PRESS RELEASE

FROM: Anuak Survival Organization in Canada

DATE: May 4, 2004

RE: Mr. Meles Zenawi comments on Gambella killings

The Anuak Survival Organization in Canada (ASO) again strongly condemns the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) for its handling of the investigation into the ongoing Gambella conflict. The ASO again asks for the United Nations to appoint a Special Rapporteur to conduct an independent and transparent enquiry into the events in Gambella, and for the FDRE to consent to this investigation.

"I don't know how they get these figures. It's a fiction." (Mr. Meles Zenawi in response to OMCT claims that as many as 1137 people were killed in the violence between December 13 and March 31) Mr. Zenawi, here is how the international community has come up with this information:

- the personal testimony of hundreds of eyewitnesses, including some of the 10,000 who have fled Gambella,
- the personal testimony of the President of Gambella, Mr, Okella Akway, who also was forced to flee the region,
- the investigation of many respected, independent human rights organization, including Genocide Watch, OMCT, and Ethiopia's own Human Rights watchdog, Ethiopian Human Right Council (EHRCO) and
- the reports from independent aid organizations present in the area at the time.

From personal testimonies, the names and ages of many of the dead have been gathered. All of this evidence paints a similarly horrific picture-that the Ethiopian armed forces were specifically targeting the Anuak, murdering their men in cold blood, burning their houses, and raping their women. The FDRE, while repeatedly denying the allegations against its armed forces, also has acknowledged that outside of the military, the federal government has no presence in the region.

There are credible sources that link Dr. Barnabas Ministry of Federal Affairs directly to the Gambella massacre of over thousand unarmed Anuak in six districts of Gambella, which is considered to be one of Africa s worst acts of genocide since the Rwanda. Yet we continue to treat Mr. Meles Zenawi as an equal partner on the international diplomatic stage. The killing is continuing in rural Gambella, where one third of the Anuak villages have been completely surrounded by Ethiopian military and paramilitary units using tanks, armored personnel carriers, helicopters, and heavy artillery. It is ludicrous to believe Mr. Meles Zenawi that this is a local ethnic action, rather than a carefully orchestrated effort by Dr. Barnabas who continue his campaign of "ethnic cleansing" of the Anuak population of Gambella.

The ASO has gathered the testimony of every organization and individual we can find who was present in the region at this time, and they all give similar testimony. There were many witnesses to the Anuak genocide. Although the Ethiopian government took precautions and imposed restrictions on reporting and photographing, there were lots of people including foreigners in the Gambella who witnessed the massacres.

Foremost among them were Anuak-Americans who were in Gambella at the time of genocide. They were among the first to send news to the outside world about the unfolding genocide. Some highlanders were witnesses as participants in the Anuak massacred. A number of them gave testimony under oath to conspirators who organized the Anuak genocide.

The ASO sincerely hopes that Mr. Meles Zenawi is not suggesting that all these individuals and respected independent organizations are lying including Dr. Dibaba, the TPLF appointed ambassador to Canada who said: "The police people and the military and some highlanders are the ones who did the killings," said Dibaba. "The leader of the police force is being questioned."

How can true citizens of Ethiopia come forward to share their experiences if the Prime Minister of the country is lying to the world? Without the truth, there can be no forgiveness or healing. Together, both institutions, the international independent inquires and the International Court will work to eliminate the culture of impunity that undermines all efforts to bring a just and sustainable peace to Gambella.

The Ethiopian dictator Mr. Meles Zenawi managed to bluff and outwit the Western governments but the donors finding out his lies and how brutal his government is. One need only look at the Genocide Watch and Survival Rights International report for Ethiopia to see a litany of horrors against a population of minority Anuak civilians in Gambella. Even if Mr. Zenawi is confident that his sources (although given the admitted lack of federal presence in the region it is difficult to imagine who his sources might be) are accurate then the FDRE should have no hesitation in calling for a truly independent and transparent enquiry into the events in Gambella before, during and after December 13, 2004. The Commission appointed by the FDRE to deal with this issue cannot be considered either independent nor transparent.

For the FDRE to suggest that an investigation chaired by Ato Kamal Bediri, to investigate allegations against Ethiopian's armed forces is independent is unacceptable. Furthermore, to have the investigation focus solely on the events of December 13, when many of the worst murders, rapes, and assaults have occurred in the weeks and months afterwards (including today) is also unacceptable.

The ASO strong believes that war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gambella must not go unpunished. More than one thousands Anuak was killed during the illegal Ethiopian military occupation. The ASO urge international community to use all resources at their disposal to ensure the timely establishment of an international tribunal for Anuaks. The Ethiopian government investigation inquires and existing judicial processes will not serve justice. This inquires is an internationally-recognized sham, due to its limited mandate, exclusion of top officials and vital evidence, and distortion of facts.

The ASO again calls on the FDRE to consent to a truly independent and transparent enquiry into the events, before, during, and after December 13, 2004 and that the United Nations appoint a Special Rapporteur to conduct this investigation. Western governments give millions of dollars in foreign aid to Ethiopia on an annual basis. This aid does not come without responsibilities. The FDRE cannot be killing its own citizens with one hand, while holding out the other to the international community for help.

What happened in Gambella on December 13, 2003 constitute genocide and crimes against humanity, and that all those responsible need to be brought to justice. Enough questions are raised by the Genocide Watch report to warrant a criminal investigation by Ethiopia into whether Prime Minister Meles and other Ethiopian military official; including some who knew the massacre was occurring but took no actions to stop it; bear criminal responsibility.

The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide describes genocide as "acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Clearly this definition applies in the case of the atrocities committed against the Anuak people.

There is abundant evidence that genocide and crimes against humanity were committed on a wide scale in the Anuak massacre, but to date, not a single individual has been brought to justice. Mr. Meles Zenawi and his government forces must be held personally responsible for this crime against humanity. The Gambella massacred is one of the most horrific and challenging crime scenes in east Africa. Hundreds Anuak civilians have been murdered, raped, hideously mutilated or terrorized. The magnitude of the massacres, the mutilations, the torture and destruction of civilian property is so great that its full extent is still unknown.

The intimidation, terror, destruction of property, displacement and evacuation of people would not have been possible without the active involvement of the Ethiopian defense forces, and the knowledge and approval of the top military command… The Anywaa Survival Organization is of the view that ultimately the Ethiopian government forces was responsible for the intimidation, terror, killings and other acts of violence experienced by the people of Gambella before and after the December 13, 2003. Further, the evidence collected to date indicates that particular individuals were directly involved in violations of human rights.

There is now a strong public outcry worldwide against the mistreatment of indigenous Anuaks of Gambella. Donors' countries must demand that international human rights organizations investigate and prosecute the accused of crimes. International community has the responsibility to defeat the demons of genocide and its companion in evil, crimes against humanity. Peace loving nations and international community must bring to justice those who perpetrate such heinous acts.

The ASO calls on the EU and donors countries to appointed independent and transparent enquiry and sponsor the preparation of reports on the atrocities and numerous accounts to be published. Strong actions must be taken against the Ethiopian government either to sanction its brutal policies or to salvage the indigenous Anuak people from the grip of extermination. Moreover, steps must be taken to require the Ethiopian governments to make restitution to the Anuak people for their immense material and human losses.

In conclusion, thoughts Anuak of Gambella have no human, economic, or political rights of any kind. Mr. Meles Zenawi government has illegally and brutally occupied their ancestral land Gambella for almost thirteen years. Gambella is where he started the carnage that led to the rape and pillage and now will lead to an even greater Horne of Africa war if we do not act now.

It is time for international community to understand that loose talk that brands the victims as "terrorists" for defending themselves, their families, and their property only serves to give a green light to the real terrorists, Meles and his henchmen, to massacre innocent people.

It is time for the UN and international community to stand up for its own principles and demand compliance with international human rights conventions before more Anuaks are needlessly slaughtered and a new African war is triggered, this time involving neighboring countries.

It is time for US government to stand up and voice its outrage at a foreign policy in the Horne of Africa that has obviously failed to preserve peace and security in this vital region of the world. It is time for the United States to back up its tough words with concrete actions. These actions would not only reaffirm the US resolve to stop the escalation of the conflict in Gambella, but, we believe, would lead to a lasting peace for the Anuak people and all ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

The ASO believes that the EU, donors' countries and Western governments must play an immediate role in stopping the Ethiopian assault on Anuak villages, which has as its aim the "ethnic cleansing" of the Anuak of Gambella.

Given the mounting evidence of serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law, Anuak Survival Organization calls on all member states of the UN to intensify their pressure on Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.

Specifically, the Ethiopian government should demand:

1. An immediate withdrawal of the Ethiopian forces and any paramilitary units operating in Gambella;
2. That the government of the EPRDF halts all long-range artillery shelling and other military operations that are being used to target or indiscriminately fire on civilians;
3. Unrestricted access to the affected areas in Gambella by humanitarian organizations, the media, and forensic specialists who can investigate allegations of summary executions, as well as access for diplomat;
4. Full disclosure of the names of those currently detained as a result of the conflict, their ages, where they were captured, where they are being detained, and other relevant details;
5. Full and ongoing access to these detainees for the International Committee of the Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations;
6. That the authorities of the EPRDF co-operate with the International Criminal Tribunal to investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian law in Gambella. Western governments should guarantee ongoing financial and political support to ensure that the ICT can immediately undertake such an investigation.

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