

Testimony of an Anuak Widow

Ajulu¹ is a 29 year old woman and the mother of two children. She was interviewed for the Anuak Justice Council in Gambella, Ethiopia in May of 2005. This is Ajulu's account (paraphrased) of what happened on that day. It may be noted that her older child was at a relative's home.

Ajulu reports:

On December 13, 2003, my husband, who worked for the regional government was killed. He was one of the first men to be killed.² He was a well-educated man and openly opposed the Ethiopian government's policy of taking over control of the local government from the local people. He had brought attention to the fact that the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was not following the Ethiopian Constitution, which allowed for this.

I remember first hearing the sounds of gunfire starting about 12:45 in the afternoon on December 13, 2003, when the shooting started in front of the regional hospital in Gambella town. My husband and I heard from others that they were killing Anuak men so my husband and I quickly went inside our house. Almost immediately, I heard the sounds of approaching Ethiopian defense soldiers walking towards our house yelling, 'Kill them!' 'Whenever you find an Anuak man, kill him.' 'Today is the day for killing Anuak.' All of us heard it. My husband wanted to get out of the house and face them, but I pushed him back and blocked the door so he could not leave.

The troops came inside our fence, so telling my husband to stay inside, I went outside to face them, closing the door behind me. I asked them what they wanted. They told me, 'Your husband.' I told them he was not there. They said that they knew he was there and again I said he was not. They said, 'Tell him to get out or they would shoot and burn the house.' One of the guys pushed me out of the way and shot at the house. My 6-month-old baby was inside and my husband again tried to come out. I went back inside and pushed him away from the door. He kept trying to get me to take the baby. He told me, 'Let them kill me!' 'Get the baby!' 'Do not worry!' 'Grab the baby!' But, instead, I pushed my husband into a corner and it was then the defense forces set the house on fire and started repeatedly shooting at the house. The baby started choking on the smoke because it was so thick we could not breathe. I held my baby as I crawled down low through the door to the outside of the house. The troops started shooting inside the smoke filled open door and my husband was shot in the stomach, chest and right arm, but he did not die. He kept telling me, 'Ajulu, go!' 'Go with the baby!' 'Let them kill me!' After my husband was injured, I jumped on top of him to protect him while I was still holding the baby with my other arm. I begged them to please not kill my husband. A highlander then grabbed me and pulled me off of him and made my husband stand up. I heard my husband say, 'Just kill me!' I was screaming and the baby was crying. Two of the defense soldiers then dragged my husband from where he was near the burning house because it was so unbearably hot. They took him outside of the gate. He was ten feet from me and still alive.

¹ The name has been changed to protect this woman's identity.

² The Ethiopian government's defense troops targeted certain Anuaks whose names were on a list. The list was prepared in advance and included the educated male leaders in the Anuak community.

They then started beating me with the barrel of their guns, on my back and on my head. My baby was crying. One of defense forces said, 'You say this is your land? After today, there will not be any more Anuak. There will not be any more Anuak land.'³ He pointed his finger at me and told me, 'Shut up! Just wait and see! Today we will do to you what was done to the people of Israel.'⁴ He then saw my gold necklace and said, 'Even your gold necklace we are going to take away.' He then ripped it off my neck.

Eight soldiers were around my husband---repeatedly hitting him. He kept saying, 'Please shoot me.' Because the heat was so great and the smoke so thick, they kept trying to move my husband further away from the house. They took him fifty feet from me and started beating him again. The same man who ripped off my necklace, held me back from him, but I could see what they were doing. The soldiers stopped for a minute and then highlander⁵ militia came and started hitting him on the head with machetes and clubs. As he tried to defend self with his hands, they hit him with a machete on his hand and he fell down. Three of the militiamen then slashed him with machetes on his head, neck and face. They hit him with a large club on his head and face until his face was smashed. He finally fell down, face forward, towards me. Another highlander then hit him again on the face. He opened his eyes a little bit and closed them again before his body started jumping. I stopped crying because I could not believe what was happening. I was numb. Then they all left me alone with my husband and baby. I went to my husband. As I was holding him and my baby, an older Anuak woman came to me along with two boys, one nine and the other twelve. My husband was opening and closing his mouth. I could hardly recognize him as his face was so bloody and his nose was missing. My husband's body started jumping. When the militia saw the Anuak boys and woman come, they came running back shouting, 'Kill them! Kill them!' The old woman grabbed my baby and my hand and started running with us.

My only comfort is my husband died before I ran away. I never saw him again. I don't know where his body is. The Ethiopian army did something I will never forget. My husband had no brother or father, only a younger sister. The only thing I have left are my children. Now I must be father and mother to them.

How could a human being do this to another? Why are the majority of other human beings in this world not doing anything to stop these people and bring them to justice?

³ Anuaks have lived on this land for hundreds of years. The land is extremely fertile with abundant sources of water from rainfall and rivers. The area is also rich in natural resources including oil and gold.

⁴ This comment possibly refers to how the Israelites were displaced from their land and became slaves to outsiders or also may possibly be related to the holocaust of the Jews during WWII.

⁵ Highlanders are those from the lighter skinned tribes of African/Arabic mix from the highland areas of Ethiopia as opposed to the darker skinned indigenous Africans of the lowlands of Gambella. Thousands of highlanders have moved to this area or have been resettled there by the government. Many highlanders were not involved in these atrocities and have good relationships with the indigenous ethnic groups in the area. However, others joined in with the killings.