

**Gambella, Ethiopia** – Talk privately to any Anuak people in the Ethiopian state of Gambella and it won't be long before they speak about "the problem." Others are terrified into silence. To Anuak and other indigenous minorities of southwestern Ethiopia, the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is a ruthless military dictatorship. And almost everyone links "the problem" to Gambella's oil.

"Since the problem, we are not able to farm or to fish," said one Anuak survivor who was shot three times. He is shy, but he will show you where one bullet entered and exited his wrist. He was shot December 13, 2003 – the day the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Defense Forces (EPRDF) and local "highlander" militias launched their genocidal war on the Anuaks. "Highlanders" are Ethiopians who are neither Anuak nor Nuer – the indigenous peoples of the region – but predominantly Tigray and Amhara people resettled into Anuak territory from their lands in the central highlands since 1974.

Ten months after the massacres of December, 2003, the EPRDF government of Ethiopia continues to downplay the violence in southwestern Ethiopia. At the same time, the government has been rewarded with new loans, debt restructuring and debt forgiveness by the international development community. The EPRDF continues to benefit from its tight military relationship with the United States.

The region is home to guerillas of the Gambella People's Liberation Front (GPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and other forces hostile to the Meles Zenawi regime. However, the EPRDF government has used the pretext of "terrorism" and "national security" to punish rural populations, and it continues to wage low-intensity warfare against innocent civilians.

Today, Gambella state is under total military occupation. Estimates place between 30,000 and 80,000 EPRDF troops deployed here, carrying out scorched-earth campaigns under the cover of "counter-terrorism." One recent attack occurred in early September, when EPRDF soldiers reportedly pillaged the rural village of Powatalam. Some 43 people were killed, and the village was burned.

At least 1,500 and perhaps as many as 2,500 Anuak civilians have died in the fighting – most of these being intellectuals, leaders, and members of the educated and student classes, who have been intentionally targeted. Hundreds of people remain unaccounted for and many are believed to have been "disappeared."

Numerous rural villages where Anuaks and other ethnic minorities generally hover in the margins of existence at the best of times have been similarly attacked, looted, and torched. Thousands and perhaps tens of thousands of Anuak homes have reportedly been burned. Anuak women and girls are routinely raped, gang-raped and kept as sexual slaves by EPRDF forces. Girls have been shot for resisting rape, and summary executions of girls held captive for prolonged periods as sexual slaves have been reported. In the absence of Anuak men – killed, jailed or driven into exile – Anuak women and girls have been left vulnerable to such sexual atrocities. Due to the isolation of women and girls in rural areas, rapes remain substantially under-reported.

Some 6,000 to 8,000 Anuak remain at refugee camps in Pochalla, Sudan; and there are an estimated 1,000 Anuak refugees in Kenya. The Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Bureau (DPPB), a regional body that works closely with international aid groups, estimated in August 2004 that approximately 25% (roughly 50,000 people) of Gambella's population had been displaced.

"Many, many men have been killed since the problem began," says one witness. "Many men ran away into the bush and have been hunted by the soldiers. Women and girls are left undefended in their homes. They are raping many girls. They keep some women by force."

The violence has almost completely disrupted this year's planting season, and people see famine in the coming winter months (October-March) – exacerbated by the destruction of milling machines and food stores.

According to Anuak sources relying on sympathetic oppositionists within the regime, the EPRDF plans to access the petroleum of Gambella were laid out at a top-level cabinet meeting in Addis Ababa in September 2003. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi chaired the meeting, at which the military cleansing of the Anuaks was reportedly openly discussed. Also present were Gen. Abdullah Gamada, head of the EPRDF military, Vice-Prime Minister Adisu Lagesse, and Omot Obang Olom, security chief for the Gambella region, an ethnic Anuak. Petroleum operations – heavily guarded by EPRDF troops – are rapidly moving forward.

### **The “Rwanda Model” in Gambella**

While there is a history of communal violence between indigenous minorities in the Gambella region, evidence attests to patterns of EPRDF government provocation, pitting tribe against tribe and neighbor against neighbor. There is no evidence to support claims of communal violence between Anuaks and the local Nuer ethnic group, as has been reported by the New York Times and other media, and by the EPRDF government.

Ethnic cleansing appears to be sanctioned at the highest levels of the EPRDF government, and there is evidence that the violence initiated by last December's massacres in Gambella may have been deliberately instrumented to justify a campaign against the Anuaks.

December 13, 2003 marked the start of a coordinated military operation to systematically eliminate Anuaks. Sources from inside the military government's police and intelligence network say that the code name of the military operation was: "OPERATION SUNNY MOUNTAIN."

In a pattern reminiscent of the Interahamwe civilian militia involved in the 1994 Rwanda genocide, operations by government troops were apparently coordinated with local Highlanders, who set upon Anuak civilians with rocks, sticks, hoes, machetes, knives, axes and pangas (clubs). Witnesses described Highlanders chanting slogans as they hunted down and killed Anuaks.

Some 425 Anuak people were reported killed in the initial outburst of violence, with over 200 more wounded and some 85 people unaccounted for. Since December 2003, sporadic murders and widespread rapes have continued in Gambella town, but the rural countryside is awash in blood.

In February 2004, [Genocide Watch](#) and Survivors' Rights International called for an independent inquiry into the Gambella situation. That call was ignored.

Ten months after the pivotal massacres, there is no indication that the United Nations or any other formal body has undertaken an official investigation of the killings of eight UN personnel on the morning of December 13, 2003. The attack was blamed on Anuak guerillas, and precipitated the wave of violence.

The killings reportedly occurred on the road from Gambella to Itang town. Sources report that Anuak policeman Ojo Akway was amongst the first group of responders to the site of the ambush on the morning. Akway reportedly found tracks that he wanted to immediately pursue to attempt to discover those responsible for the UN killings - it was winter and the ground was amenable to tracking. The Police Commander in Gambella, Tadese Haile Selassie, is said to have ordered Akway's execution in order to remove the problem of identifying the actual killers. Sources report that Akway was detained later that day, driven out of Gambella town, tied to a tree along the road to Abueal village, and shot in the head seven times. An informant sympathetic to Anuaks provided the information to relatives, noting that Akway's body was disappeared, his gun was brought back to town, and no report was filed.

A federal police investigator from Addis Ababa dispatched to Gambella in July was also reportedly shot and killed. Charged with determining the extent and nature of involvement of Gambella police in the December massacres, the investigator was said to have identified many Highlander police who were "fully involved" in the killing.

International and Ethiopian human rights organizations say that the killings in Gambella constituted acts of genocide, as defined by the Genocide Convention. Arbitrary arrests, illegal detentions and torture are occurring throughout Ethiopia. Arbitrary arrests and detentions of Anuak people have occurred for years prior to the recent massacres. Reports coming out of the Gambella region indicate that hundreds of people have been arbitrary arrested and illegally detained, and that these people remain under detention, subject to torture.

### **"Golden Spear"**

Ethiopia remains a pivotal ally in the US "war against terror" in the Horn of Africa, maintaining both covert and overt military operations and programs.

Beginning July 2003, forces from Pentagon's Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) held a three-month bilateral training exercise with Ethiopian forces at the Hurso Training Camp, northwest of Dire Dawa. The US Army's 10th Mountain Division recently completed a three-month program to train an Ethiopian army division in counter-terrorism tactics. Operations are coordinated through the CJTF-HOA regional base in Djibouti, where the Halliburton subsidiary KBR is the prime contractor.

The CJTF-HOA region includes the total airspace and land areas of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Sudan and Kenya, and the coastal waters of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Indian Ocean. In May 2004, US Brigadier General Samuel T. Helland assumed command of the CJTF-HOA region. On January 21, 2004 special operations soldiers from the 3rd US Infantry Regiment – "The Old Guard," Bravo Company – replaced the 10th Mountain Division forces at a new base established at Hurso, Ethiopia, to be used for launching local joint missions with the Ethiopian military. A new forward base named "Camp United" has also been established in the area – a "temporary training facility in rural Ethiopia" used "as a launching ground for local missions, predominately training with the Ethiopian military."

From 1995-2000, the US provided some \$1,835,000 in International Military and Education Training (IMET) deliveries to Ethiopia. Some 115 Ethiopian officers were trained under the IMET program from 1991-2001. Approximately 4,000 Ethiopian soldiers have participated in IMET since 1950.

For 2002 and 2003, Ethiopia received some \$2,817,000 through the IMET and Foreign Military Sales and Deliveries programs. The US also equipped, trained and supported Ethiopian troops under the Africa Regional Peacekeeping Program. Ethiopia has remained a participant of the IMET program in 2000-2004. In August 2003, the U.S. committed \$28 million for international trade enhancements with Ethiopia.

In 2003, US AID, working with Africare and Catholic Relief Services, was providing disaster relief to "combat famine in the drought-stricken Gambella region of Ethiopia." The US State Department was informed about unfolding violence in the Gambella region as early as December 16, 2003, through communications to Secretary of State Colin Powell, the Overseas Citizens Division, and the US Embassy in Ethiopia.

Immediately following the February 16, 2004, release of a report by Genocide Watch and Survivor's Rights International ("Today is the Day of Killing Anuaks") the United States issued a formal call for "an independent investigation" into the events in Gambella. The State Department and the UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) condemned the ongoing violence in Gambella. Each agency called for "[f]ully transparent and independent investigations by the government" that would "encourage restoration of peace in the troubled region," and called on the Ethiopian government to investigate allegations of EPRDF involvement in atrocities.

In the spring, the EPRDF government launched an "independent inquiry" into the Gambella violence. The Independent Inquiry Commission, established by the Ethiopian House of Peoples' Representatives, reported that few members of the Ethiopian armed forces were involved in the Gambella killings.

In April 1, 2004, testimony before a House of Representatives appropriations panel, US AID representatives asked Congress to approve some \$80 million in funding for Ethiopia programs in FY 2005. Ethiopia was described as a "top priority" of the Bush administration. US AID boasted of programs "that lay the groundwork to establish a market-based economy hospitable to investment..."

In a letter of August 6, twelve members of the US Congress called on Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to protect citizens from harm and ensure humanitarian access to the Gambella region. Asking the Meles government to hold officials accountable for any involvement in the violence, the letter also asked for an English version of the Independent Inquiry Commission findings on the situation in Gambella.

On September 16, US Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) introduced a bill to the House Committee on Appropriations calling for substantive attention to the Anuak problem.

The US Department of Defense Central Command (CENTCOM) and European Command (EUCOM) are the pivotal forces behind the "Golden Spear" anti-terrorism program initiated in 2000 to "address issues of terrorism, humanitarian crises, natural disasters, drugs trafficking and refugees in the greater horn of Africa."

"Golden Spear" members include Ethiopia, Kenya, Eritrea, Djibouti, Seychelles and Egypt. Ethiopia sponsored the July 28-30, 2003 "Golden Spear" symposium (held at Addis Ababa), designed by the DoD "to provide a forum for strategic-level dialogue on current security issues" in the region.

Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said "the consensus reached at the meeting was a major achievement towards the enhancement of national capacities as well as collaborative efforts to deal with disasters, thus protecting development gains the region has attained over the years."

Meetings of the Golden Spear military group occurred in June in the Seychelles, and July in Tampa, FL. Participants in July included Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Seychelles.

### **Gambella Oil Rush**

Sources report ten military camps in the immediate vicinity of Gambella town, with an estimated 60 to 100 troops at each. The three major camps are Terfshalaka, about seven kilometers from Gambella town on the Addis Ababa road; Mekod, at the Gambella airport; and a base in the middle of Gambella town. An estimated 60 to 75 troops can be seen at the Gambella airport. Troops are everywhere in the town.

Witnesses report trucks of soldiers perpetually coming and going from Gambella along the roads into rural areas. Soldiers were seen to openly extort money and goods from civilians. Vehicles traveling along the roads are expected to stop and pick up any soldiers waiting for rides. Rights workers reportedly witnessed a church building that had been expropriated by soldiers and turned into a semi-permanent barracks. A nearby school was also expropriated and occupied.

On June 13, 2003, Malaysia's state-owned petroleum corporation, PETRONAS, announced the signing of an exclusive 25-year oil exploration and production sharing agreement with the EPRDF government to exploit the Ogaden Basin and the "Gambella Block" or "Block G" concession. On February 17, 2004, the Ethiopian Minister of Mines announced that Malaysia's PETRONAS will launch a natural gas exploration project in the Gambella region. Block G covers an area of 15,356 square kilometers within the Gambella Basin.

According to Anuak sources, the Ethiopian government held a public meeting in Gambella in February, even as violence against Anuak in rural areas was continuing to rise. One witness testified:

"They told people about the oil and how it would benefit everyone. But the Anuak said: 'How can you talk to us about oil when people are still being killed? We don't want to talk about the oil.' But the government said, 'No, we want to talk about the oil now.'"

The Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPEB), a powerful subsidiary of China's second largest national petroleum consortium, the China Petrochemical Corporation (SINOPEC), appears to be the principal oil firm operating in Gambella at present, under subcontract to Malaysia's national oil company PETRONAS. The base camp for ZPEB equipment and petroleum explorations is located approximately 1.5 kilometers from the center of Gambella town on the Abobo-Gambella road. The Ethiopian site manager, Mr. Degefe, is a highlander who tersely describes himself as "responsible for making all operations and security." The base camp is under tight security and heavily guarded by EPRDF troops.

PETRONAS and the China National Petroleum Corporation currently operate in Sudan. A recent report by Human Rights Watch raises charges that the Asian oil giants have provided cover for their respective governments to ship arms and military equipment to Sudan in exchange for oil concessions granted by Khartoum.

While not cited in the above Human Rights Watch report, ZPEB operates a concession for oil and gas exploration in Block 6 in the Republic of Sudan. ZPEB also operates in petroleum extraction in the Yli Basin of China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, an area noted for egregious human rights violations and systematic state terror against the indigenous Uighur people. According to Human Rights Watch: "Much like Tibetans, the Uighurs in Xinjiang (western China) have struggled for cultural survival in the face of a government- supported influx by Chinese migrants, as well as harsh repression of political dissent and any expression, however lawful or peaceful, of their distinct identity."

On September 18, 2004, a notice was posted around Gambella town indicating that the Southwest Development Company (a new Highlander-owned venture) would be accepting applications for new hires to fill some 117 positions in support of "construction and petroleum related operations in Gambella region." On September 19, 2004 another notice seeking an additional 70 workers was posted around Gambella town. The posters were stamped with the official seal of the office of the Gambella People's National Regional State.

Anuak sources in Gambella state: "The Anuak people have not been involved in the discussions about the oil, our leaders have not agreed to these projects, and they will not hire any Anuaks for these jobs. If any Anuak says anything about the oil he will be arrested."

### **Crocodiles and Rats**

The few reports about the situation that have appeared in the international press have misrepresented and distorted the nature of the violence. Reporters traveling to the region have relied upon the EPRDF for security and information, and attempts by Anuaks to make the truth known have largely been ignored. National Public Radio last spring described Anuaks as primitives "once went naked and ate rats."

Marc Lacey reported from Gambella for the New York Times (June 15, 2004) simultaneous to the Ethiopian military's ongoing scorched earth campaign against rural villages. Lacey, who arrived with a government escort – including an Ethiopian intelligence and security team comprised of perpetrators of "the problem" – related no first-hand accounts from Anuaks of the summary executions, massacres and mass rape by EPRDF soldiers. Instead, the Times opted for a picturesque story of pastoral harmony, mentioning the violence almost in passing and even noting the threat to local bathers from crocodiles.

"Bath time here is a communal affair," read Lacey's lead. "Everyone grabs a bar of soap and heads down to the river. As they stand naked in the water a few feet from one another, lathering and rinsing in unison, people from Gambella's various ethnic groups appear at ease. The Anuak, the Nuer and the highlanders all use the Baro River as their tub."

Just across the Baro River are Anuak villages with scars attesting to the huts that were torched – some with people inside. But these went unmentioned by the New York Times. The EPRDF military has been said to routinely dump the bodies of the disappeared in Gambella's rivers.

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