



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

The Anuak Justice Council Warns All Ethiopians: Beware of the EPRDF Hate Plan to Divide Muslims and Christians!

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The Anuak Justice Council (AJC) calls Ethiopians to not seek revenge against Muslims or Christians for the recent religiously based killings in Ethiopia. Instead, Ethiopians are urged to exercise extreme caution as this conflict may not be about religion at all, but be about the EPRDF. The AJC warns that further religiously based violence could lead to such breakdown in the country that recovery would be difficult. Ethiopians need no further killing or revenge! Such actions would propel Ethiopia into further chaos; hate and suffering even worse than what we have been enduring for the last fifteen years since this regime came into power!

The AJC calls on all leaders, especially in the religious community, to guide your people towards forgiveness and reconciliation. Let only the real perpetrators be held accountable for their crimes in courts of justice, not the innocent or you will become like "them!" Even if such justice is not available in Ethiopia right now, let us work together towards future justice for all Ethiopians. Know that God will ultimately hold all accountable for our actions.

Do not fall into the trap set up by the EPRDF to make us fail. Persevere, support and grieve through this until together, we see the light! As we speak, religious tensions are growing. You, and each of us, must stop this horrible brutality and join together to fight for peace, justice and the rule of law. Do not fight against yourself, ourselves and our brothers and sisters by joining in with actions that are sure to lead us to greater despair.

When the Anuaks were massacred in Gambella in 2003, no one grieved with us but our own people. Many people have since shared with us their guilt and regret for not doing more for the Anuak. You have another chance now to be different. Grieve for those fellow Ethiopians, regardless of whether or not you share their faith and whether or not you share their ethnic background, for you share something far more unifying-- your humanity. They are created by God, like you. Most have families. Grieve for these families and reject the evil that leads to such hate and violence. Do not contribute to more grief and loss by seeking revenge. Stop this cycle of hate that is destroying us! Do whatever you can to uphold life and truth!

Background: Is it really a Christian and Muslim conflict or just another EPRDF power scheme?

The AJC has been alerted to a seriously misunderstood issue affecting Christians and Muslims in the Oromiya area of Ethiopia, about 350K west of the capital city, Addis Ababa. In the last weeks, international news has provided reports of inter-religious conflict in the region. Reports allege that Christians were murdered by Muslims and that their homes and churches were burned, with threats of more to come. Muslims report that some Muslims were also killed by Christians. Such conflict comes as a shock to most Ethiopians who, despite ethnic and political divisions, have not seen serious religious conflict. Historically, Muslims, Christians, Jews, traditionalists and non-believers in Ethiopia have been able to live peaceably, side by side in this country of about half Christians and half Muslims.

What is happening? Is a more radical form of Islam emerging in Ethiopia that will threaten the religious tolerance that Ethiopians have enjoyed for many years? Well, in a more sinister direction, information reported to the AJC in the last three weeks points out a different possibility--that the conflict has been created by agents of the EPRDF-- the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF), who have incited local militias, made up of pro-EPDRF government Muslims and allegedly, even some Christians, to kill Christians and burn their homes. The common factor between the militants is their allegiance not to Allah, but to the EPRDF.

Reports are coming out from various sources that the attacks were instigated, supported and perpetrated by ENDF and other pro-government militias. Some reports have been received that as the Christians grieve and try to get help, they have been urged by some in the ENDF to retaliate. Witnesses report being told by the military to, "Stop your whining and do the same to them," meaning Muslims. Instead of being a bona fide religious conflict, the crisis has all the telltale signs of a purposely manufactured conflict meant to achieve definite political goals. Shockingly absent is any concern for the human lives lost as a result of these brutal and calculating methods.

Political survival of the EPRDF is at stake. Decreasing international support and increasing inter-ethnic unity amongst Ethiopians is causing increased difficulties to the current regime. An old strategy of fomenting conflict between ethnic groups has now come to the forefront to break down the historical religious tolerance between Christians and Muslims as Mr. Meles attempts to convince the West that the terrorists are here in Ethiopia.

Such violent conflict may strike deeply enough at the hearts of those in the West, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, to convince them that more is needed now than ever before to prevent the spread of radical Islam, associated with terrorism, in this strategic country in the Horn of Africa. It will be a further indication--although untrue-- that Mr. Meles Zenawi, their partner in the War on Terror, is the answer to that need, despite the opposition from his own people who accuse him of a magnitude of human rights crimes, repression, corruption and terror tactics.

The alarming fact is that this trumped up conflict could potentially ignite a new battleground for conflict between religious groups in Ethiopia. It is extremely dangerous. We must seek to immediately quell its damaging effects before it erupts into something much less controllable with many more victims. Fortunately, many Christian and Muslim Ethiopians are resisting the government's efforts to fuel the tensions between them. The real battle is between those who hate, divide and kill and those Ethiopians who value life, liberty and freedom for all.

However, it is important to understand what is going on so that grief and anger are not directed at the wrong targets. Recently, in a church in the Diaspora, the congregants were shown a videotape of part of the massacre of the Christians. Understandably, viewers were extremely upset, but yet these emotions should not lead to a backlash against innocent Muslims-- something that could lead to increasing destruction. Ethiopians should resist falling into the trap prepared for them by the masters of conflict, the EPRDF. If this happened, it would help Meles to accomplish his goal of maintaining his power by proving to the West that his leadership was critical in the fight against Islamic terrorists. In doing so, serious damage may be done to Christian-Muslim relations in Ethiopia for a long time to come.

This newly fueled arena of conflict is not surprising. Meles Zenawi has been known to use ethnic division since his early days when he was in the bush with the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF), fighting to overthrow the communist regime of Mengistu.

Since he has been in power these last fifteen years, he has used these same tactics so repeatedly that we should not be surprised that he is now seeking to foment religious conflict. Up until the present, he has only sought to control religious authorities, now, more ominously, he appears to believe that he can better hook the Christian West into supporting him and his pseudo-democratic government by having Muslims persecute Christians in yet another devious treachery to his own people.

When the AJC received a phone call from an Ethiopian, originally from this region, the details of the incident were so reminiscent of what happened to the Anuak in the massacre of December 2003, which it was like pouring "salt on our wounds." The caller asked for help exposing the incident and we agreed to further investigate what was reported. As we did, we talked to some of the witnesses of the violence. We heard a very different version of what happened than has been heard in the press. The hallmark methods used by the EPRDF in the massacre of the Anuak were all there--- Ethiopian troops in uniform, civilian militia groups with machetes, soldiers backing up these groups and joining in with the killing, the burning of homes, the chanting of slogans and of course, the cover-up and subsequent government spin in the international media.

First of all, the AJC wants to be clear that we are not a political group or a liberation group trying to overthrow the government. We are a human rights organization that is working through education, mobilization, advocacy and legal action to find a solution to the tactics of this oppressive regime who has been terrorizing groups throughout the country of Ethiopia. Now it is directed towards people of faith. We do not differentiate between ethnic groups, religious groups, ages, genders or geographic areas. We believe they all equally have inalienable, God-given rights. Our area of focus is the Anuak, but we are opposed to any human rights abuses perpetrated on any persons or groups and believe if we fail to speak out for others, we will ultimately all lose.

Witnesses Report EPRDF Military behind Religious Violence in the Jimma Area of Ethiopia

In early October, at about 6:30 AM, a witness, whose name is being withheld out of fear of retaliation, went to an Orthodox church for worship. Men were seen approaching the church. They were holding machetes, clubs and sticks. "All of us could see them." He continues, "Behind them, they were followed by men in military uniform. We could hear the soldiers telling them to shout, "Allahu akbar!" or "God is great!" The militia then entered the church and started hitting the men with machetes in the head. The men fell down and people started screaming and ran out of the church.

The troops kept instructing the militia what to say. The militia responded with what they were told. They yelled, "We will kill you Christians--the bastard crusaders." They started axing men in front of the church as they ran from the church. As they did this, the soldiers started shooting into the air. More chaos erupted.

A second witness, also afraid to be identified, but at the same location, indicated that the stronger men started realizing that they were the targets and started running away. One of the worshipers realized that some of them were being targeted because of the crosses on their necklaces. The witness reports, "We pulled off our necklaces and threw them away or put them in their pockets."

There was much screaming and crying. "I saw men axed in the church. I also saw a man in uniform pour gasoline on a truck. I then heard the military troops again instructing others to say, "Allahu akbar!" The witness reports being hit with a stick and then running out of the church. She reports, "I saw men in uniform telling those in the militia to kill us and to shout, 'We will kill you crusaders.'" I ran behind the church to a forest area.

Some of the men were shot and killed by the soldiers. Later on when the police and the local Red Cross came later on to collect the bodies, they asked us what happened. We told them civilians as well as soldiers, had killed the people. One of the authorities told us they were not defense troops. The people objected saying they were, but the authorities told the people that anyone can buy ranger uniforms at any time at the market. However, she said she was certain the government was behind it, otherwise, why would the troops be telling them Muslim slogans?"

Another incident occurred in the same general area at another Orthodox church. This third witness reported that militias came with machetes and started calling the men at the church, "crusaders." Most of the stronger men ran away, but some were shot. This witness saw two men killed by men in Ethiopian military uniform. Others, who did not run, were axed with machetes. The witness ran behind a house. When the witness came out, the militia and soldiers were gone. Some went to the police and reported that the army was involved. The police asked them why they thought they were army troops and again, people said because they were in army uniforms. The authority said that this was wrong because anyone can buy uniforms. In response, the people reportedly began to realize that this was something difficult to understand because there seemed to be no precipitating cause for it.

The witness indicated that only Christians in the church or those on the street wearing crosses on their necklaces were targeted. The witness reported that one of the men in the militia was someone that the witness had known for many years. He was of Christian background, but was an EPRDF government supporter, employed by the government. The witness was shocked to see him yelling Muslim slogans. Some of the Christians were saved from being killed by being protected by some of the violent participants who were known to be pro-government, who allowed them to go because they knew the person. The witness indicated that there were some who were known to be Muslim, but they were also known to be pro-government in their views.

This witness was part of a group that was rounded up by three gunmen in uniform and taken to a remote area right behind the church. Two people were already dead on the scene and others cried because they were afraid they would be killed next because they were Christians. When they were first detained, other men, some in army uniform, believed to be of higher rank, came to the site. This was assumed because when they came to the site, others listened to them. One of these men was a government employee who noticed one of his family members was in the group of detainees. This person had the power to single out this person from the group and allowed the person to go home. The witness does not know what happened to the others in the group.

The witness knew of another incident as well where a woman was beaten up, but one of the police officers showed up on the scene and knew her family. He then called someone in the army to possibly gain permission to have her left alone. Those people with government connections were not killed. Now, many believe that the government is behind this because it happened during Ramadan when Muslims are more committed to living in harmony. For them to take this action now is not consistent with their practice, unless something significant had been done to them? No one is alleging this. Some of these statements can be further corroborated through some of the video and testimony appearing on Ethiopian websites. The stories and video are very consistent with what these witnesses have reported to the AJC, further increasing their credibility.

These Christians and Muslims are mostly Oromo who have lived amongst each other for years. This game of the EPRDF should be exposed by everyone, including Muslims and Christians who refuse to be played with like pawns in a game, but this is not a game, it is life and death. Unfortunately, the history of this regime is mired in the blood of many. Unless more are aware of what is happening, it will continue to claim the lives and futures of the Ethiopian people.

Ethiopians must not be blinded! Even now, some Christians may be planning revenge against innocent Muslim Ethiopians. We must warn these people to not simply react with great emotion coming from their grief and anger, but to think before they commit crimes for which they will later be held accountable by God and man. We must realize that all the signs are there that the EPRDF wants us kill each other. Do not become like the Woyane--- agents of death! Our pain does not justify killing of the innocent! Our Muslim and Christian leaders must stand up for higher principles and avoid greater disaster!

The AJC expresses its condolences to the families who lost their loved ones. As we feel the pain of these losses, we remember the 424 Anuak who died in December of 2003 and the 1500 or more who have died since then. We cannot bring back any of their lives, but we can work towards making a better Ethiopia where such things can never happen again. If we in the AJC can forgive, we are in a better position to contribute to the future rather than becoming stuck in hate and anger. As a country, this is our plight. We seem to all be recovering from some bitter wrongs in the past.

We must advocate for a different future. As each of us makes a decision this day, choose to contribute and resist the evil plan of the EPRDF that can lead to the destruction of our beloved country. Fear God and resist evil! You may be thrilled with where it leads you!

May we seek God's comfort, strength and guidance in the difficult path ahead of us; for only He can heal Ethiopia.

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