethiopia and affect neighboring countries.

Mr. Zenawi dismissed reports that the Ethiopian army targeted and killed Anuaks as 'fiction' and said that at the most 200 people had been killed in clashes in the region. Genocide Watch, Survivors' Rights International (SRI), and OMCT have drawn the attention of the international community to reports that Ethiopian government troops and 'highlander' militias massacred 424 Anuak civilians, in December 2003. Genocide Watch urged Mr. Zenawi to prevent the massacres from becoming full-scale genocide, called on Mr. Zenawi to order the arrest of the perpetrators and named three Ethiopian government officials responsible for the killings.

Genocide Watch has received no reply to its letter. Instead, the named officials have been promoted to positions of more authority. Most of these crimes are occurring in rural areas where no outsiders are allowed and where approximately 20,000 Ethiopian defense troops are located. The Ethiopian government's claims of denial or gross exaggeration of any crimes against the Anuak by their troops stand in opposition to daily reports from witnesses and victims. Security reasons have been used as a reason to deny access to these areas.

We understand that the Ethiopian Government has recently decided to set up a commission of inquiry. While such an initiative is appreciated, we note the great skepticism of many Anuak. The credibility of the Government will depend on the steps taken to ensure that this commission is empowered to ascertain the facts, make them public, and identify perpetrators.

Both the U.S. Government and the EU Council of Ministers called for a full and independent enquiry into allegations of involvement by members of the Ethiopian military in violence directed against innocent civilians in Gambella.

Letter to_African Commission

According to our sources, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, World Organization Against Torture and Physicians for Human Rights have been denied access to Ethiopia to investigate the massacres.

We believe that these organizations should be allowed to investigate abuses and visit any part of the Gambella region which they consider appropriate. We urge you to use every available avenue to ensure that such visit takes place.

We hope that strong action by you by exerting pressure on the Ethiopian government to stop the abuses that continue to be perpetrated against the Anuak and others of this region and to allow immediate access and humanitarian aid would prevent further death and suffering. We also call for the establishment of an independent investigation of the incidents, leading to the release of the innocent from prison and holding the perpetrators accountable. In this connection, we would appreciate your assistance in ensuring that the Government grant access to Ethiopian as well as international human rights organizations wishing to conduct similar investigations.

We have also included some recommendations that could bring stability in Gambella.

1. **Withdrawal of Ethiopian defense troops from the region:** Most of the Anuaks are terrified to return to their homes while the troops are still around. According to a study, about 52% of the Anuak children have seen family members or neighbors killed. There is fear and anger among people.
2. **Immediate humanitarian assistance:** Food storages have been destroyed and crops have been burnt Farmers in the rural areas are unable to plant crops for the next season. People are in urgent need of assistance, particularly as the rainy season has started. Access is key.
3. **Independent inquiry:** The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should ensure that an independent inquiry be made into the events that took place on December 13th of 2003 to the present, with a view to bringing perpetrators to account for their crimes, thus eradicating the prevailing culture of impunity.
4. **Release of prisoners:** The Federal government of Ethiopia has been targeting most of the educated Anuak for the last thirteen years, by arbitrarily arresting and executing them. Human rights organizations should be allowed to visit prisons and interview these prisoners.
5. **Mediator:** We would like the UN to be the mediator between the people of Gambella (especially the Anuak) and the Ethiopian Government, with a view to rebuilding trust and stability.
6. **International tribunal:** The international community should ensure that perpetrators abuses against the Anuak be held accountable and brought to justice. Only enforcing the rule of law as outlined in the Ethiopian constitution, will there be peace and stability in Ethiopia.

We appreciate your willingness to address this crisis. We are available for further questions, commentary or updates.

Sincerely,
Obang Metho,
Executive Director
Gambella Development Agency

Letter to_African Commission