



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

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Speech to “my fellow Ethiopian community” sponsored by:
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Good afternoon brothers and sisters. First of all I would like to thank those of you who invited me to this event sponsored by, Upstate New York Ethiopians for Democracy Support Group, whose purpose is to promote peace and democratic change in Ethiopia.

Before starting, I heard that some of you here have driven from Syracuse, Buffalo, from all over Upstate New York and even from as far as Toronto to be here today. I thank you all for coming from so far and I hope I am able to at least give you one thing to take back with you. I also hope you have a safe drive home.

I have been invited to talk about the gross human rights abuses taking place in Ethiopia. It is impossible to talk about this without considering why we have such abuses taking place throughout Ethiopia. I come not as a member of a political group. My ambition is not to run for any political office, but is to contribute to making Ethiopia a better place for generations to come for all ethnic groups, large or small, for all religious groups, for all socio-economic classes, the educated and uneducated, for men and women and for the young and the old.

I come to call those of you who are grieving about the state of our beloved Ethiopia to a new vision. I call on those who have lost hope that Ethiopians will never be able to live together as one people. I call on those who have fallen victim to the divide and conquer agenda of the current regime; believing in order to survive, our group must protect itself from the oppression of the others or your children will never be educated or have a future.

I come to call you to renew your thinking---to rekindle your passion and to be part of creating an Ethiopia that can nurture and love its members, no matter how different each one may be from the next. It is not too late, but it will not be easy. We are caught in a cycle of violence towards each other, believing it is the only way to survive. I come to tell you—this is not the way! I come to tell you we are traumatized from this violence and hate and yet there is hope for healing for our wounds.

I will attempt to give you my opinion, but first, I will tell you something about myself as I have been asked repeatedly how I became so passionate about defending human rights. This will take me back to when I was a child and witnessed so many things I wished would be different. I began living a life of wishing. I would ask my elders why people had to die, wishing that they would be like rocks and live forever. I wished that anything I wanted, I would get right away.

I remember the day my friend and I were playing when he was bitten by a snake and died. I wished all snakes would be killed. I remember a young girl who had babysat for me who had gone to the river where she was taken by a crocodile. I asked why there were crocodiles and wished they would all be killed.

I remember the young neighbor girl from my village who had a difficult birth. Both she and her baby died. Both could have been saved had someone been able to deliver the baby through a Caesarian birth. I wished for a hospital.

Another young child, my cousin, died because the water from which he drank, gave him a waterborne disease. I wished for clean water.

My younger brother died from the fever of malaria in one day. I wished for medicine for him. I regretted being in a world where things are not perfect.

I asked my grandmother what was the point of being born if some of us were taken away so young? I asked her why we were here on this earth. She gave me an answer I have never forgotten.

She told me that God has brought all of us to this world and that He has lots of purposes for why we are here. She told me that one of those purposes, above all others, is protection---loving yourself, loving your family, loving others, your village, your community, your country and above all, protecting human beings.

I asked her how do you go about doing this? She said, “By not giving up---by trying to do the best you can to protect each other.” She told me, “I want you to know that every human being is a hero, but they do not always know it.”

She explained, “God does not want us to live an easy life. He expects us to work hard to protect ourselves and others. That is why living a life of wishing for everything will not work. Life is a struggle, beginning at your birth, growing up, living your life and in death. That is why wishing, is not the way out. If you want something to change, instead of wishing, find a way to do it.”

This is my burden. This is what my grandmother taught me.

I thought when I grew up that I would find a way. This advice stuck with me. She told me that protecting other human beings was what the world expected from me---that I should know this was my purpose. Every time I think of it, it almost brings me to tears of joy. Whenever I think of my own struggle, I think of her words, that life is not easy, but that I must do my best, working to change the things around me that I used to wish were different.

I migrated to Canada when I was seventeen and went to school. I lived by myself, set my own alarm and ate the food I cooked for myself. When I was in my twenties, I regretted that I had not done so much to help my people and the people of Ethiopia and Africa. I lived a life of questioning when my time would come to do something to change the things around me. That is why I and my close friends, established a development agency. I said, if people are dying of waterborne diseases, I will do my best to help them find clean water. When I remembered my relative who had no fingers or feet because of leprosy, I thought, there is already treatment that could eradicate this and I aimed to engage medical doctors in helping.

When I first arrived in Addis Ababa, I was struck by the young children who ran up to me in the airport, begging for money, and by the teenagers walking the streets of Addis, not in school and by the poor woman sitting in the street with her children, asking for help. I was going to Gambella, but I saw so much need in Addis. I thought, I could be one of them and I wanted to help, but I knew that the need was so large I felt overwhelmed. The words of my grandmother returned to me and I knew I should not give up and be afraid of the challenge, but that I could help one person at a time.

When the massacre of December 13, 2003 happened, it took me back to those who were bitten by snakes and taken by crocodiles. I knew that killing would not be the way out. But, I had to make sure this government would not take away another person's life without my trying to make it stop. I cannot wish this kind of suffering away. I must take action to do my best as others do the same.

My grandmother's eyes were blind. She had cataracts. I used to help carry the water on my head for her, experiencing some teasing from others for doing the work of girls, but I did not care, my grandmother's blind eyes had opened my eyes to the world and I am forever grateful.

The Anuak are one of those vulnerable groups needing some kind of protection. Their experience, as a small ethnic group of fewer than 150,000 members worldwide, may illuminate the experience of many throughout Ethiopia. We cannot simply wish that things were different, we must become involved in the protection of other human beings.

On December 13, 2003, horrendous killing of Anuak educated leaders took place in the homes and streets of Gambella, Ethiopia. Prior to the killing, there was a buildup of government sponsored hatred and fear mongering towards the Anuak. As the Anuak spoke up for their political rights as laid out in the Ethiopian constitution, the government attempted to repress them. The government was free to fire anyone with a government job without a reason. They were free to arrest and detain those voicing their rights and to keep them incarcerated for years without being charged with any crime. The government especially targeted any Anuak who questioned the contract between the federal government and the oil company, Petronas of Malaysia, as many opposed the fact that the regional government had not been consulted in the agreement.

Division was fomented between the Anuak and the Nuer, between the Anuak and the Majenger and between the Anuak themselves. The reason was to demoralize and weaken each group so the federal government was free to do run the region. If conflict erupted between these groups, it would be easy to say that the regional government was not capable of administering the region, necessitating the federal government to step in and do whatever they wanted in the region.

They succeeded in the summer of 2001 when fighting began between the Anuak and the Majenger, something that had never happened in the thousand years that they had lived side by side. They succeeded again in July of 2002 when fighting erupted between the Anuak and the Nuer. More Anuak were killed and displaced. When the Anuak asked for help, they were ignored.

The Nuer had guns, but the Anuak had been disarmed years before, a widespread pattern used by the government in order to accomplish their purposes through stirring up unbalanced conflict. The Nuer and the Anuak are from the same Nilotic family. They have had some skirmishes over the land in the past, but they have solved these conflicts through traditional cultural ways where they still respected each other. There has also been much intermarriage. Now, the Anuak had to run away in fear, becoming internally displaced persons.

When the Anuak in the regional government asked the federal government to help with the displaced Anuak, the federal government did nothing. Because of this, Anuak leaders and the Anuak in the Diaspora organized an effort to raise funds to establish a committee to deal with the humanitarian needs of the displaced Anuak. When the government discovered that the Anuak were successful, becoming organized and more powerful, they arrested the Anuak governor and 44 other government officials and community leaders. They were charged with promoting their ethnic interests.

After the arrest of these Anuak leaders, the Anuak realized how vulnerable they had become as they were arrested simply on the whim of their government. Some left for Sudan and Kenya. Others found guns and started to resist in small little incidents, but this led to the government wanting to crack down on these resisters by cracking down on all Anuak. This practice is continuing, even as we speak.

Finally, on December 13, 2003, the “green light” was given to kill any Anuak leaders who might be unsympathetic to the government or to the government’s plan to go ahead with the oil exploration. Okello Akway, the newly appointed regional Anuak governor, openly objected to their plan to explore for the oil because there was no local input into the plan. He and other Anuak leaders were seen as causing a problem and an obstacle to the objectives of the government.

The EPRDF had handpicked him for the job, but his later disagreement with their plan was a source of serious dissension between the regional and federal governments. Thus, they allegedly made a secret plan to teach the outspoken Anuak a lesson by killing their leaders, hoping to permanently silence them. They believed that they would be successful because the area was very remote and they had been able to perpetrate human rights abuses against them for years without the world knowing about it.

On December 13, 2003, a car was ambushed, supposedly by unknown assailants, and nine people were killed, including the Anuak driver. Yet, the government officials blamed the killings on the Anuak and actively promoted and participated in the killing of innocent victims rather than attempting to investigate the case and locate the actual perpetrators. Testimony received by the AJC, indicates that orders were given to mutilate the bodies and display them in the center of town. What kind of government has so little regard for the rule of law that they think they can get away with such flagrant abuses?

Ethiopian troops, regional police and militia forces made up of some highlanders, systematically, with the help of a prepared list, went from one Anuak house to another, pulling out the educated Anuak men and murdering them in front of their families, saying, “Today is the Day for Killing Anuaks.” Sometimes they would rape their wives and daughters first, taunting them with the slogan, “Now you won’t have Anuak babies.” In less than three days, they killed over 424 Anuak living in the Gambella region of Ethiopia. Since that time almost two thousand more have been killed. Four thousand are still in a refugee camp in Sudan. The others who have remained, have been experiencing ongoing crimes against humanity as documented by Human Rights Watch.

Pastor Okwier was one of the first victims targeted. He is my sister-in-law’s father. He was a highly respected Anuak pastor who had just visited our churches in Minnesota and Washington. His wife was returning from visiting a sick relative when soldiers came to his home during a prayer meeting. After they set his home on fire, he jumped out a back window. She saw him hacked by machetes by those in the militia and then shot in the back by Ethiopian soldiers in uniform. Others at the prayer meeting and choir members at the church were also killed that day. Five of these church members are buried in one grave in front of the destroyed church where they were killed.

The killing that took place is without precedence. Once these crimes are investigated, it should fit the definition of genocide which is defined as an attempt to eliminate in part or in whole, an ethnic group, race or class. This was an overt attempt by the Ethiopian government to eliminate Anuak leaders. They had a prepared death list and went from home to home to kill Anuak leaders. You cannot get any more intentional than that. Yet, the EPRDF government is not taking any responsibility.

Usually, the rule of law holds the reckless back from committing crimes; however, when one no longer has to be afraid of the consequences and is actually encouraged to get rid of certain “undesirable groups,” it unleashes incidents such as Awassa in July 2002, Gambella on December 13, 2003 and Addis Ababa in June and November of 2005.

How can Meles blame others for the shooting of student protestors in the head in June of 2005, after he declared the military to be under his own command? If they were, why did the killing take place, or if they operated independently of his orders, why has there been no real investigation or accountability for these actions?

In these incidents, did the Ethiopian Defense Forces, Regional Police and militia groups make the decision to kill, rape and destroy on their own or were they given the go ahead by someone above them? Just like a child whose parents do not condemn their actions when he or she hits another child, that child will hit again. Where are the legal consequences for these actions? If there are none, these actions may have been approved by others, powerful enough to protect them from accountability—at least for now.

The majority of Ethiopians may not have believed that their own government could do this to their own people. But it did not happen spontaneously. Instead, ethnic division is a well-cultivated crop, where the seeds of division were planted many years ago in the secret discussions led by the experts, the current government of the EPRDF. The Tigrayans who heavily dominated this group, were themselves victims of oppression under Mengistu and Haile Selassie. Rage filled victims become the new perpetrators of the same crimes, only to different victims. Sometimes they can even exceed their predecessors in their methods.

One of these savage methods is deceptively called, “Ethnic Federalism,” a tactic that can be traced back to the beginning of this regime; a strategy meant to empower members of one ethnic group to the detriment of others. We Anuak, Nuer, Majenger and highlanders in Gambella were made victims of each other under this policy. It has now failed and everyone knows it.

When the EPRDF first appeared, they spoke the message of peace and prosperity. They said, in time, we will be a real democracy, but why after fourteen years do we only see baby steps being taken? The baby should have grown up. The baby should not still be toddling along, holding the hand of the EPRDF. Instead, their baby steps have proven them to be on the same track as the regime of Mengistu, only their disguise is slightly different. They have accomplished dominance in every spectrum of Ethiopian life, from the government, to the press, to banking, economics, the military and as the beneficiaries of anti-poverty programs and other development aid coming from international donors---all at the expense of others.

As the EPRDF has realized that they no longer have the support of the Ethiopian people, they become like the hyena who eats the vulnerable, even their own babies. This can include even other Tigrayans, who stand up for rights of others, not agreeing with the government. In fact, I keep hearing from some of my Tigrayan friends that they have now seen the destructive nature of this government who represses and brutalizes the innocent. Their consciences can no longer accept the benefits of this kind of governance. Some believe that they will be the victims of retaliation should the government fall and are no longer willing to stay silent.

Regimes like this will certainly bring their own end, but the critical question now is---how will we as Ethiopians replace it when it does? It is not a simple process of exchanging one defective system for another based on the same cycle of violence.

Ethiopia does not need another ethnic group to dominate the country because of being bitter about it's past and being powerful enough to take over. Yet, who can blame those who have been so excluded from opportunities for education, jobs, health care or other services for themselves or for their children or who have been imprisoned, beaten, tortured and even killed simply for being of another ethnic group?

This is why I, as an Anuak, am willing to forgive rather than to be caught in a cycle of hate and retaliation. Out of the 424 Anuak killed in the massacre, starting with my uncle, my cousins, my friends, my classmates and my work colleagues in future development projects, I knew 317 of the victims. There is nothing I can do to bring them back, but their deaths could be used for good if the rest of us make sure that this kind of government sponsored killing does not happen again, not only to the Anuak, but to any other people in Ethiopia.

Yet, there is a danger that the oppressed groups who have been suffering and marginalized for so long, may say, "It's our turn to eat." Ethiopia cannot succeed if we keep demanding "our turns." What it has actually meant in the past was that it was time to feed yourself at the expense of everyone else. What happens to the little, weak groups? They are like the flies in the middle of the fighting elephants---they get squashed! What happens to the large groups? They get angry and demand the next turn. We must get out of these power struggles. They end in destruction for everyone.

These kinds of power struggles are rampant all over Africa. They must stop before our countries and our continent are totally damaged by corruption, exploitation and oppression by whomever is in charge. Why are more people being killed by their governments than ever before? Why is Ethiopia and Africa poorer than it was in the 1960ties?

We have lush land, vast natural resources and hardworking people. All of us do not need to come to the US for school and health. We must educate ourselves and take responsibility for providing for ourselves in our homeland. We must stop this cycle of violence that is fed by anger, jealousy, pride, greed and ambition. Do not rid yourselves of one path to destruction by replacing it with another.

We are at risk as our minds have become disordered with the trauma, stress and pain of our own wounds. We must change the very core of our thinking or we Ethiopians will have reason to fear the future. We must find a way out of this culture of violent retribution and greedy exploitation.

Beware of common African politics where dictators cling to power by threatening their own groups. They warn their own what will happen to them if another group takes over. They say, "If you do not support me now, when I go, you will be done." They may reach out to other ethnic groups to gain their support by saying, "We drink from the same river" so join us, giving us your unconditional support regardless of how we abuse others to our own advantage. Other groups are used for the dirty work since they cannot do it alone, but these "outsiders" are never really trusted or included because you are not one of them. These others include those "pro-government" sympathizers found in most every ethnic group, now even dividing their own ethnic groups from within.

Some believe that Meles and his group passed Article 39 of the Constitution, early in his period in office, in order to eventually secede from Ethiopia should things go worse, especially now that the region has benefited from preferential treatment. But our country should not be splitting up, we should be unifying and become strong because of our diversity.

We should learn from our past history and use it to improve our future. Lately, I have heard about the great division between the Amhara, the Oromo and the Tigrayan; that if this government falls, what happened in Rwanda could happen in Ethiopia. We must learn from the lesson of Rwanda.

We heard Kofi Annan of the UN say, "Never again!" We heard the voices of those in the international community say, "Never again!" Yet, it is really up to us to make sure that together we say, "Never again--especially, never in our beloved Ethiopia!"

We must learn to love ourselves and others like God loves us. We are not savages. We can choose another way. Do not underestimate yourselves.

We all know that a young child can lead a big cow where he wants it to go with a little rope on its horns. The cow will go along with it because the cow does not know how powerful it is. Do not be that cow.

After the election of 2005, many heard Meles threaten Tigrayans of an impending genocide against them should his regime fall. This inflammatory talk is dangerous. If this happened, this country could be ruined. Resist this kind of thinking, knowing that some like Meles, may use this talk to hang on to their own power, even sometimes wanting such a tragedy to befall others in order to boost their own objectives. Do not give up your own humanity by falling for this kind of talk. You could later be held accountable for war crimes. Do not be that cow.

Instead, reach out to support the rule of law and the humanity of every person, even those in power. The person who hates, is himself or herself destroyed, taking along many other victims. Let a true system of justice hold violators accountable instead of reckless crimes of revenge where everyone is the victim and chaos reigns.

We know that the people of Ethiopia really elected the CUD, yet they are political prisoners charged with treason and genocide. They are living in a filthy prison, sharing the washroom with hundreds of others rather than being here with us where we have so many opportunities and luxuries. They could be here, but instead they chose to stay where they stood up for democracy and the rule of law. They can be seen as heroes.

Some are saying they are only for the Amhara, but the CUD leaders are calling for unity and have included within their executive party, the Gurage, the Oromo and others. Do not be brainwashed that they are only for the Amhara. We all need to take part in strengthening our civil communities and include all the political parties.

As long as people tend to be more proud of their ethnic identity than their country, we will be divided. As long as we have leaders who are *ghosts*---never being seen by the people, they really do not represent the people. As long as there are these kinds of people, there will always be injustice, poverty and suffering that will drive people out of the country. Worse than that, when some get to another western country and when asked where they come from, they are ashamed to say Ethiopia. Being ashamed of where you come from is like being ashamed of your own mother, even though she was the one to give you life.

In my own country of Canada, where I now live and am a proud citizen, I am the only Anuak in my whole province, yet I am accepted as a Canadian. We have two official languages, many multi-ethnic groups, and yet, we are all included under one government.

In the US, you also have multiple ethnic backgrounds, but citizens have a larger identity of being an American. In Europe, countries of different ethnic backgrounds and languages, who used to fight with each other, are coming together under the European Union, even using the same money.

Why should Ethiopia be going in an opposite direction? National parties should not be based on ethnic groups, but on core values. It should include all and have leaders who are not selfish--- but instead, leaders who would sacrifice their own lives for the lives of others—a servant of the people, not a dictator.

Find leaders who are more like your own mothers. All Africans know that it is our mothers who wake up early in the morning and collect the water, collect the firewood, make the food, feed the children and when the food is not enough, will not eat, leaving the food for their children. This is what leadership is supposed to be.

Africa lacks this kind of leadership today. This is why when most African leaders retire; they die in another country, in exile, instead of in the country that they say they love. What led to this is that these leaders are selfish. They are not there for the people. They are there for themselves. They even go as far as using the image of our dying children to get foreign aid and this aid will go directly into their own pockets, later to be deposited in their accounts in foreign banks.

Ethiopia is in trouble because of this kind of mismanagement and corruption. This is why most African leaders do not die poor, but instead become wealthy. In Ethiopia, there is plentiful land to feed us, but we are in a cycle of poverty because of valuing our own interests more than the lives of our dying children.

Nearly eighty per cent of the people in Addis Ababa are currently unemployed. If this applies in Addis, it will apply across the country. There are more beggars than ever before and increasing in number. More people are unable to attend school.

We cannot own our own land. Coffee farmers get less than the distributors of their coffee. We have fertile land, yet we are starving.

When Meles was interviewed on BBC on the program, "Hard Talk," he was asked about the thirty who had been killed following the elections in May of 2005. He indicated that there were not thirty-six, only twenty-six unemployed youths, as if their worth was of less value because they were unemployed. Meles should not be ashamed of the unemployed youth, beggars and other unfortunates and instead, be looking for solutions for all citizens.

After losing the election, Meles could have been a revered model of an African leader had he given over the power to those elected by the people, but he lost his chance. Now, the blood of the Anuak has created the evidence that can align him with Charles Taylor of Liberia.

Ethiopians have to work to find leaders who do not love themselves more than their people; who will not order their people to be shot dead on the streets for peacefully protesting, who will not massacre citizens to suppress their dissent. We must work together to establish a strong civil community for all. It will not be easy. You may see a big black bag of garbage in front of you. Someone may tell you to lift it up, but you are afraid, thinking it is too heavy, but it may be full of leaves. You must try.

You may be terrorized to speak up or the government will kill someone back at home. But if we are silent, more will die. We cannot afford to lose one more life. Get out of the cycle of fear. Try to make noise—become engaged. South Africa did not overcome apartheid by using the barrel of a gun; it was by speaking out the truth that it was destroyed.

Even the Ethiopian Defense Forces, who are shooting the guns, are people with families, children and friends. If you speak out, they may put down their guns and not shoot anymore. Their consciences may be resurrected and their souls saved.

We in the Diaspora are a powerful force. We are hearing that Meles has now set up a budget to hire people to silence our voices. He wants to create a new CUD in Addis, keeping the real leaders, with the real message of unity and democracy, in prison while placing EPRDF compatriots in positions in an attempt to deceive outsiders.

But, you can speak out from the beautiful countries that promote freedom; where the unemployed are considered human beings, where, if you do not agree with the government and protest, you will not be shot; where you can sit next to someone in school or work who does not ask you your ethnic group.

My grandmother was blind. She had cataracts, but she could actually see. Open your eyes. Sometimes our blindness is self-chosen. We need a new spirit in Ethiopia. We cannot loosen the chains of our bondage only on the outside; we must seek freedom for our souls. Only God can truly direct us.

We all now know the problem and need some effective medication to cure us. Those ingredients in that medicine are our different ethnic groups, our different thoughts, languages, religions, food and colors. Unless we put it all together, grinding it until it all becomes one, the disease affecting us will kill us.

We do not have to agree with each other. Some ideas may be more helpful than others, but we need to be able to get all the ideas out into the public square, a place where we do not use repression or bullets to force our ideas on others, but in civil discussions where everyone has a voice and can contribute to the dialogue. Let the ideas that best lead to the promotion of truth, liberty for all and the rule of law, equally applied to everyone, be the winners in these dialogues. No worldly system will ever be perfect, but together, we can contribute to a better Ethiopia if we listen to each other.

There is great power, beyond imagination, to change the direction of this country, in the simple acts of kindness done by one person at a time. Let God fill your hearts with his love and mercy, giving you fullness and joy beyond comprehension as you act out His kindness to those who may not deserve it---to those who may have wronged you, to those who are caught in the darkness of their own desperate thoughts and actions.

You be the one to carry the light to the hearts and souls of these fellow humans, by giving kindness to another undeserving of it, enabling them to see a way out of their own torment, guilt and depression. Do not wait for someone else to do it to you. Be the one to carry the candle and to light the candle of your enemy---that enemy may be overwhelmed with your kindness and change forever, becoming your friend.

Start lighting the candles of those caught in the traps of their own anger and hopelessness, making their lives spiral downwards. As you reach out individually, the message you give will be one that will ignite the next person to pass on this light, until all of Ethiopia is ablaze with a new passion and vision---where each person is precious----where God is honored and feared. Then the light from Ethiopia will brighten the world as each individual humbly seeks to do his or her part.

Do not wait for those in the international community to solve our problems. Let us be the ones to beat the drum---to make the noise. If the international community does not respond the way we want, do not be discouraged. Do not count on H.R.4423 to do everything for us. Do not count on the United Kingdom's withdrawal of funds or the actions of others who may do the same, like the European Union, to accomplish justice for us. Stay active and engaged. If the international community can see us all acting as one, hungering for justice, freedom and peace, they will be able to do more.

As in our culture, you do not have to wait for outsiders to cook and serve our food---you can be part of the process. This is your home and you should be involved in preparing the meal. If you want to eat *Dora Wat*, be the one who plucks the feathers off the chicken. If not, be the one who cleans it or marinates it in *berbere* sauce. If not, be the one to ground the *tef* to powder and fermented. If not, be the one to mix the flour and cook the *injera*. If not, be the one who serves it, for when the time of celebration comes, you will sit together in a circle around the big tray, you will feel that you have contributed to the meal.

You will appreciate others in the circle who have done their part. Yet, you may also invite others to join you, will be grateful for the food---it will be a gift to them---like your children and grandchildren who will eat the *Dora Wat* of the future.

Being an Ethiopian is not just about raising a flag for the Ethiopian world marathon winners. It is more than that. Do your best so when you are gone from this earth, you leave a better Ethiopia behind than the Ethiopia you had as a child.

Do not be afraid of anything except God. Do not be afraid of talking the language of love. Make sure you are the one preparing the ground for the abundant crop coming from reaching out to those with whom you disagree. Then peace will prevail and we all will be a family, sitting together, drinking coffee and eating *Dora Wat*.

We Ethiopians need to correct the image the world holds about us. All they see now are the images of our dying, malnourished children, our dried out land and our dead cows.

We now have to tell them about the true nature of this extraordinary nation of ours. We need to tell them about our Ethiopian Rift Valley where the Human race emerged. We need to tell them about our beautiful land, the birthplace of coffee. We need to tell them about the lush, green rolling hills, the deep forests filled with colorful birds--- with giraffes, elephants, lions, zebras and antelope. Ethiopia is a country with an ancient history, made up of many people of different colors, cultures and languages. Tell them about the Churches in the Rock. Tell them about the Lalibela Pilgrimage. Tell them about the fertile plateau. Tell them about the Omo Valley. Tell them about the rainfall and tropical forests in Gambella. Tell them about the *Ras Dashen*, Ethiopia's tallest mountains and the mists that hang over the green, dark coffee plantations in the highlands. Tell them about the lush green savannahs of the lowlands. Tell them about the rolling hills that are grass-covered and looked lovely beyond any singing of it. Tell them about the great red hills stand desolate, and the earth has torn away like flesh. Tell them about the lighting flashes over the mountains. Tell them about the clouds that pour down upon hills, the dead streams come to life, full of the red blood of the earth. Tell them about the Akaka, the umbrella tree that stands so prominently all over Ethiopia, with their open palms reaching up to the sky. Tell them about the big and little rivers, abundant with life, that keep the Nile River flowing. Think of other images of Ethiopia. Do not be ashamed of the negative images already being portrayed where they are true, but know that Ethiopia is much more than these. Give people the real true colors of Ethiopia. I leave you with this. This is what your country expects of you.

Lots of people have asked us how such a small and young organization representing such a small ethnic group has spoken up so others could hear. The Anuak Justice Council has few material resources and operates with mostly volunteers. We cannot tell you exactly why we stand before you today because although we know we are working hard, we are still amazed that we find ourselves in this position. We cannot take the credit. We are convinced it is because God has heard the cries of those who seek His help from all over Ethiopia. We believe that God does extraordinary things through ordinary people like you and me as long as we have faith and listen closely. We as Ethiopians need to listen closely and turn away from the paths we have created to our own destruction. We have choices. How we choose our next steps makes all the difference.

We have received heartfelt e-mails and calls from hundreds of Ethiopians, from every ethnic group. I have heard the desperation in their words. They seem to hunger for truth, reconciliation, acceptance and freedom. If we look deeply into our blood, most of us would not be totally from one ethnic group as we have mingled together for hundreds of years.

The blending of our blood can call us to make one Ethiopia where everyone can be included. No longer does the Anuak Justice Council only stand up for the Anuak. We now stand also with you. As we share our common pain and suffering, let us see our common humanity. We need each other.

As a child, my elders told me an Anuak parable that goes back hundreds of years in our culture. An Anuak man was walking to another village and had a bed sheet, a large gourd, a small gourd and some burning coals to start a fire. It began to rain and he became soaking wet. The rain stopped. As he slept that night in the bush, he was freezing cold, having only the wet bed sheets and his wet clothes. The rain had deadened the fire in the coals.

The next day he reached the village of his destination. He told his friend how cold, wet and miserable he had been.

His friend said, “You did not need to be so miserable. You could have used your large gourd to protect your bed sheet from the rain. You could have used your small gourd to protect the live coals. Then, you would have slept with a dry bed and been able to use your coals to make a fire to keep yourself warm.

The man replied, “Oh, how I wish I had had another person with me on my journey! Two are better than one!”

This is my call to you. Go home changed people. Know that two Ethiopians standing together are better than one. Know that two ethnic groups standing together are better than one. Know that two opinions may perfect each other. Know that humanity must stand together to promote the best for this world.

Start with praying for Ethiopia. Pray for your own healing from the deep wounds of hate, blame and division. Pray for the healing of others who are stuck in their anger and despair, seeing no way out. Pray for the all the Ethiopian people who have lost loved ones and their hope for the future. Pray for your Anuak brothers and sisters who are still stranded in Sudan and who have no clean water, little food and whose children are writing with charcoal on cardboard scraps. Pray for the Ethiopian Defense Troops who were planning to go there to terrorize them this last week. Pray for this current government, many of whom are desperate for fullness of life, not knowing they will never find it by misusing their power against others. Pray for repentance and forgiveness for all of us. Pray for the CUD leaders and their families. Pray for all the journalists, human rights activists and anyone who has been arrested for challenging the government or speaking up for the right. Pray for all the national political parties, such as CUDP, ENUF, EPRP, UEDF, and OLF to come together and to find a solution to this crisis through dialogue instead of the gun.

We cannot kill all the snakes and crocodiles, yet as my grandmother told me, each of us can be heroes even though we do not know it. Be that hero. Be a change maker. Ethiopian people can join together and become a country not described by our ethnic conflict, by the level of poverty, by the dying child or the dead cow. Do not just wish for change. Pray and then invest yourself in making it happen. It begins with you.

Following the recent House Subcommittee hearing, I spoke with Pastor Okwier’s widow. She stated:

“I am very happy about this hearing. This is what my husband would have wanted. He was a man of God and would never have taken the life of another. Now people know what happened and people will work to make sure it does not happen again. We need people like this to get the truth out so our voices, which have not been heard before, can do something for the Anuak and others who have also experienced this kind of killing. My tears are now dry because of people like you who have been brave enough to stand up for us.

The government of Prime Minister Meles has, all along, killed its people and then covered their bloody hands with gloves. The hearing is making them stop and we are now looking beneath the gloves. Soon the truth will come out and the gloves will come off, showing the blood of the innocent people.

Once it is seen, the identity of the criminals will be made known and they will be brought before the courts of justice. Then, reconciliation will come and people will teach each other that we should never take another human's life because we are all equal under God. Good things will not only come to the Anuak, but to all who have suffered. It will be because of brave people like you."

Pastor Okwier lost his life on December 13, 2003, yet no one could kill his soul---it was too full with the love of God. There is so much hunger in Ethiopia for real life, yet so many communicate their emptiness and pain, living life on the outside, but not on the inside. On this day of Easter where many celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, let us remember that we need not live as the dead, even though we are physically alive. Instead, put to death the hatred, pride, division, ambition and anger that kills our inner being, seek the redemption that is life giving and lives on forever.

The Tigrayan man who protected the two Anuak men said:

I know I was not alone to defend those Anuak. Other people are doing the same in different ways, like you are now doing. You may not stand up with a machete, but you are doing what all of us have as our main goal and that is finding justice. We need everyone. Now, those who have heard this testimony have the responsibility to do something. I have done my part in bringing this information to you. Now I am happy that I have passed it to you for you to carry on."

Be that person, be that hero, be alive--- then, pass it on to others to work beside you.

In conclusion, I have been told to talk about the topic of human rights. I am going to close by ending on this note, summarizing the meaning of human rights. This is something I have not always understood, but I do now. The value of each human being was established as a basic principle of this world by God. It is not man made.

Consider this Biblical passage from Psalms 72 where a king is called to rule with justice and righteousness so that his reign will reflect the rule of God himself:

For he will deliver the needy who cry out,
the afflicted who have no one to help.
He will take pity on the weak and the needy
And save the needy from death.
He will rescue them from oppression and violence,
For precious is their blood in his sight...
Then, all nations will be blessed through him....

You do not need to be the king to fight for justice and the oppressed. It is disappointing to see how few people are fighting when there are so many abuses going on in front of our eyes. Together, we can have a huge impact. I ask you to fight for every Ethiopian, African and other human being. Step out to protect any human being you see who is suffering, as if that other person was you. Speak up for those who cannot speak. I am not talking as an expert. We do not need to be experts to do something.

Just like if you get a cinder in your eye, you will raise your hand to remove it. Now, do that for others.

Thank you