
MEMORANDUM

TO: International Human Rights Organizations and International Community.
FROM: Anuak Justice Council (AJC)
DATE: January 29, 2005
**RE: January Update of Extra-judicial Killings, Torture and Disappearances of Anuak
Continuing in Gambella region of Ethiopia.**

Currently, the Ethiopian defense forces activities are reminiscent of varying kinds of acts of retribution, all aimed at the Anuak civilian population. Below are just some examples:

On December 22, 2004 three young men, ages 17, 18 and 20, were bathing in the Baro River about seventy-five kilometers from Gambella, when an Anuak man, fishing in the river, witnessed approximately eight federal defense forces handcuff the three men and forcibly take them away. No one knew what had happened to them until January 15, 2005. At this time, some Anuak farmers were traveling from Bonga, on their way to Kubon Village and smelled something. As they investigated, they found three men's corpses tied with their backs against trees. It was apparent that they had been shot. Bullet shells were close by on the ground. The families of the three young men identified them as their sons who had disappeared in late December. The young men, Ochalla Gur age 17, Nyimulu Ojullu, age 18 and Olok Orymia, age 20, were all residents of Bonga village.

Local farmers went to the regional government and spoke to the regional government representative, Omot Obang Olam, an Anuak man who had collaborated with the federal government in the massacre of December 13, 2003. They asked for an investigation into the murder of the three men and indicated that there had been a witness who had seen the men taken by federal defense soldiers.

Omot Obang Olam refused to conduct any investigation. He told them that there was no proof that the defense forces did it and even if they had been guilty, there was no way to find out which soldiers may have been involved. He then told them it would be wise to go back home and to forget about it. When they continued to press him further, he told them that an important meeting with internationals was going to be held there in two hours, and that the government officials did not want them around. He told them to leave or they would be arrested.

It was learned that this meeting was one between representatives from the embassies of Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States. They had requested a meeting to ask the regional government what they were doing to address the issue of peace and security in the Gambella region, particularly in regards to the reported crimes against the Anuak.

The village of Ecway is close to the largest federal defense force military camp and many soldiers living there are believed to be those who participated in the December 13, 2003 massacre of Anuaks in Gambella. Within this camp is a detention base where it is believed other Anuak are being held and tortured. Reports from people living in a town very close to this

compound indicate that starting on approximately January 16, that they have been hearing screams in the Anuak language, late at night, calling for God's help, that they are dying.

In another rural area near the village of Pochalla-Olwori, (not to be mistaken with Pochalla, Sudan) in the Gog district of Gambella State, federal troops, based close by, rounded up four young men, ages twenty-one to thirty, and a nineteen-year-old girl. It started on January 13, when federal soldiers accused the young people of being new to the area. Despite insistence by the local people that they were from Olwo, another village nearby, and that they were on their way to Pinyudo, the soldiers radioed ahead so that when they left the town, other federal soldiers arrested them.

They were then taken to the military base outside of Pochalla-Olwori on January 15. When two local farmers heard of their arrest from an eyewitness, they went to the military camp during the morning of January 17 to inquire about their whereabouts. They were then also detained and immediately taken to the local police station in Pinyudo. They learned from the local prison official there that the young people had never arrived at the Pinyudo police station. Instead, they had heard, the five had left the town at about 6:00 PM on January 16 and had been transported to Gambella Regional Prison, accompanied by ten military troops. However, the young people never made it to Gambella.

On January 17 and 18, their families started asking what had happened to them when they did not arrive. Information was received from some Nuer (another local ethnic group) who live in the refugee camp nearby, that during the evening of January 16, they had heard a car muffler and then silence before hearing five to ten gunshots. The Nuer reported being frightened that the Anuak who had killed three highlander teachers in December, 2004 in retaliation for the federal defense soldiers killing three young Anuak men, were now going to retaliate against Nuer; however, when nothing happened, they had come forward with this information.

The mothers of these young people have traveled to Gambella town to speak with the regional government representative, Omot Obang Olam, asking for help in finding their sons and daughter. They also were told that "outsiders" were coming for a meeting and that they were to leave and come back another time. The mothers said they did not want to leave until they found out where their children were. However, they were told that they would be arrested and go to prison if they did not leave.

After the mothers returned on Friday to Pinyudo, a group of Anuak men started searching for any evidence of what might have happened. They found all five bodies. Three of the corpses, Lero Ojulu, age 30, Athow Okoth, age 27 and the young woman, Ajulu Omot, age 19, were in close proximity to each other. Their clothes had been removed from them except for a shirt remaining on Ajulu Omot. The men's faces were unrecognizable due to being beaten and mutilated. Lero Ojulu's neck was deeply slashed. Athow Okoth had a gunshot through his head. Ajulu Omot had died from two gunshots to the head. A half-kilometer away, the body of Gilo Cham, age 23, was found. He also had been shot once in the head and another time in the chest. Another 500 meters away, Kero Okway, age 21, had been shot twice in the head. These two also had their clothes removed and their faces smashed. The charred remnants of their clothing were nearby where a fire had not completely destroyed them.

On January 9, on a road leading to Dimma town, an unknown gunman killed one soldier and wounded two others. Soon after this event, close to the scene of the attack, an inhabitant of the village was arrested. In the presence of the other villagers in the village, soldiers arrested Okello Owar, placed a hood over his head, seated him in an armed military vehicle and transported him to an unknown location.

On January 11, Okello Owar's body was discovered on the outskirts of Dimma town. His nose had been cut off. On his neck, was evidence of a deep knife-wound. The upper part of his head was simply mashed flesh and bones and his wrists and fingers had all been broken.

On January 13, the federal police shot a young girl in Pinyudo town. They reported that they had thought she was a boy they were trying to stop. After that, the mood of the local Anuak police towards the federal police became more suspect as the federal police perceived that they were being looked at with more hostility. Following this killing, the federal police commander called a meeting on January 19 and the Anuak police in the Pinyudo area were totally disarmed. In the Gog district, 71 have been disarmed.

The head of the federal troops in Pinyudo told an Anuak who had been the head of the local police that the Anuak now look at them "with an evil look" so they apparently are fearful that if any insurgents come to the area, that the Anuak would join them. The Anuak are now increasingly concerned that another massacre, like the one of December 13, 2003, is planned as disarmament had occurred prior to this incident. It had also occurred in June of 2002 in Itang, prior to a number of people being killed.

On January 18 at about 10:00 AM, in the town of Aoukyi in the Gog district, defense troops pulled four teenagers out of a group of others, indicating that they had not seen them before. An older man from the town told them that they were not new and that they were "our children" and had always lived there. Instead of listening, they arrested the older man too. As they tied their hands together, the man broke away and ran, drawing attention to himself. The boys then ran, but they were shot and three of them were killed in front of the others. Names One boy who had made it further into the bush, later was found dead from the gunshot wounds. The older man survived.

On January 18 another incident took place when some highlanders (ethnic groups from the highlands of Ethiopia living in the lowland area of Gambella State) from Pinyudo went 3 to 4 kilometers from town to the Sudanese refugee camp to buy chickens from some of the refugees. As they were returning, they were met up with two federal soldiers. These soldiers robbed them of the chickens and then seriously beat one of them.

The soldiers then warned them to say that they had been robbed and beaten by Anuak insurgents. They warned the highlanders that they knew who they were and where they lived. They threatened that they would come to their homes, even in the middle of the night, to kill them if they did not do this. However, even though the beaten man was still in pain the next day, he took the bus to Gambella town and reported it to the federal police. He allegedly reported to

them that he had been beaten, tortured and robbed, not by the Anuak, but by federal defense forces. It is unknown what has happened, if anything, in response to this man's report.

On January 19, not far from the village of Ukunakejang, in the Abobo district, a local Anuak woman, looking for firewood, discovered two corpses bearing significant evidence of torture. Relatives identified the bodies as being those of Olek Ojullu and Keide Nygiow. Unfortunately, we have no reason to hope that anyone will be punished for this crime. Of all the many cases known to us of the disappearance of individuals who had been detained by federal troops, not one has been investigated.

On January 20, two Anuak men were arrested in Thata and brought to Pinyudo. From Pinyudo, they were taken to the military base and detained with at least twenty-five to thirty others. That night, while they were sleeping, two soldiers came with a gun. One of the men, perhaps thinking they would be shot, ran away. The soldier shot at the man, and chaos erupted in the camp. No one knows what actually happened, but allegedly, all the twenty-five to thirty men, ranging in age from 15 to 46, are nowhere to be found. They had all been recently arrested as potential insurgents.

On January 21 in Bat-Gilo Abol, an Anuak farmer, Agwa Okello, age 47, was working in a field when people heard a shot. When they checked on him, they found him dead.

On January 21, 2005, Markeach village in Dimma district two Anuak men were arrested. The men were all residents of Markeach: Omot Okumo (born 1985) and Apowara Kwut (born, 1983). All three were arrested together outside their houses and then "disappeared".

On January 22, Okuth Odanga, age 19, was arrested at his home in the village of Dumbang in Abobo district by the defense forces. On the next day, his disfigured corpse was then taken by soldiers on an armed military vehicle and deposited in the bush on the way to Abobo town. Okuth had had his fingers and wrists broken and there was evidence of stab-wounds all over his body.

On January 23 near Pochalla-Alwori, two Ethiopian soldiers were murdered by unknown assailants. After this, the village of Pochalla-Alwori and Otel were raided, during which 14 Anuak men were arrested. Ethiopian defense forces drove the detainees to an unknown location. It was learned that most of the people living in the village of Pochalla-Alwori, have vacated the area and gone to Pochalla, Sudan. Now the government is threatening those few remaining.

On January 24 in the nearby Bat-Gilo Abol area, federal troops forced seven men from the village to assist in looking for people leaving the area. They have now disappeared. Three of the men had been from Gambella town.

On January 24, a vehicle transporting nine Anuak men and four Anuak women from Pinyudo to Gambella was stooped at Obela by the federal troops who are based at a military camp nearby.

The driver, a non-Anuak, was told to leave and the people were told to sit under Chewa tree. They have now all disappeared. Local Nuer witnessed this. Also on that same date, the body of a twenty-four year old Anuak woman was found on a road near Dumbang. She had been shot and killed. The body of a young male teen, who had been shot, was also found dead near Okunakejang in the Abobo district.

Anuak Government Employees Fired or Demoted

Ethiopia has what they call the “Ethiopian Strategy Plan for Employment.” What this means is that the government monitors the employment criteria to make sure people, currently in jobs, are qualified for those jobs.

The evaluation is to occur every five years and was just completed in Gambella one year ago. Instead of waiting another four years, it was again completed last week by the head of Federal security, Mr. Almayeu Almeru, who has been acting as the governor of Gambella region, behind closed doors, since Mr. Okello Akway Ochalla left the region in January 2004.

He and other government representatives came from Addis Ababa and have told Anuaks working for the government, that they are not qualified for their jobs, that they do not have enough education or that they do not meet other criteria, subsequently forcing them out of their jobs. They were informed that Nuers or Highlanders would replace them. Some asked why this was being done and were told that ‘maybe the Anuak people should not be suing the Ethiopian government’.

It is believed that it is a strategy to limit the Anuaks from having access to the higher positions and as a means to control any possible political activity. Some who had been in administrative positions were given custodial jobs. People close to Omot Obang Olam were not affected.

Federal Defense Military Camp Set Up Near Only Water Wells in Area

In two villages in the Gog district, Gog Dipach and Gog Jaingjor, Federal Defense forces have set up their military base, comprised of approximately twenty-five hundred troops, near the main source of water in the area. Three wells have been drilled, but offer only limited reserves, meant to supply just the local community. This is an area where there are no major rivers, but only a small stream that dries up when the rains stop. This is now happening as the dry season has begun.

During the dry season, the local people cannot depend only on the wells, but instead, it is typical to move the women and children to an area near the Gilo River while the men return home to prepare the fields and plant crops. This has been done for years. However, as people were on their way to the Gilo River, they were stopped by the military who told them they could not go this year as they might be “running to Pochalla, Sudan” or insurgents in the more remote areas along the way might recruit them. Instead they were told to move their families back and to live close to the military camp. However, the Anuak did not want to do this. They have been beaten and intimidated as they attempted to obtain water from these locations. They had been told that they could not get any water until the military got what they needed.

On January 16 the commander of the federal forces in Gog Depach further tightened their policy. Now, Anuak were told that only the local women could get the water and that they would only be allowed to do so after dark. On January 17, as Anuak were trying to comply, federal soldiers raped two women as they were trying to get water. On January 18, three more were raped.

On January 19, two local Anuak men escorted their wives and daughters to the well. Both had guns that were visible as they sat watching, ready to defend the women. The soldiers demanded that they put down their weapons. The Anuak men refused, telling them to put theirs down first. (Like in Pinyudo, these Anuak men had weapons due to being Anuak policemen whose guns had been restored to them this past summer. Prior to the massacre, the Anuak police had been disarmed, but due to a need for more control in the rural areas, some had been restored to their positions and given back their guns.) The following day, the commander of the troops went to the villages and to the local police and ordered anyone who had a gun to turn in it due to the incident the previous night. They were told they would be arrested if they failed to do so.

Some guns were returned, but other locals instead disappeared with their guns and their families, escaping to Sudan through the bush rather than using the main roads now that the dry season had made it possible. As the federal forces realized what was happening, they began to threaten and intimidate the local people to tell them where others have gone. One man was beaten for not knowing. The local farmers had been told not to prepare the ground for planting, as they could not be trusted. They were accused of using it as a ruse to actually “re-group” with other Anuaks to form an organized resistance force against the government. One woman was beaten, causing her to lose a tooth, after her husband left for planting.

Anuak Threatened to Register to Vote or “Pay the Price”

The regional government in Gambella state has been issuing warnings and threats to Anuak that they will suffer serious consequences if they fail to register to vote in the elections coming up this May. The government has nominated all the candidates, contrary to election laws in the Ethiopian constitution, and the candidate for governor of the region is Omot Obang Olam, the man believed to have provided the government the list of Anuak to be massacred on December 13, 2003. He is also believed to be guilty of other crimes involving his fellow Anuak, including the continuing imprisonments, torture and other crimes against the Anuak people. He currently holds the position of regional government representative for the Anuak.

The other candidates for district governorships include other government sympathizers who had promoted policies against the Anuak, which have resulted in their continued oppression. In the Gog and Abobo districts, the people were upset when the federal officials wanted to bring someone from outside the district to be the candidate for governor. Now the officials have found a local man who has been pro-government. During mid-January, a truck with a microphone went through Gambella town announcing voter registration. However, although the highlanders have registered, hardly any Anuak have registered to vote in Gambella town or any of the rural areas of Gambella state. This week, Anuaks are being told they must register to vote or be punished.

On January 27, Anuak elders and leaders from Gambella town and the rural areas were called to a meeting with the local government officials and federal election officers from Addis Ababa. They were told that during the last three-month voter registration period, the Anuak have not

been receptive to voting and that the government cannot allow this. If there were no participation in the election, it would not be a good indication to the international community. They were told that they must make the people in their villages, towns and communities, register to vote or face serious consequences.

One older Anuak man stood up and started to explain the reasons for the Anuak resistance to voter registration. Before he could get very far, Omot Obang Olam, Didumo Omuni and two highlanders, interrupted him and all tried to stop him from going on. However, they were told by the head of the federal election board to let the man finish speaking.

The Anuak elder continued to say that telling the people to vote was not the problem. They have been doing this for years. He said that never before have they had to tell the people to vote. They have understood this since the time of Mengistu. He stated that the people knew how to vote even if they did not know how to read, but that the reasons for the problem are these: First, we have no one to vote for. All our people have been killed or are in prison. Those you are telling us to vote for are people who are the same people who were in positions in the government while our sons and daughters were killed. These people contributed to their killing. Second, we have seen that our vote will make no difference and will contribute nothing to our lives. It will not bring peace and prosperity. It is a waste of our time. However, he told them that the Anuaks would vote if the government would:

1. Release Anuak leaders and intellectuals from prisons and from wherever they were being detained.
2. Arrest people involved in the killing, including the Anuak who are now holding positions within the region.
3. Compensate the people who lost loved ones. Apologize and provide reparations.
4. Rebuild and replace homes and properties destroyed. As an example, in Pinyudo alone, three thousand homes were burned down and none have been rebuilt.
5. Find a lasting solution where we can live freely like anyone else in Ethiopia and if you do not know what I mean, I mean like human beings.
6. Bring people back who are in refugee camps in Sudan and Nairobi, Kenya.

He stated that if the government were willing to do these things, they would not see any Anuak who would refuse to vote. In fact, he emphasized that Anuaks would be willing to walk any distance and make every effort to vote. However, he stated that he knew the Ethiopian government was not interested in this and that is why one could see troops everywhere; ready with their power to make them vote.

He went on to say that most of the Anuaks would not vote, even if the government used their power against them. He commented that those Anuak, nominated for government positions, had no courage and were really not Anuak anymore and that the government should already know that. He stated that what he was saying has been said five hundred times with not one response from the federal or regional government. In closing he said, "By saying all this, it may cost me lots of things. Maybe I will be joining those behind bars."

An older woman spoke next. She stated that the Anuak have not been given the right under Article 39 of the Ethiopian Constitution which speaks of the right to education. She said they have never been given the opportunity for an education, which would help them appreciate their rights. She stated that the few that had gotten the opportunity are now dead or in prison.

She believed the only “good thing Meles has done” is to allow the Anuak language to be used in the school. Now even that is no longer possible because “all our leaders and educators are killed, in prison or have gone to Pochalla, starting with the democratically elected governors who were arrested in 2002 and remain in federal prison today.”

She stated that “technically”, the language is still being taught, but in reality, there is only a tiny minority that knows how to read and write Anuak. Now, where there are schools for Anuak children, it is Nuer or Highlander teachers who do not know the language, teaching the Anuak children.

She emphasized that the Anuak have always been left behind in the area of education, but since the actions taken by the government starting in 2002, they have regressed twenty years. She stated, “We have nothing now as a people who want to improve the future for our children. We have no future.”

She stated, “The election is not what we want to talk about, but we are forced to do so. The election is not for the Anuak or for Gambella. Who is there to be elected? Who is nominated? Whose sons or daughters are they?

Maybe because we have been given no answers, is why we are reluctant to register. As far as I am concerned, as a woman, a wife and a mother, I have no one to represent me. The person I would have voted for governor is in prison in Addis and others are dead. It would be very good for those wanting us to vote, to leave me alone. Thank you.”

A third speaker stood up. This woman stated that she wanted to talk about what was taking place “right now” during the last two weeks in Gambella. She stated that the Anuak had been removed from their jobs because the Federal government claimed that they no longer were “qualified” for their jobs even though many of them had been in them for over fifteen years. She indicated that it was this government’s strategy plan that was making her not want to vote at all.

She reported that the government representatives had removed most Anuak from their jobs with no warning because they supposedly did not have enough education or experience. Yet the replacements or others continuing in their jobs are given training when necessary and salary while in training while the Anuak are told to pay for their own, with no salary benefits. She stated that it was the intention of the Ethiopian government “to not give us a brain” to continue on. She stated, “Now, we have no role models or leaders to vote for because we have no leaders left.”

She stated, “This strategy plan has now cut off our Anuak legs, amputated our Anuak hands and blown up our Anuak brains. That is why, as I speak for myself, the election process is meaningless to me. She further elaborated that some of those who replaced the Anuaks, do not even have an education or the experience to do the jobs, but have been put there because

someone in higher positions wanted them there. Most of the people in the jobs, know they are outsiders and that they are not qualified for them, but because they want to support their families, they take the jobs.

“In the Tigray region, employees must be able to speak Tigrayan, in the Oromo region, they must speak Oromo, but not in Gambella. In Gambella, everyone speaks Amharic. She stated, “Now, Gambella is the region of opportunity and prosperity for other people from other regions of Ethiopia, but not for us Anuak. The local people have no voice in any of this. The people supposed to speak up are not doing so, either because they are promoting their own self interests or because they are afraid to speak up.

The Anuak who are claiming they are representing us, are not. These people do not speak for themselves; they speak what they have been told to say. They have been put there as stooges, making it difficult for us to explain it to outsiders. This is why we do not want to elect more stooges. Some of us will lose our lives because we refuse to get more stooges in.”

“Having an election is not a threat to us, but the threat is the way it is being done. We would be so thrilled if we were truly given the right to choose who will represent us. But that right is not there. That freedom is not there and that option is not there. The Anuak see more important things than the election, like the peace and security in the region. Some of our relatives are underground, some have not seen their children for over a year since they fled to Pochalla, and some have been alone this past year or more with their husband in prison. We want a future, but the future is not there.

An example is the new federal requirement that all children must wear a uniform to go to school, but many of our children do not have parents, or their parents have lost their jobs, their fathers are in prison or their guardians cannot afford it. This will make us have even less opportunity. That is why this election will not do anything.”

“The important questions, we are not allowed to ask, like about December 13, about those arrested and detained and about the mass graves. No one has the courage to come forward and answer these questions. That is why we are not for this election. Thank you.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, the chairman of the federal elections panel stated that he had heard what everyone had said, but that the elections would go on so that they should tell the people to vote. He indicated that the people elected would have to address their problems. He did not threaten them.

During the meeting as people were making statements; the head of Federal security Mr. Almayeu Almeru; was shaking his head. Following the statements, he went over to whisper in the ear of Omot Obang Olam. Omot Obang Olam then told the group in Anuak, without interpretation for the non-Anuaks, that they had better register or something would happen. He explained that if they did not assume their duty to vote, they were the people who did not like the government and were therefore against it. For that, he warned, they would pay a price like any citizen who breaks the law, therefore requiring punishment. He finished by saying that what had been said in that room was to remain there.

In closing, it is important to note that the Anuak live in a constant state of uncertainty, poverty and terror--with no end in sight. International pressure is essential. International authorities must act now to secure peace in Gambella before the Anuak way of life disappears forever. The suffering of these endangered and forgotten people of the world has gone on long enough.