

**Testimonies by Three Eye Witnesses of the December 2003
Anywaa (Anuak) Massacre in Gambela Region, Ethiopia**

Interviewed and compiled by

**Eisei Kurimoto
Professor of Anthropology
Graduate School of Human Sciences
Osaka University
Japan**

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Eisei Kurimoto: kurimoto@hus.osaka-u.ac.jp

INTRODUCTION

The massacre of innocent citizens in Gambela town in western Ethiopia, 13-15 December 2003, was a horrible news to all those concerned. It took a few days until the UHNCR and BBC reported the incident on their websites. The Federal Government of Ethiopia also started to report it, and other international media followed. While the situation in Gambela town remained unclear, the incident became an international concern as the magnitude of human suffering became revealed and thousands of Anywaa crossed the border and fled to Pochalla on the Sudan side. It became also apparent that an overwhelming majority of victims were Anywaa (Anuak) citizens.

Undoubtedly this is one of the worst incidents in recent history of Ethiopia. The magnitude of human rights abuses and human suffering is enormous. However, many things have remained unclear although one year has passed since the incident. Let alone addressing the root causes of the massacre, and making efforts for reconciliation and peacemaking, key issues are still highly controversial such as the number of victims, the accountability of the massacre, and the Federal Defence Force's involvement in it. The setting up of an inquiry commission by the House of Peoples Representatives in April 2004 raised a hope that the truth would be revealed. The Inquiry Commission's report, however, was quite unsatisfactory.¹ It was presented to the House of Peoples Representatives in July after members of the Commission had conducted investigation and interviews in Gambela town. The major shortcomings, it seems, of the Inquiry Commission's report are as follows. 1) It seems that it underestimates the number of victims. The report puts the total number of victims as 65 dead (61 Anywaa and 4 highlanders) and 75 injured. It radically differs from other reports. As early as January 15, 2003, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council (ERCHO) reported that at least 93 people were killed and provided the list of names. There are other reports with lists of victims' names, whose numbers are more than 65. If the Commission's report were to argue that its claim is right, it should supply the list of victims' names and crosscheck with other lists available. But it did not do this.

¹ I read only the English version translated by Melese Tilahoun. I have not yet read the original Amharic version.

Moreover, various sources had claimed, before the setting up of the Inquiry Commission, that the death toll during the December massacre (including those killed outside of Gambela town) was more than 400.² The report completely neglects these claims. 2) It does not deal with at all the killings took place outside of Gambela town during and immediately after the massacre in Gambela town as well as killings which were still continuing in the entire Gambela region at the time of investigation. According to some sources, by the end of March 2003 the number of Anywaa killed reached 1,137. Many others were said to have been injured, raped and detained.³ The Inquiry Commission remains silent on these issues. 3) Although it admits that a few soldiers as individuals participated in the massacre (which was a progress compared to the previous statements by the federal government that denied it), it failed to investigate the role played by the Defence Force as organization.

Gambela (Gambella) is a multi-ethnic autonomous region in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It is one of the regions created under the banner of ‘ethnic federalism’ adopted under the current TPLF-EPRDF (Tigray People’s Liberation Front and Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) regime that seized power in 1991. Gambela is a remote and underdeveloped region bordering with South Sudan. Three major indigenous ethnic groups—the Anywaa, the Nuer and the Majangir—are politically entitled to represent the region. Since 1991 Anywaa elites have been in power at the regional level. Other residents in Gambela region include South Sudanese refugees now living in three camps of Pinyudo (Fugnido), Bonga and Dima, settlers who were brought by the Derg (the socialist regime, 1974-1991) from the Ethiopian highlands, and traders, civil servants and others from the highlands.

Since the Derg era, Gambela has been the hot spot of armed conflicts with a variety of actors. Up to 1991 there were three major forms: the Derg versus Anywaa peasants/Anywaa armed dissident group (GLPM)⁴; South Sudanese refugees/SPLA

² ‘Today is the Day of killing Anuaks’, a field report by Genocide Watch and Survivor’s Rights International (25 February 2004) puts the figures as 424. The statement by Obang Metho, an Anywaa activist and the representative of the Anywaa Survival Organization, at the UN Commission on Human Rights (8 April 2004) puts the same number. He further says that, out of those 424, 221 were buried in a mass grave. It is strange that there is no mention to the mass grave(s) in the Inquiry Commission’s report.

³ See the above report and statement.

⁴ Gambela People’s Liberation Movement, which seized power at the regional level after 1991.

versus Anywaa peasants and militia; SPLA versus Nuer peasants-and-pastoralists. After 1991 armed conflicts became more violent involving more actors: GPLM versus EPRDF; EPRDF versus Anywaa civilians; Anywaa peasants versus settlers; Anywaa peasants versus Nuer peasants-and-pastoralists/armed Nuer invading from Sudan; Anywaa students versus Nuer students; Anywaa peasants versus Nuer refugees; Anywaa peasants versus Majangir peasants, and so on.

The December 2003 massacre is, however, not like previous conflicts in many senses. What is remarkable about the violent conflict of December 13-15 is that it was not a fight between two groups but a massacre, one sided exercise of violence, by one group against the other, Anywaa civilians, and that 'highlanders' were the attackers. It should be noted that in the Gambela context the people categorized as 'highlanders' are by no means homogeneous. Basically they consist of four groups: traders and businessmen, settlers, civil servants, and soldiers. Again each group is not homogeneous and has a multi-ethnic composition, and after all the ethnic groups that comprise 'highlanders' are the Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan, Kambata, Gurage and others.

'Highlanders' in the local context refer to peoples of the Ethiopian highlands of 'red' skin. The indigenous peoples of Gambela including the Anywaa recognize themselves as 'black' peoples. In the history of Ethiopia, this division of the nation based on skin colours was politicized and racialized. For centuries the 'black' peoples living at the peripheries of the empire were located at the bottom of social strata. In recent years the Derg and the EPRDF regimes have been trying to redress the situation. Nevertheless, the basic power structure defining the relation between the centre and periphery and the images of the Other shared both by the 'red' and 'black' peoples still continue to this day. This is one of the backgrounds of the massacre of Anywaa by 'highlanders'.⁵

⁵ Historically the core of 'highlanders' are 'Abyssinians', the Semitic speaking Amhara and Tigrayan, who form the top of the ethno-racial social strata. Other peoples like Cushitic speaking Oromo and Omotic speaking Kambata are put below them. For the indigenous peoples of Gambela, however, these internal divisions do not make much sense, and all of them are categorically recognized as 'highlanders'.

The position of 'highlanders' in Gambela, in particular in the national political context since 1991, is twisted; they occupy an ambiguous position in political, economic and military terms. Politically, at least in principle, as they are not indigenous to the region, they do not have political representation. In reality, however, those TPLF-EPRDF cadres exercise power as 'advisors' in the regional government. Many others work as civil servants. Economically highlanders' traders and businessmen almost monopolize the regional market. In military terms the Defence Force they have supreme power as soldiers of the GPLM, local militia and then regional policemen became disarmed. Under these circumstances, a series of murder cases of highlanders started in 2002 frustrated and angered them. They assumed that they had been committed by armed individuals or groups of Anywaa militants or ethnic-extremists, and the regional government dominated by Anywaa elites failed to enforce law and order. This is another background to the December 2003 massacre.

The Federal Government of Ethiopia first reported the incident as 'inter-ethnic/tribal fight' between the Anywaa and the Nuer, the two major indigenous peoples in Gambela, over natural resources, namely land. Then it put the blame on external anti-government groups ('terrorists') such as the Omoro Liberation Front (OLF) and the Al Itihad Al Ismamiya. Then in April 2004 the Inquiry Commission was set up by the House of Peoples Representatives and submitted its report in July. Although the situation in Gambela town seems to be calm, we continue to receive news that human rights abuses by the Federal Defence Force and retaliation by Anywaa armed groups are continuing in different parts of the region.

As an anthropologist who conducted research in Gambela region intermittently between 1988 and 1999, with foci on the social, economic and cultural transformation of the Anywaa, inter-ethnic relations, and Anywaa's relations with the state, settlers and refugees, I have been seriously following the news and information since December 2003 with a deep concern and compassion. I first received the news on 15 December 2003 when I was staying in Lokichokio, a remote area in north western Kenya, through e-mails and telephone calls. This is another significant aspect of the recent conflict in Gambela. Thanks to the development of communication technology, news and reports can reach all corners of the world very fast.

I had chances to interview three Anywaa men who were in Gambela town when the massacre took place. The first interviews with Omot and Ojulu were done in Addis Ababa on 21 February 2004. The second one with Obang⁶ was conducted in Nairobi on 11 March. I know the three men personally for years, and appreciate their courage to narrate me their experience. It was a painful exercise for me because I could clearly sense their feelings of sorrow, anger and despair. Ojulu was detained on 13 December by the Defence Force at the army barrack in town, but fortunately released later on that day. When I met Obang in Nairobi, where he sought refuge, he still looked very much depressed. He had almost twenty wounds all over his body, from head down to feet, by bullets and machetes at the hands of soldiers and neighbours. Seeing them, I could not believe that he had survived.

Although they are only three, I have decided to make these narratives with a short introduction available to the public for two reasons. Firstly, they are in detail and in depth, and provide us valuable information on what really happened and insight to understand the backgrounds of the massacre. Some people may think that they are 'biased', as all of them assume that the massacre was planned by the Defence Force, or by certain elements among them. I believe that this 'bias' itself is important because it is shared by an overwhelming majority of the Anywaa, and because it should be taken into consideration when reconciliation, peacemaking and peace-building will be done. Secondly I wish that these testimonies will be useful for those who try to bring justice and be engaged in the reconciliation, peacemaking and peace-building projects. It is highly remarkable that the testimonies testify that in the midst of anarchy there were some officers of the Defence Force (who are highlanders) and local Anywaa policemen who tried to save the lives of Anywaa, and that not all highlanders are considered as enemies by the Anywaa. Here I find seeds of hope for future.

I sincerely wish that the year of 2005 will be the year when truth will be revealed, justice will be done and peace will prevail in Gambela.

⁶ The names of three interviewees are assumed for security reason.

I. Testimony of Omot

Interviewed on 21 February 2004, Addis Ababa. Omot is a man in his late forties.

The Massacre in Gambela Town, 13-15 December 2003

Where did the first killing of eight highlanders happen?

It was between Itang and Jikaw.

By what were they travelling?

They were travelling by two or three cars. They were the staff of Administration of Returnees and Refugees Affairs (ARRA). They were killed on the road around 11:00 am and their bodies were brought to Gambela town at 12:00 am. As the bodies arrived in the town they took them to the Regional Administration Council Office. All highlanders went to the Council Office.

What did it happen after they took the bodies to the Regional Administration Council Office?

It seemed that there had been a secret meeting held without the knowledge of Anywaa. When highlanders met there, they decided to rampage the town and to kill Anywaa. After they saw the bodies off to go to Addis Ababa, they started running to Anywaa residents to attack them. I think that among the mob and the soldiers there was a group of people who were against the government and wanted to use this opportunity to put the government in a problem. There was also a group of people who have anti-Anywaa sentiment.

Instead of conducting an investigation to get the culprits, they decided to come and attack innocent civilians and kill them. They mobilized all highlanders. They made all highlanders and thieves to equip themselves with knives, machetes, clubs, guns and stones to attack Anywaa. Civilian highlanders marched in front and soldiers followed them behind. Then whomever they found on the street or at their homes were beaten

to death, stabbed by knife, or cut into pieces by machete. If a victim ran away, he was shot at the back by soldiers. Anywaa didn't react because they thought that soldiers would help them or save their lives. To the contrary, soldiers became killers. Then all thieves got a chance to loot, kill, and burn down the houses of Anywaa.

It was soldiers that committed killing together with civilians. They told the civilians to hit the victim at the legs with machete. When the victim fell down, the soldiers shot him dead. I assume that soldiers and civilian highlanders held a secret meeting before the killing to kill Anywaa. I think that there were anti-government and anti-Anywaa elements within the army who orchestrated this type of killing.

Did the killing continue on Sunday?

Yes. It started on Saturday and continued up to Sunday night. On Monday they stopped killing people. The soldiers stopped because they started to feel the fear, fear of killing innocent civilians who have not committed any crime.

How many Anywaa do you think were killed in these two days?

They were many. Many people were killed. The figure of 420 is correct. I have seen more than 100 dead bodies in my area in Gambela town. There were also many others killed outside of town, in Bonga, Opoamoro, Pinykew, Illiay, and on the road to Makot (Gambela airport).

That was a well planned and politically motivated attack. It was kept secret from Anywaa. If the reason for the killing Anywaa was the death of ARRA staff who were killed on the road, [it does not make sense because] the killers were not identified. Nobody knows exactly who ambushed the car and killed people.

Was there any highlander or Nuer died?

Nobody at all. No highlander, Nuer or nobody from others ethnic group was killed. They killed only Anywaa. But there was a rumour that three Nuer were found dead. [They might have been mistaken as Anywaa].

Did they kill women?

Yes. They killed one woman.

Did they kill children?

Yes. They killed many boys, who were students at the age of about eighteen years old. [But no small boys were killed].

I think there was a secret plan for this killing. I don't understand it really, whether people who opposed this government did it or the government did it intentionally to displace Anywaa from our motherland.

Where exactly did the killing start in Gambela town?

It took place throughout the whole town. The entire town was in turmoil. It took place across the river, on both banks of Jabjabe river⁷, in government offices and everywhere. I heard that there were 38 or 40-50 people had been put in prison because of allegation as perpetrators of the killing.

So, now there are some highlanders in the prison [those suspects who were responsible for the killing]?

Yes. There are some in the prison of Gambela.

I understand that the reason of this entire killing is hatred. They hate Anywaa. As you know, Anywaa are friendly to anybody. We don't want to quarrel or fight with anyone. Anywaa do not want somebody's property or land. We love to talk and play with anybody. We are peace lovers. We live under the rules of kings and chiefs.⁸

⁷ Jabjabe is a tributary of Baro (Opeeno) river, which runs through the Gambela town on the northern bank of Baro. It used to be the boundary between the Ethiopian side of Gambela and the British side ('Baro Salient').

⁸ Anywaa in Gambela used to have kings or nobles (*nyieye*, sing. *nyieya*) and chiefs or village headmen (*kwaari*, sing. *kwaaro*). Both of them were hereditary. These offices were abolished by

Those highlanders do not understand the system of Anywaa. Anywaa do rule by themselves. Anywaa have their kingdom with ministers and officials in charge, appointed by the king.

Recent Incident near Abwobo

What do you know about the recent killing that took place in Tier Koodhi [near Abwobo]? How many highlanders were killed?

The rumour I heard is that four highlanders were killed in that ambush. In the Isuzu car there were highlanders and Nuer passengers. According to the information they told the police that the killers were not Anywaa. They were highlanders armed with guns.

The Killing in Dima, January 2004

Have you heard about the recent fighting in Dima?

Yes. I heard a rumour that there was a fighting between gold miners [who are Anywaa] and government soldiers. I have not got accurate information, but it was reported in the newspaper here. What I heard is that soldiers went to the gold mining field from Dima to disarm Anywaa. The Anuak leader who was administrating the district refused the demand of the army. So they shot and killed him. Then people picked up their guns and fighting erupted. Many people were killed in the gold mining field (Dambala).

Did soldiers kill people in Dima town?

Yes. They discriminately killed many civilians in the centre of Dimma town. It is very sad news indeed.

the socialist regime, while on the Sudanese side, they are still functioning. After 1991 some village headmen and nobles were restored in Gambela region.

II . Testimony of Ojulu

Interviewed on 21 February 2004, Addis Ababa. Ojulu is a civil servant and in his late thirties.

The Massacre in Gambela Town, 13-15 December 2003

How did this killing happen and when did it start?

The first killing of eight workers on the road happened on Friday (12 Dec.) at 11:00 am. Then the mass killing started at 1:00 pm on Saturday (13 Dec.). They killed people on Saturday day and night, throughout Sunday, until Monday evening. They stopped killing people on Monday when federal police forces, deployed by the federal government, arrived in town.

Were these eight people killed between Itang and Jikaw?

No. It is between Itang and Ochom, about 30 km from Gambela town, just near Itang.

Are there Anywaa in Itang?

No, there is no many Anywaa in Itang since the closure of government institutions because of the change in the administrative structure. People were moved to Dimma, Abobo and others districts. It is only Army and few people left there.

Are there Nuers in Itnag?

Yes, there are some of them with the soldiers. You see, the worst thing is that the government has cheated the world by saying that it was the Anywaa and the Nuer fighting each other. They used the 2002 Anywaa and Nuer conflict as pretext because the world knows that there were conflicts between them in the past. It was some time later that people started asking why it is only people of one group that died while

there is no one dead from the other side. Therefore, people started understanding what the government was trying to hide.

Regarding the massacre in Gambela town, who were the killers? Were they both soldiers and civilians?

Soldiers made civilians lead the way to Anywaa homes and followed them from behind. Civilians called people out from their houses, stoned them and hit them with clubs or machetes. If the victim was strong, then soldiers shot him to kill.

Who were those civilians?

They were all highlanders from different ethnic groups: Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan and settlers.

Who were those soldiers?

The majority of them were Oromo.

You know, what happened was that Anywaa did not have information about the plan of killing. All highlanders gathered themselves for scouting the corpses to Addis Ababa. When the bodies arrived in town, the crowd took them to the Regional Administration Office. On their way to the Office they got two Anywaa on the bridge and killed them there right away. After they had had the bodies taken to the highlands, they returned to the town in three groups. One group took the Jabjabe river road, one took the main road and the other took to the Jinina road. Then they started attacking people. People ran into their houses without knowing why they were attacked. The crowd called out the frightened people. When they came out from their huts, they were stoned and stabbed by the crowd, or shot dead by soldiers.

Did these mobs kill only men?

Yes. They targeted only men. They did not kill women and children except one child who was slaughtered.

Prior to the killing they had a secret meeting to kill Anywaa. Some highlanders who had been born in Gambela and had strong relationship with Anywaa were slaughtered before the attack because they believed that these people would tell Anywaa the secret plan. A man by name Abachu Akillu was killed because he had a close relationship with Anywaa. I think that this plot was not known by Tigrayan soldiers. I believe that Oromo soldiers in the army planned the killing. If there was one Tigrayan officer among Oromo soldiers, you would not have been killed and the officer would have spared your life.

In those days people did not move because there was no guarantee for life. You could be killed, tortured or thrown into jail without question. This made many people to run away to take refuge.

Are there many Oromo in the army in Gambela?

Yes, they are many. Oromo have their own agenda in Gambela. They want to revenge the OLF members captured by the government in Gambela last year. They are the ones who killed people in Gambela this time.

Did many people leave the country?

Yes, many people fled away.

If I can take you back to the starting point of the killing of eight workers on the road, how did it happen?

We heard around 9:00 am in the morning that people were killed on the road. I understood that it might create a problem in the town later. We decided to stay at home rather than going out. But after some time we tried to go to near by Ambullu Hotel, the one near the Ethiopians Airline's office. While we were there, a big group of highlanders came and went to the police station for a meeting. Then we heard a loud applause from inside the police station. When they came out from there, they attacked some boys who were repairing bicycles near the army barrack, pervious

security office, with stones and they returned to the police station. Then they fired one bullet into the air. This happened before the arrival of corpses. Therefore, we knew that these people would create a problem. At 1:00 pm, the corpses arrived. By that time, they were in front of Abulla's Cafeteria waiting for the bodies. They cried a lot and took the bodies to the Regional administration office across the river. That is where they met the first victims, two Anywaa, and killed them near the bridge.

Did they kill them near the bridge?

Yes, across the bridge on the other side of the Baro river. Then they entered the Regional Council compound with bodies. After they sent the bodies to the highlands they returned from the Council in three groups. The fourth group was in the army barrack. The first group came to my place and attacked us. We ran into the house. They demolished the fence and I heard the mob leader was asking for the matchbox to burn the house. They burned the house and went away without killing anybody because there was no soldier among them. Then we came out of the house and put the fire off. Then the second group came and started throwing stones, shooting everywhere. We ran into the house again. I made a telephone call to the police station asking for help, but the answer was negative. Then one army captain who is residing near by came running and dispersed the mob. He called us to come out. All of us, women, children and men, came out. He asked me if I had a gun in the house. I told him that I did not have anything. He went into the house to search inside. Since it was dark, he asked me to give him a flashlight. I did so. Then he searched inside the house and did not find anything. He handed back the flashlight to me and told us that women and children would remain there, but he would take men to the police station. I took some young boys with me and he led us to the police station. On our way, we met a group of soldiers on the bridge (of Jabjabe river) near Tourist Hotel and asked the captain where he was taking them? The captain answered that he was taking us to the police station. They said, "No. We should take them to the army barrack." They told us to sit down and kept arguing with the captain. Then one black and skinny soldier grabbed my by the collar and said, "This is the one we have to kill." The captain told him to stop. Again he grabbed other two boys. Then they took us to the barrack.

Who is this captain?

He is a highlander who is working as military nurse.

As we arrived at the barrack, there were not many people. I found Atuk Okoth and two women there. They put us separate from them. After some time they brought Kwot Wagade and Kupudan. They were seriously beaten. They said that they had found a gun in the house of Kwot. I do not know whether it is true or not. The commander told others, "If you found a gun in his house, why didn't you kill him?" Then they brought Ojulu Ochalla and an old man, Cham Bang. Then many more were brought in and they were seriously beaten. Some were wounded by gunshots, knives, stones, and machetes. After some time a truck came to take us. They talked among themselves and the truck left without taking us. We did not know what happened. I think they changed their mind. Sometime later one commander came and they talked to each other. Then he told us that after one hour you would hear the result of this operation. The commander who came to us returned to the town and a serious of killing took place everywhere in the town. I think they gave an order to kill as many people as possible. At about 5:00 pm we asked them to treat the wounded people, but the commander told us, "No need of treatment. Let them die with their wounds". Later they changed their mind again and brought in a truck. We put the wounded people onto the truck and they took them to the hospital. At 12:00 pm they told us to go home. We left the barrack. But it was meaningless because there was no peace at home.

Did they release many people at night?

Yes, they released many people because they had brought people from all areas in Gambela town. They took people in lines from Omininga, Owolinga, and Baat Thur areas.

Did they kill people on Monday?

Yes, they killed people on Monday. For example, in Omininga area they called people to come out and shot them. They killed four people in this way.

Who is the commander of Gambela?

The commander is called Tsegaye. He is a deputy colonel and a Tigrayan. He is the one who said, “You Anywaa, you are responsible for the killing of the people. You have been killing many highlanders. Why are you complaining now because a few of your people were killed today?” Look, is this a government? What a government should do is to investigate the crime whenever a culprit does something wrong. He told us that he had not expected that the killing would last for many days. “I was expecting that it would last for only half an hour.” It is ridiculous. How could you count the minutes of the killing of human beings? This means that he knew something about the killing. It is something that they had planned in advance.

Is Tsegaye the commander for Gambela region as whole?

Yes, he is the commander for Gambela region. There is a senior commander for the Western Zone who is based in Jimma. He is a colonel and came to Gambela after the killing.

Were people staying in the compounds of Mekane Yesus Church and Catholic Church during the massacre in Gambela?

Yes. When we returned from the bush we took refuge in Mekane Yesus Church. Others people took refuge in Catholic Church. We stayed in Mekane Yesus for one week. Later, the soldiers alleged that the church had guns inside. They came and searched all inside the church, but did not find anything and went back to their barrack shamefully. On Tuesday, they went to the Catholic Church and forced the people to evacuate. On Thursday, they came to Mekane Yesus Church and did the same. Look, all houses were burned down in all residential areas like Omininga, Addis Sufer, and Tier-kidi and also there was no guarantee of your life. How could the government soldiers force people to evacuate the Churches? Where were they going to stay? Could they go and stay outside? What if the mob of highlanders and soldiers came again and killed the people? They did this because of the fear that the crowd gathered in the Churches might attack them.

Were there any Nuer killed in the incident?

No single Nuer was killed.

Is this type of killing similar to that happened in Pinyudo and Itang during the Derg era?

No, it not similar. Under the Derg regime, the government did not involve itself in the killing. It did it indirectly.

The problem between Nuer and Anywaa used not to be critical like it is today. The fight between them used to be at the inter-village level. There was no such a confrontation that the entire peoples are at war. This time, the government agitates it in order to make tribes not to understand each other.

Killing Happened Outside of Gambela Town

Did government's soldiers hold some people outside and take them back to Gambela?

Yes, they did. But the majority was killed. If they found you in the bush, they would kill you there. What they did before the killing was that they sent many soldiers to block the roads in all districts. Many travellers were killed on the roads because they did not know what had taken place in Gambela. People who were travelling from villages to Gambela were captured on the road by the soldiers and executed. Thirty people were killed in this way near the Makot airport. Only six bodies were found on the roadside. Even they attempted to extend the killing up to Ilea village.

Did they kill some people in Ilea village too?

No. But they attempted to attack the people. However, the farmers were strong and they stood up and told them, "We will fight you if you try to kill anybody here." Then they got afraid and left without killing anyone.

Did soldiers kill people in Pinykew village?

No. They did not kill in the village, but killed people on the road. Since people were moving around from village to village, they killed those found on the road. They attacked people in Pinyudo town, killed nine people, burned down the entire town, and displaced the people.

When did this take place? Was it on Saturday?

No. It took place a week after they killed people in Gambela town. They killed people and burned the houses in Pinyudo, and people ran away.

Recent Incidents in February 2004

I heard that Dr. Gebrehab Barnabas, Minister of Regional Affairs, went to Gambela yesterday. Even though he is there, he cannot solve any problem. In addition, I heard a rumour that an Isuzu car that was travelling from Gambela was ambushed.

Where did it happen? And how many were killed?

It happened between Gambela and Bonga. I heard that nobody was killed.

Were there people killed in Gambela yesterday?

Yes, Kambata (settlers) killed two people (Anywaa).

Were there people killed in villages?

Yes, soldiers went to Village 13, former Ithuriemo village, in Abobo district and they fought with farmers and killed some people. Lastly, they collected the highlanders and brought them to Gambela for safety.

Were some people killed in Tier-kodhi last week?

No, not in Tier kodhi. I think that it is a truck that was attack. The truck was travelling from Gambela to Pinyudo. It was an Isuzu truck. According to the Information I got this truck has one traveller who has good amount of money with him. Some of the soldiers have the information of this money. So, this group of soldiers ambushed the truck and killed four soldiers and two Nuer in the truck.

To whom did this truck belong? Is it a military truck or a civilian?

It was a civilian's truck

Did this incident happen last week?

Yes, it was last week, on Wednesday (16 February).

About the looting of the cattle, when did it take place?

The cattle were taken on Thursday.

The Incident of Dima

Did you hear anything about the fighting that took place in Dima?

I had a telephone call last time (from Dima). There was a group of people who survived the Gambela massacre and ran away. This group of people wanted to revenge for their relatives' blood shed by soldiers. They attacked highlanders in the gold fields in Dambala. Then the government army came and asked the *wereda* administrator to go to the gold fields to make peace with gold miners. When they arrived at the gold fields, they found the gold miners with guns. Then they decided to disarm the miners. However, the administrator told them that we could not do this. "We will be creating another problem. We do not come here for this purpose. We come for peace negotiation." Then one soldier shot the administrator because of his idea. After this the fighting erupted between Anywaa miners and soldiers because both parties have guns. When the army was defeated in the fields, they came to villages and killed many Anywaa civilians. They killed 20 people in Korkore village, 90 in Gadhu

village and 21 in Dima town and threw their bodies into the river. The death toll among the Anywaa is 131. You see, last time the government reported that Anywaa killed 172 people of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State, ignoring the 131 Anywaa killed, reducing the number of dead Anywaa to 21 only.

I heard that Anywaa killed people of Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. Is it true?

The government reported purposely to instigate another war between people of Southern Regional State and Anywaa. As you know, there are many nationalities, Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan, and so on in Dima living together with Anywaa. I can say that everybody is there. The government made this statement to defend itself not to be blamed. What kind of government is this, instigating hatred among people?

Did Anywaa and people of Southern Regional State fight before?

Never. There was not any problem between them. This wrong information is given by the ARRA to the UNHCR. They are the ones who reported that 172 people of the Southern Regional State were killed by Anywaa and that only 21 Anywaa were killed by the mobs instead of 131. I hope that truth will prevail tomorrow. The survivors are still in the UNHCR compound. They will tell the truth. Highlanders are still hunting Anywaa with spears, clubs, and machetes in the compound of UNHCR in Dima town.

Don't UNHCR staff in Gambela and Dima get the accurate information? The reports they give on the Internet are not correct.

Yes. Their report is not correct because UNHCR's informants are highlanders of ARRA, which is a government agency. That is why they said that the conflict was between Nuer and Anywaa. The UNHCR officer publicized the report without any examination.

Is the UNHCR officer not a foreigner?

Yes, he is a foreigner, but he is not in the field. The highlanders in the field provide information to him. He cannot do anything about the reports he gets from the field, which prepared by these highlanders.

Anywaa-Majangir Conflict

In 2002, I heard that there was a series of fighting between Anywaa and Majangir. How did this happen? As I know them, the Majangir are a peaceful people who do not like wars.

Yes, it is true. The Majangir did not have any conflict with the Anywaa. We used to live together in peace. It was a plot of the government and Nuer. They told Majangir, “You have to fight Anywaa to get more posts in the regional government.” They said that, although Majangir already had enough seats in the Regional Council as well as in the federal parliament.

What made this get serious was that a Majangir man killed his fellow Majangir because of a girl when they were drinking beer. He ran away. When police went to investigate the case, they held some people for questioning. The Majangir who committed the murder came back and told others, in order to cover up his crime, he went that the Anywaa took away those Majangir and killed them. Then the Majangirs formed squads, went into Anywaa villages, and killed many Anywaa. Then Anywaa retaliated and killed many Majangir too. Later when they understood that this is something they were forced to do without their interest and not good for them, they have come together and reconciled their differences. Now they are living in peace. There are many Anywaa working for Majangir in government offices in Godare. The government jailed the administrator Odungduk who investigated this issue and brought peace between the Majangir and the Anywaa. He is in prison now.

Conflict in Gok, 2003

Did the government army kill some people in Gok last year?

Yes, they did kill.

How did it happen?

It happened because of one boy who had been in jail for certain crime that I do not know. When he was released, he started to go to school in Gok. The root cause of the problem is an incident took place in Dima between a certain group of Anywaa boys and the army. Those boys, after they had clashed with army in Dima, came to Gok. So, the army suspected that the student was one of the boys who clashed with them in Dima and wanted to arrest him. Soldiers went to Gok. The student said, "I am not the suspect. I have been here for the whole year doing my study and you know it. If I should have committed a crime, why you haven't put me in jail up to this time. You would have jailed me a long time ago. Why do you want me now? I did not make any crime. I won't go to the jail for nothing." After this talk, soldiers returned to their barrack in Pinyudo peacefully. Some time later, they went to Gok for the second time and called peasants for a meeting to make a decision to jail the boy. The boy refused. Then they shot him. Then some peasants picked up their guns and the fighting broke out between the soldiers and the boy's father and his relatives. The group of boys who had clashed with the army before in Dima joined peasants. When the army was defeated in this fighting, they went to the village and beat any peasant they found seriously including students in the school without any reason. When they returned to Pinyudo from Gok, they even killed one student.

This is the habit of the army. When they fail in the field, they come home and kill innocent citizens. The Gok case would have been very simple, which had been solved by the peasants without involvement of the army. All these problems were created by the government. They should have consulted elders, but they did things in their own way. I do not think you will get information from a person by torturing, jailing and killing him. This is what the government is doing in Gambela. The government is the problem maker in Gambela.

Conflict in Pinyudo-Thatha, 2002

One day in 2002 a highlander was killed on the road between Pinyudo and Thatha village. The killer was a Dinka refugee. The government officials including President

Okello Akwai and Okichi Olom went to Thatha to investigate the case and to make peace in the area. While they were in a meeting one army officer got up and shot one Anywaa in front of the President Okello. This government is a racist that stands only for its own ethnic group. Look at this. How is it possible for a government to punish anybody for the crime committed by another person? Whenever a crime is committed in Gambela, without any investigation, Anywaa will be held responsible for it. Anywaa are jailed and killed for nothing. This will make people to stand up against the government. They will pick up guns, and go to the bush to fight the government in future.

Did the fighting in the Pinyudo refugee camp⁹ take place before the Thatha incident?

No. It happened after the Thatha incident.

Reaction by the Federal Government

I heard that a week ago Omot Obang and Okello Oman had met with the Minister of defence, Ato Dulla, and Major-General Samora on this issue. They said, “You come late. You should have reported to us earlier. Now we are going to give an order to put those who perpetrated the killing, people like Commander Tsegaye and his officers, into jail.” They gave such kind of statement. But we don’t know whether they will do it or not. As you know, in the army there is a chain of command. These people [at the top], they might have heard the killing. But if they haven’t got a report they may not do anything. Such kind of thing will be a block on the way not to reach them.

Was it true that soldiers were mobilised to build houses for the people?

Yes, they did build houses for the sake of propaganda that the soldiers did build the houses for the victims. They forced the government employees to go with them and cut wood and grass and started building houses. But in the end they handed over the job to settlers to do it as “food for work.” They did not finish the work either.

⁹ It started on 25 November 2002 in Pinyudo (Fugnido) refugee camp. In the initial clash, 33 refugees, mainly Dinka, were killed by Anywaa refugees. ‘UNHCR calls for more security after deadly clashes in Ethiopian camp’, 10 Dec. 2002, <http://www.unhcr.ch/>

Was there anybody who went to visit Gambela from the Federal Government?

Dr. Gebrehab Barnabas, Minister for Regional Affairs in the Federal Government, and Ato Allma, his deputy, went to visit people in Gambela.

Are they still in Gambela now?

No, they returned to Addis Ababa. I heard that they have gone back to Gambela on Thursday (19 February). His going there has nothing to do with people. He did not comfort people for what had happened to them. Instead he blamed the people for the killing. What he said to people last time was not good. He said, “You are responsible for your own death. Why are you complaining for the death of a small number of people? It is you who have been killing people here.” Is this what a responsible man in the Federal Government is supposed to say? You know, there are many crimes committed in entire Ethiopia, killing people on roads and in train. Did they ever go to civilians and killed them for the crime of another person? Here in Western Ethiopia some Oromo kill people from time to time. But soldiers do not attack Oromo civilians. Why are they killing all people in Gambela for the death of eight people by unidentified gunmen? Nowhere in the world innocent people will be judged for the crime of other persons. It is the first of its kind to happen in this country. In reality in Ethiopia the Anywaa are not the only one people who have bandits among them. All people in Ethiopia have bandits. In addition, nobody knows who were the attackers of the car. No one has identified the attackers.

Recently some people were killed in Shabele town. It was reported that the killers were Oromo themselves. Look, if they want to expose the truth, they can do it.

I understand that the massacre in Gambela was planned by soldiers. They needed a reason to start killing Anywaa. Two highlanders’ traders, one living in Gambela town and the other in Pinyudo, contributed money to be paid the soldiers who would carry out the job in case they should be identified and expelled from the army. This plan did not work on time. When they heard that there were some delegates coming from Addis Ababa going to Jikaw, they thought that the chance had come. Therefore, on

Friday night soldiers were deployed on the road to ambush the car. When the UN and ARRA staff left in the morning, the soldiers were already waiting for them in the bush. When the news of the attack reached the town, the police went to the scene and tried to go after the attackers. But they were prevented to do so because the army knew that the attackers would be found and identified. However, since their plan was to find a reason to kill the Anywaa, they just returned to the town without pursuing the killers and started killing Anywaa.

The solution for Gambela issue needs a neutral body to come and investigate the problem. The government cannot give any solution to this problem. The government is defending itself from the crimes it committed. If the investigation is going to be done by the government, it will aggravate the situation. The government does not want to identify the problem and solve it. I think that it will not be possible to live with such people (the federal government) any longer

The reason why President Okello left the country is anger against the attitude of this government. Look, when Ato Allma of Prime Minister's Office came to Gambela, instead of comforting the people and making peace, he started blaming the leaders for the killing. He said, "We have to evaluate the performance of leadership." President Okello told him, "This is not a time for such kind of action. You have to look for the whereabouts of the survivors and make peace prevail first. We cannot do any evaluation now while people are still dying." He did not listen to Okello. Then he got angry and left the country. Maybe the motive behind Allma's statement was to put Okello in jail. Even the number of the deceased people that was given by the government is not correct. It is more than that. The counting was finalized so early before we did not finish searching for missing ones. What I can say is that we need a neutral body to come for investigation.

You see, always when this Allma and Dr. Gebrehab Barnabas come to Gambela, after they leave some people are either killed or imprisoned. Moreover, they are always defending themselves to be free from any responsibility. Look now. They have started blaming others such as Nuer and SPLA. Also they started to bring the people of Southern Regional State into this issue. What they do is to cover up their crime.

Therefore, their going to Gambela is meaningless unless they are bringing a solution to the Gambela problem.

Now Gambela has no leader. Who can talk to the Federal Government officials?

People do talk. What people told them last time was that they had to put the perpetrators of the killing in jail first and bring peace in town. Then people who ran to the bush and went exile would return home. Otherwise, people would choose to stay in the bush or take refuge in other countries rather than coming out and being killed. You know, nobody wants to go exile and stay as a refugee if there is no problem at his home. Now people are in a big problem and they are either in the bush or in exile. They want to come home and live peacefully. But it will not happen without peace. Even more people will go out if there is no good action taken by the government to bring peace. For example, we should have left as they were looking after us. The reason we have not gone is for the sake of our children. What will happen to them if we go?

How many Anywaa are in the prison of Federal Government in Addis Ababa?

There are 41 Anywaa, including people like David Oduru, Philip Opiew, Pinykew, Odol, Okok and so on.

Are there some prisoners in the Gambela prison?

Yes, there are many there. Many young people are in jail.

Our fear is that many people will be killed later when they come to exploit the oil. Anywaa will resist them. Last time they planned to go to Jor district (where the oil resources are) to disarm the peasants by force. If it had happened, they would have killed many Anywaa. As their behaviour has showed us, whenever they loose in the field, they will come home and kill civilians. Now they have deployed 30,000 troops in Gambela.

III. Testimony of Obang

Interviewed on 11 March 2004, Nairobi. Obang was working for the regional government and is in his mid-thirties.

The Massacre in Gambela Town, 13-15 December 2003

The killing started on Saturday, 13 December 2003, exactly at 12:30. The attack had happened earlier on that morning on the Itang road. It was reported that about seven people [on the car] had been killed. The real assailants were not identified, but the [Federal] government assumed that they might be Anywaa. The government should have waited for the evidence to find out who they exactly were, but it did not. The incident happened between Uchwom and Itang. In fact the place is not inhabited by Anywaa. Uchwom is a screening center for Sudanese refugees, mainly Nuer. At the moment the area is lived by Nuer who refused to go to the refugee camp and remained there, although Anywaa wanted them to go. It caused a problem within the interim government of Gambela last time when Anywaa claimed that Uchwom is their land, belongs to Pinykew. The government refused. So, the assailants might have been Nuer. Or, they might be some other intruders from outside. But I doubt that they might be Anywaa.

At what time were the bodies brought back to Gambela town?

On that morning I was in a car doing some work for the Regional Government. The bodies were expected to arrive since 10am, and it arrived at around 11. They were brought by an army vehicle. I saw with my own eyes that there were seven soldiers in uniform in the lorry. What happened was that they were moving from the Mobil petrol station to Gambela Hospital. But before going to the Hospital they took the bodies to the Regional Council. [By seeing the bodies] many people (highlanders) were crying, and some started throwing stones to the van of the President of Regional Council, Okello Akwai, breaking the rear window. They were about to be attacked by bodyguards (of the President), but the President refused, he himself an Anywaa. What happened exactly was ...

Who were those people that stoned the car?

They were highlanders, citizens. You know, it was very bad. The soldiers were there. But they were fuelling it up, persuading highlanders to act against Anywaa. And it happened. It was not necessary to take the bodies to the Regional Council, not to the Hospital, and to move around Gambela town, Jabjabe Hill, and unnecessary places. They were supposed to be taken to the Hospital straight away, or to the Police station, and they should have made coffins. But it was not like that. They agitated highlanders to attack Anywaa. It was well planned. I think, because I saw every thing by myself.

Is it true that the bodies were badly damaged, mutilated?

In fact, I did not see them. They were covered. Some say that the bodies were cut into pieces. They were dead and covered. I think that they were exaggerating things, just to make highlanders angrier, just to annoy them.

So, highlanders immediately started killing. I think that a half of the population of Gambela town are Anywaa. So, highlanders may fear. But it was by order of the army and the army informed them that they were behind them. In fact soldiers were the first to shoot, which encouraged highlanders to go and get whatever they wanted. No Anywaa tried to resist, because the soldiers were behind them and they were shooting. They shoot you first. If you are shot, OK. If not, then highlanders chase you and beat you with anything they have. Even those shot by guns were cut into pieces by machete, so that people could not know that they were killed by bullets. I am a witness for that because I myself was shot first, and ...

In which part of Gambela town did the killing start?

You know, the order came from the Police station from where they fired. You know, people living behind the former Regional Council, there is a small market there. The area is called Bure Safar, and the killing started there. You have Ras Gobana Primary School and Higher Secondary School. Teachers living there were also the first to start

killing near Television station, Wuminiga area. In fact, it was badly attacked. Houses were set fire, and looting, whatever ...

Where were you when the killing started?

I was exactly at Wuminga where my house is. I first heard seven or eight shots of guns. I was there and saw every thing. Even the people who were killed like Pastor Okwer, I was seeing every thing. Even the killing of a dresser of the Hospital, when a grenade exploded in his house, I saw it. It is not far from my place, just about ninety meters. So, I was seeing every thing.

Who were the attackers? Do you know them personally?

Yes, I know them. I can tell you the names. Three teachers and two Defence Force soldiers [and others] were the ones who attacked me. One teacher of Ras Gobana Secondary, Werku, and two teachers of Jabjabe Primary School, and a student of Jabjabe Primary School, and one trader who is our neighbor. One soldier shot me three or four times.

Were those soldiers in uniform?

Yes, they were in uniform. You know, I was just standing at the gate [of his compound] and watching what was happening. I was with my wife, a son, and other two children. When things were deteriorating, I sent them away. They ran away. I remained alone standing and waiting. I even did not close the door. They shot me and I fell down. When I fell down they shot me again, and it was missed. I could not go back to shut the door. When I tried to run, they shot me again. I fell down. An old man standing behind me was shot and died. I saw his blood. While they were busy with him I ran away.

Which parts of your body were shot?

First I was shot at my chest. But the bullet did not hit me. It went through my T-shirt and came out by the sleeve. When they shot for the second time, I saw dust between

my legs. Then I fell down. Before that they shot from a distance and the bullet hit the gate of Pastor Othwol's house. I entered into his compound. Five or six of them came and aimed at me. From then I did not know anything. They beaten me and I remained there unconscious. After two or three minutes, I heard the sound of grenade exploded in the house of Pastor Othwol Omot. He was inside the house with other children and big boys. When I got up, the whole house thatched by grass was burning. Even the hut I entered was burning. So I could not see well except the fire and a soldier of the Defence Force. Then I tried to walk away, but I could not run. My both legs had been beaten by machete. I do not remember very well. What I remember is that a boy came and caught my hand. When I looked at him, he was shot and he ran away. They left me there. I went and fell down in the Jabjabe river. I recall that a boy pulled me out of the river, and took me to the bank. I did not know anything. It was about 1 pm. I do not know exactly. From 1 pm up to 5 pm, I did not know anything. I remained unconscious. Finally around 5 pm somebody came. Her name is Achala. She was afraid because all of my face was drained with blood. She went and called some boys. Okuny and others came and carried me to the house of my father-in-law at Addis Safar. They washed me. My wife, mother-in-law, and others were weeping beside me. They had run away and then were called back. I spent a night there.

Next day on Sunday, I saw every thing from morning till evening. On Sunday morning it (destruction and killing) started at 8 am. I saw people running. They were looting and burning. It was very bad.

Can you tell me how many wounds you had on your body on that day?

Yes, I can tell you, but some of them I cannot tell you exactly because I was unconscious. First my right hand indicating finger was injured by bullet. It was broken and it is still paining. On the day, I did not feel pain. My chin was hit by machete and it bled a lot. The lower lip was also cut into two, and a lower tooth was dislodged. My nose was also hit by machete and bled a lot. On my head there are four wounds hit by machete. My left hand thumb was also hit by machete or what, I don't know. Now it is deformed. My ring finger is also broken at the bottom. My right shoulder was badly beaten. One of my left ribs was broken. My left buttock was badly beaten. Something might have been broken, and it is still painful. Both of my legs

were beaten by machete. They bled and swelled. I think that they tried to cut my legs. Maybe they wanted break my legs so that I could not run away. My left ankle is still paining. I don't know how many wounds I got. They were killing me. I was very lucky that I did not die. It was very difficult to resist. I could not even speak because my lower lip was cut. If you had seen me on that day, you could not have recognized me. I was bleeding all over and different parts of my body swelled. It was very bad.

You could not move? Did you stay in the house of in-law on Sunday?

I did not stay in the house. They lifted me up, but I could not walk. So I crept into the grass of the graveyard, where the graves of Cam Ogala's brother and other Pinyudo's people are. I just laid down under small trees. Sometimes I got up and watched. On the other side of the Jabjabe river I could see people shooting, looting, burning and taking things away. I became tired and slept. When I woke up again around 11 am, I could still see people running, shouting and insulting Anywaa. Shooting was going on in the forest behind Dipo where there are fuel tanks. Shooting and shooting, you could hear from far. People were after those who had run away from town. It continued until the late afternoon around 5 pm since morning. All Anywaa people in Wuminiga area were driven out of town, except old ladies. On Saturday and Sunday they did not attack women. Very few women were assaulted. They did not do raping. Raping happened on Monday because all men were deserted. Men ran away, and those wounded men were taken away. So only women remained. After looting every thing, burning and destroying houses, they started to go to women. They raped women. It was really bad, horrible. I cannot talk about it.

Who did commit the raping? Was it also done by citizens and soldiers?

Highlanders and soldiers. But mainly soldiers because they frightened women (with guns). They were frightened and surrendered.

Can you tell me exactly who were the soldiers? I know they were EPRDF soldiers, but were they all Tigrayan, or were many Oromo also included?

Yes, many soldiers were Orimo, because they belong to the Western Command based in Jimma. Some soldiers from the Southern Regional State were also included. High ranking officers were Tigrayan. I think the TPLF was responsible for every thing, because they are the ones who rule and give orders.

Can you tell me the name of commander?

The name of commander is Tsegaye. He has been in Gambela for about two years and is commanding all the forces in Gambela Region. I think he is a captain (*shambel*). I met him twice in meetings, and he has hatred against Anywaa. But I had not believed that the army could do such things to citizens. That is why I did not run away, while I had heard the sound of shooting in the beginning.

Where did you spend the Sunday night?

In the evening the attackers went back. Most of the time I laid down in the grass, and in the evening my wife came to me, and we went back to her parents' house. I slept there. I tell you, on Saturday and Sunday, we never thought about food. Nobody cooked and we did not eat anything. I did not even feel hungry because of the pain.

On Monday morning at 9:30 they came again to that area. They were about to kill me, but as there were very few people left at Wuminiga, they went to Baro-Akobo area on the other side of the Jabjabe river. They killed about two people, and set fire on houses. They came to our area in the late afternoon around 4 pm. I was lying down, feeling much more pain than the previous day. When they came, I could sense it because children who had been playing kept silence. I could understand something was happening. I raised my upper body and saw them coming. They were two soldiers in uniform carrying AK-47 and three people with iron bars and machete. One of the soldiers said, 'This man is very sick. Leave him.' So they left me.

They went and met about 14 boys who had come back from the forest. It was late afternoon, and people fled to the forest were coming back to town to sleep there. You know boys went out of town early in the morning and returned in the late afternoon. They had these boys line up. They lined up like slaves, one holding the shirt of

another one in front of him. I know them one by one very well. Then Anywaa policemen who saw all this went and reported to the army. Army officers came to the spot and released those boys. It was very fortunate that these policemen came across. Otherwise, they might have been brought to the forest and killed.

They killed a lot of people, and the bodies were buried in mass graves on Monday. One is behind the WFP compounds, another is behind the Jabjabe Hill. Still many were buried in unknown graves. Only the soldiers could pick up and take dead bodies somewhere.

So, some Anywaa policemen were still there?

Yes. But they had been disarmed and had no gun. On Saturday about six policemen were badly beaten at the Police Station. But there were others who were not beaten. On Monday I think that there was an order that there should be no killing, and on Tuesday the Federal Police forces arrived.

From where did they come, and how many were they?

They came from Addis Ababa by land, and they were about 60. After their arrival at least the killing stopped.

Was the situation improved after Tuesday?

After the arrival of Federal Police it became a little better and on Wednesday people could move, and my friends and relatives were able to come and see me. Before that it was impossible. Nobody came. If anybody was seen crossing the road, he could have been killed immediately. So, security improved. But from the other side of town (across the Baro river), the area behind the TTC for instance, we had a report that raping was still going on. It was very bad.

The security improved, but no Anywaa talked to a highlander, and no highlander talked to an Anywaa. But they kept insulting Anywaa, saying ‘Now you have seen what we did. The second step will come next. We spared women and children in the

first step, but in the second we kill you all'. Some women whose husbands had been killed reported to the Federal Police, and as a result some highlanders were arrested. That is why they wanted to kill all Anywaa, so that there would be nobody to accuse them. After two weeks from the incident many youths disappeared because they could not tolerate the shameful situation in their own town. People were not allowed to mourn the death. Nobody could weep. How could you stay? Your houses were burnt, you could still see the blood on the ground. You could not tolerate all these. So many people deserted and left [fled to Sudan and Kenya]. I also should have left at that time, but I was very weak. I could not walk because of the wounds.

Had Anywaa living in Gambela town never expected that such a massacre would happen?

No.

If the incident had not been planned, how they could go to Ilea, Upanya, Akado and other places to disarm Anywaa militia. The army went and disarmed them on Sunday because they thought these militia men would come and defend Anywaa. They also looted (in these villages). They beat one man and took his money at Akado.

Conflicts prior to the Massacre, September-November 2003

But did you ever feel that tension between Anywaa and highlanders were growing? I know that there had been some cases of killing of highlanders although the killers were not identified. I also heard that Anywaa peasants and soldiers had fought in Gok.

Yes, I knew that. Gok was badly ravaged by the government. It was the weakness of the government. The government was not involving itself to solve the problem. Rather it was aggravating the situation. I think that the Anywaa were too patient. When the problem happened in Gok, the government did not try to catch the suspects. Instead it assaulted innocent villagers.

When did it happen?

It happened in September (2003), and continued up to November. The government soldiers, about 12 or 15, in Pinyudo together with policemen were sent to Gok, and exchanged fire with the criminals. About three soldiers died in the fight. Then in retaliation they set fire to the houses of villagers.

Were the criminals the ones who came from Dambala (gold mining place near Dima)?

Yes. The soldiers should have followed the gangs and caught them. Instead of doing that, they attacked innocent villagers. In Pinyudo town they threatened and beaten members of Gok Wereda Council. One of them lost his eye.

How many villagers were killed in Gok?

More than 30. But they were not killed at one time. Attacks continued until November. Gok became a very insecure place. Nobody could go there.

With the escalation of the problem, in November an Isuzu van carrying highlanders was attacked between Abwobo and Pinyudo. Some passengers were killed. We do not know who did it. But the blame was put on the innocent Anywaa. Again, a car was attacked at Choolan area between Gambela town and Shabele, on the way to Dembidolo. 5 or 6 highlanders were killed. This is an area controlled by the OLF. We do not know who did it. The government is also there. Instead of going to investigate the case, they beat local people. I really put the blame on the government. There was also a hand grenade explosion at a billiard place in town, in which five highlanders were wounded. ... At one time two Anywaa criminals were caught by the Anywaa policemen at Abwobo. Then two highlanders working on road construction on contract near Abwobo were assaulted (and killed). Then a meeting was held in Gambela town, organized by the Regional Council and Defence Forces.

The Army's Involvement in the Massacre

It was disclosed (in the above meeting held in Gambela town) that those killings were committed by Anywaa, and it was declared that if any highlander should be killed

anywhere, the army would take action. The meeting threatened people. And it was exactly what happened in December. The December massacre should be the result of the meeting. Before the massacre, on November 16, there held a secret meeting at the military barrack outside of Gambela town. The atmosphere of the meeting was very aggressive and decisive. In the meeting the decision was passed to all soldiers that they should kill Anywaa. I got this news from a confidential source.

Reaction by the Federal Government

How was the meeting held at Gambela when Dr. Gebrehab Barnabas was sent by the Federal Government?

You know, this Dr. Gebrehab is like a mad man. When he came, every day there was a meeting: with workers, with party leaders, with victims. We had a meeting on Saturday, 20 December. It was a public meeting with victims held at the Regional Council. We talked to him a lot. There was a promise that those who had fled to the forest would be brought back safely, and that they would be assisted in medication, food, clothes, shelters, and so on. It was promised that peace and security would be guaranteed. In the meeting there were four points raised by us. One of them was the issue of widows. The wife of the late pastor Okwer said that it had never happened in history that a pastor hiding in his own house was killed by the government army. ‘A pastor is the one,’ she said, ‘who brings peace and reconciliation. But he himself was killed, together with people who took refuge at his house. Moreover, even some people were killed in church.’ People complained a lot about killing, and about the way dead bodies had been mistreated. You know, some corpses were burnt. But Gebrehab, Omot Obang, and some body called Allma from the Federal Government did not agree. Omot Obang is a member of the Regional Council in charge of police, justice and administration, and is very much backed by the government. He is like a prime minister, but he is not elected by people [a political appointee]. He is anti-Anywaa, and just put in the position by the government. He is still there. He is a bad guy. Gebrehab insisted that no army soldier could have killed a citizen. They told him every thing, and I also told him. But he did not agree. The lady told him that it was something like apartheid in South Africa, killing innocent people in cold blood, and that the government should investigate. She said, ‘What happened along the road was

done by a particular group. Those people should be found. But instead of doing that, why did you kill innocent people?’ There was no answer. He denied every thing. ... It was only recently because of the American pressure that he admitted that the army was partly responsible. After three months! Even Meles up to now has said nothing about the issue. That means he knows the truth. He does not care, and the killing is still going on in Gambela.

Seeking Refuge in Kenya

On which day did you leave Gambela for Addis Ababa?

I left on 28 in EC by air for Addis Ababa. It was on Friday (26 December), two weeks after the incident. I was escaping secretly. They were waiting for my wounds to heal. Before my leave the Federal Police called and interrogated me three times about the cases of Ojulu Obang and Omot Oman who had escaped and Ajoo Odol who had been arrested. Because of my job they thought that I had got secret information and that I was the one supplying information to those Anywaa abroad who were posting news of the massacre on internet. In Addis they also followed me. It was impossible to go to Kenya by air, so after staying in Addis for about two weeks, three other Anywaa and myself set off by land (for Kenya).