



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL  
*Justice, Peace and Freedom*

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## **The Three Year Anniversary of the Anuak Massacre and Meles Finds Mengistu Guilty of Genocide!**

**December 20, 2006.**

Only one day divides the verdict of genocide against Mengistu from the three-year anniversary of the massacre of the Anuak in Gambella. Ironically, it is Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, whose EPRDF courts found Mengistu guilty and who has imprisoned members of the Opposition Party on false charges of inciting genocide, who may some day himself face such charges of genocide against the Anuak. This is because some believe that what was done to the Anuak, under the authority of the Meles government, actually better meets the definition of genocide under international law.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Clough, a US attorney and longtime observer of Ethiopia told Voice of America in a statement released on December 13, 2006,

*“The biggest problem with prosecuting Mengistu for genocide is that his actions did not necessarily target a particular group. They were directed against anybody who was opposing his government, and they were generally much more political than based on any ethnic targeting. In contrast, the irony is the Ethiopian government itself has been accused of genocide based on atrocities committed in Gambella. I’m not sure that they qualify as genocide either. But in Gambella, the incidents, which were well documented in a human rights report of about 2 years ago, were clearly directed at a particular group, the tribal group, the Anuak.”*

As the Anuak remember December 13, 2006, the pain and suffering still remain. Usually, what helps grief to ease away is some resolution, like having the perpetrators brought to justice, or a proper burial or some kind of reconciliation between people, but none of this has happened. Children are growing up as orphans or without their fathers. The perpetrators are seen in the neighborhood or at the market, going about freely with their lives.

To outsiders, it will seem like three years, but for the Anuak and those close to them, it seems like yesterday. To add to the difficulty, the EPRDF government will not allow people to talk about it. It is like adding salt to their tender wounds. They are killing their loved ones, burying them in mass graves, allowing the perpetrators to go free and then denying them the right to say anything. December 13, 2006 was a day when many would have wanted to come together, to sit down as a group and grieve and comfort each other, but it was not permitted.

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<sup>1</sup> See “What is Genocide”, “Eight Stages of Genocide” and “Genocides and Politicides from 1945 with Stages in 2006”, found on the website of Genocide Watch: <http://www.genocidewatch.org/>.

Anuak refugees are still in Sudan, living under very difficult circumstances with limited schooling for the children, but still do not feel the situation in Gambella offers a better and safer alternative. They want to come home, but the EPRDF government has never acknowledged what they have done and security remains an issue.

There are hundreds of Anuak who are still being detained in Gambella prison since even before the massacre occurred. They have found no solution and their futures continue to be stolen from them as court dates to hear their cases are never made or if made, endlessly postponed. They are cut off from their families who are struggling to survive without their help. Most are not guilty of anything, but speaking up for the rights and dignity of the Anuak.

The Anuak continue to live under terrible conditions. They have become so vulnerable. Increasing numbers have turned to alcohol as a way out of their despair. Even though the incidence of human rights violations has been reduced in the last two months or so, there is fear that when the rainy season ends and the oil companies return, the troops that accompany them for their protection will again start perpetrating atrocities against the Anuak.

Another reason why the killings and disappearances have lessened is because so many troops have been moved to the Somali border. Instead, the regional government is now trying to recruit 1,400 Anuak young men who would be taken to be trained for the military effort in Somalia.

After three years, the Anuak Justice Council has reached many of the significant groups in the international community—the United Nations, the United States government, the Canadian government, the European Parliament, the World Bank, the International Criminal Court and the African Union. The awareness work has been done. There have been multiple human rights investigations and the plight of the Anuak has been heard. Two more reports have just been released this past week.

Both reports document the responsibility of the EPRDF military as the perpetrators of the gross human rights crimes against the Anuak and others of the Gambella region. The first report, completed for the UN, released by one of the authors, entitled, **“Livelihoods & Vulnerabilities Study, Gambella Region of Ethiopia,”** speaks to the great deprivation in the rural Anuak community related to very real threats of being killed, arrested, beaten, detained or raped by Meles’ defense troops to the point that the daily tasks of life are nearly impossible to fulfill.

The second report, completed by the International Human Rights Clinic at the Harvard School of Law’s human rights department, entitled, **“We Are Now Hoping For Death—Grave Human Rights Abuses in Gambella, Ethiopia,”** reveals substantial documentation as to the violations of human rights committed by the Ethiopian National Defense Troops against the Anuak and others. Unfortunately, it also reveals how some Anuak, especially early on, retaliated with anger and revenge against innocent civilians, also committing some serious atrocities.

As the Anuak continued to be targeted, with little response from the international community, some of the Anuak, in desperation and anger, picked up guns to defend themselves and their families, as well as to seek revenge against the Ethiopian Defense Forces, pro-government Anuak and even against some innocent victims. This violence resulted in further retaliation by Ethiopian defense troops against more innocent Anuak rather than against the insurgents doing the original crimes.

The AJC does not condone the killing of the innocent or taking justice into one’s own hands, but we do understand how these groups become so frustrated with a system that advances the interests of pro-government perpetrators of crimes.

Another significant contributor to the human rights crimes was the presence of the Chinese Petroleum Company, Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPAEB), contracted by Petronas, the Malaysian company, who unsuccessfully found oil at the first exploratory well in the Gambella concession this past year, but are planning to return when the rains stop to attempt another drilling site in a more southern area of Gambella. As the EPRDF defense troops “protected” the Chinese from the local people, it gave them justification for the killings, arrests, disappearances, torture and rape of the Anuak. As mentioned previously, this will most likely again increase when the oil company returns.

Ethiopians have all become aware of what a brutal government they have in power after the experience of the May 2005 national elections. The election initially gave hope to the Anuak that with a new government, the perpetrators would be brought to justice and stability would return to Gambella. They hoped that as stability returned, that the political prisoners would be released and the refugees in Sudan would be able to return, but unfortunately, we all know what happened with the election.

The election was hijacked when the EPRDF declared themselves the winners. The hope of the Ethiopian people was crushed when the student protestors, who were peacefully rallying in June and November, were killed or detained. The Ethiopian people were devastated when their elected leaders were imprisoned in Addis Ababa for crimes done not by them, but by their accusers, the EPRDF.

Ethiopians realize that the same government that is supposed to protect them, is instead killing, torturing, harassing and intimidating them. What has been going on with the Anuak is reaching out across the country, affecting all ethnic groups and unifying all Ethiopians against a government that abuses the basic human rights of its own people.

As we Ethiopians come together to condemn these acts, we can know that the Memorial Day of December 13<sup>th</sup>, should not be seen as only for the Anuak, but also for all Ethiopians. As Anuak reflect on the loss of their loved ones, may all other Ethiopians join with the Anuak as their fellow people. This grave and tragic situation at hand is no longer about one group or one region, but it has become about all of Ethiopia.

Human rights freedom fighters, journalists who have had the courage to write or speak the truth, government officials, prisoners of conscience and political leaders who have followed their moral convictions by trying to use a non-violent means to change a brutal system—all are suffering for us in prisons, jails, detention centers and in exile. Let us think about them and pray for them that they have strength to endure and that they would be encouraged by our commitment to work for freedom.

Let all Ethiopians reflect together at this time of the December 13, 2006 Memorial. Many have written to us regarding their regret for not crying and grieving for the Anuak who died. Now is your opportunity to show your care and compassion not just for the Anuak, but also for all Ethiopians who have suffered. Let us do the same for the over 200 civilians who died in July of 2002 in Awassa, for the 193 protestors who died in June and November of last year, for the people of Oromia, Ogaden, Sidamo, Tigray, Amhara and many other parts of our country who have died at the hands of the EPRDF. All who are killed are one of us.

Pray for peace and justice. Pray for unity, tolerance, respect and love for one another. It was a lack of love and respect for one another that was and remains the root of all the killing. It is because of hate, greed and envy that we destroy each other. It is those things that have put us where we are and until we replace it with attitudes that give respect and dignity to all people, we will not find an end to our pain and suffering.

Instead, may the suffering and blood of innocent Ethiopians that was spilled on the ground, cry out to the living with a loud voice of warning. May those cries stir us to love, respect and care for each other. May their blood penetrate so deeply into the soil of our motherland, that it becomes part of us. May we be reminded as every new crop emerges from the ground, that it is like human life; that we must nurture and protect it or it will wither and die.

Let us remember these dark days as voices of instruction for the future. If we forget why our people died, we may not learn the lessons of how to be truly human. May God forgive us for what we have done and help us to forgive others for what was done to us. May the blood of those who lost their lives, not be wasted. May it motivate us to move ahead in a different direction and live!

May we remind you that December 13<sup>th</sup> is no longer a Memorial Day only for the Anuak, but instead, it is the memorial of becoming one family—the family of Ethiopia. As long as we remember this, there will be no more genocides!

May God accomplish more than we could ask or imagine in this beautiful land of Ethiopia!

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