



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

We must realize that we are infected by a widely spreading virus which requires one shot to cure--that shot is our UNITY.

January 27, 2007.

What lessons have we Ethiopians learned in 2006? Perhaps more than we realize! I will start with myself.

As you all know, I, Obang Metho, am not a member of any political party. As I have said it many times, party membership is not my intention, neither is it the intention of our organization, the Anuak Justice Council. However, some people may wonder why the AJC speaks regularly about the political situation in Ethiopia. It is because the reason for our formation resulted from the massacre and other human rights violations directed at the Anuak people by the current TPLF government. We came to the realization that until the system of brutality established by the central government in Addis Ababa changed, the crisis threatening the survival of the Anuak would not be resolved.

As we learned that others across the country were experiencing the same kind of suffering as the Anuak, it became even more apparent that it was not an isolated problem, but one that encompassed most Ethiopians. To bring a halt to such terror would require a joint effort. The suffering could no longer be separated by ethnic groups. The suffering had become a problem of the Ethiopian people, as it was the same government who had brutalized the Anuak who was now openly creating an environment of terror for everyone who opposed them. The widespread injustice became a rallying cry for Ethiopians to come together to solve this shared human rights crisis. As a result, those in the AJC felt it was a moral responsibility to speak up for others who were suffering like the Anuak.

In the past year, we Ethiopians have found each other and discovered a way to work together. It has led us to the realization that we are more alike than different. Together, since this discovery, we have had a fast learning curve. We now know that the suffering we have endured because of our brutal and exploitive leaders, has been felt by millions of other Ethiopians. As we have become more tolerant of each other, we have together, reached our limit of tolerating leaders like Meles.

Ethiopians from all parts of our society are ready to throw away the model—the proto-type of such leaders! His type cannot be trusted even with some recycling of its parts—it must be discarded. In other words, to address our problem, we must address **“our problem”**—Meles and look-alike Meles! We need a new type of leadership—leaders who are willing to put the interests of the people first—before their own!

Despite the fact that our Prime Minister has plunged us into a new war and restored some of his tattered image as a “hero” fighting extremism, the people in his country have a different vision for the future. They have new eyes for truth and a new eagerness for unity, peace and for the respect of all people, crossing any lines of differences that previously divided them. We have rediscovered each other and created an environment for change—and with this new environment, we are demanding a “new breed of leader.” Even though Meles has been called such a “new breed of leader,” we, along with the international community, have now discovered he is really the “old breed of leader,”—just more devious in nature.

For our future, we do not want a cardboard look-a-like of such a leader as Meles—one that merely talks the talk. Instead we want leaders who authentically live the life! For those who think you might follow in his footsteps, forget it! The Ethiopian people are ready to eradicate these kinds of leaders—just look at the election turn out for evidence of that. We are ready for a government that represents the people. The public knows that this kind of leadership like that of Meles, will only bring us more misery rather than peace, stability, prosperity, justice, equality and opportunity.

This is not to say we do not have any individual and group responsibility for mending our regrettable history of divisions, intolerances, breaches of trust and acts of serious wrongdoing between us, for we have contributed to this deception and hate-based politics for way too long. We must be accountable for that. However, a quiet revolution has started as we have had the taste of possible freedom. It has created a spirit of discontent that informs us of what we can and should be as a people and as a society, even if we are not yet there! Do not discount how important this is—awareness of a problem always precedes correction of it. Even our difficulties and pain will not be without benefit if we are wiser, kinder and freer in the future. We must persevere through these difficult times until we find durable peace.

Yet, we must look at some of the lessons of the last few years so we do not miss what we must learn before moving on. To start with, the Anuak Justice Council would never have begun without the crisis of the Anuak. I was involved in humanitarian work in the Gambella region before the massacre of 2003. It was my own grief and pain—that still exists—that drove me to begin fighting against a system that has sold its soul for lust of power and gain at the expense of the poor and weak of whom they are supposed to protect.

There are several important lessons here. First, we all must guard ourselves against compromising our values. Instead we must let our consciences rule over our actions so that we do not sell our souls in similar ways. We came into this world without anything but our souls and that is our only possession when we leave before meeting our heavenly judge. What we do on this earth matters. Yet, because we cannot always trust even ourselves, we must create laws and transparent systems, which will more easily hold all accountable. Hopefully, the motivation amongst Ethiopians for such a climate of greater accountability is something that has increased during this last year.

Secondly, we must focus on improving the human rights and life conditions for the living and those to be born, not dwelling on the dead. In other words, this fight is not just about holding the guilty accountable or seeking personal revenge, but it is about creating a government and civil society that continues to hold people so accountable for their exploitive, corrupt or abusive behavior towards other human beings, that it significantly reduces further incidences of such behavior in the future. However, because of guilt that could encompass many, we must find a way to bring reconciliation between victims and perpetrators, between ethnic groups and other groups who have been divided, neglected or injured.

Thirdly, we need a new compassion for others who are suffering amongst us. When we Ethiopians came together this past year at the crossroads of each other's grief, we began to better recognize each other as human beings like ourselves. In the past, this has not happened like it should have as we remained in our protective groups, interested mostly in ourselves, alienated from others and not caring about the suffering of others.

For instance, in the 1980ties, the TPLF stood up against the oppression, injustice and marginalization of their own people. Why did others in power not take a stand for them? Understandably, Mengistu terrorized the people making many afraid to take a stand, but this is not enough of a reason. Eventually, other repressed people did stand up for their own freedom along side the TPLF, including the Anuak who had formed the Gambella People's Liberation Movement (GPLM) and the OLF because the TPLF was talking about democracy and human rights for all. However, when the TPLF came into power, they quickly forgot about how it felt to be terrorized by their own government, becoming the new perpetrators of terror. Mengistu had been recycled into Meles!

When the Anuak were massacred in December of 2003, did other Ethiopians cry out in their behalf? Not really. Just check past records to see how few articles or statements of concern covered this horrific event. It was not until the killing of protestors in Addis Ababa following the elections and the testimony in front of the U.S. Congress Sub-Committee on Africa that the paths of the Anuak and other Ethiopians converged. We have learned much together since that time, but whom have we left out? There are many more Ethiopians from whom we have not heard—or perhaps listened to!

Fourthly, we should consider who we have identified in 2006 to be the real heroes and enemies? Well, for sure, the real heroes are not the leaders in the Diaspora! The true heroes—those who made a difference—are the people of Ethiopia who rallied by the millions and are continuing to do their best in an increasingly repressive society! Some lost their lives and freedom as a result. Our heroes include the 26 million people who voted, not for people here in the Diaspora, but for people who are now in prison who could have chosen to live in exile, but instead are now locked up. The heroes are also those Commissioners of the Inquiry into the post-election violence who stood up for truth at their own expense. It is all of these people who inspired others in the Diaspora to take action. Keeping that in mind, we who are outside of Ethiopia can help fight, but the real struggle is being carried out by the people back home. They have not given up. They did not die. They are still there in Ethiopia. We in the Diaspora are support groups and will always be supporters, but not the driving force of change.

Yet, when we have fought for leadership here in the Diaspora, the real enemies to this movement may have become ourselves! In doing so, we may have contributed more to killing the movement than any outside antagonists could have done. The real warriors for freedom are still fighting for it in Ethiopia—they are still there while our energy is being drained by our infighting. But those at home had hoped that with our technology, our education, our resources and our access to strategic people and institutions that we would have been able to contribute much more.

If, as some suspect, there are Woyane amongst us, sabotaging our efforts, let us create new ways to circumvent such undermining conflict. Like in Dr. Berhana Nega's book, **Dawn of Freedom**, we need to not prolong the darkness. To do so, we may need to let go of our personal agendas or the agenda's of our groups. This is not about a struggle for freedom and human rights in Ethiopia that can be carried out by one group, political organization, ethnic group, region, armed group or religion. It is about a common struggle where we must be careful that all are included in the effort and fruits of that fight.

If one carefully looks at the current ruling party, what you will see is a government made up of only a few from a minority group in Ethiopia, the Tigrayans. This small elite group has looked out for its own, heaping power, financial benefits and opportunities to the faithfully loyal TPLF party members or their EPRDF puppets from other ethnic groups. It makes us realize that it is not about Tigrayans because many who disagree with the brutal tactics of this government are not included in sharing the benefits of their power.

On the other hand, some Ethiopians from most every ethnic group have joined with the ruling party and have reaped the benefits. For example, in Gambella, where the Anuak have been living in terror for the last three years since the massacre, an Anuak man is the TPLF appointed governor of the region, effectively carrying out the TPLF agenda to the harm of the Anuak and others in the region. The same thing is happening in most other parts of Ethiopia where the regional governors and leaders are not Tigrayan, but of the same ethnicity of the local people. Thus, it is absolutely not a problem of Tigrayans versus all other Ethiopians. Instead, this struggle is between those who value human life and the principles of freedom and justice established by our Creator and those who devalue others to advance their own self-interests. Yet, for those who would never join with Meles and his cadres, there are those who still indirectly support the ruling government by more passive means.

Some of us in the Diaspora want to remain passive in order to be able to return to Ethiopia to do a business with the same government who is terrorizing and killing our people, making such people part of the system that enables this government to continue. Instead, if we look deeply enough into a solution to this crisis, we realize that we are affected by one disease that requires one shot to cure it and that shot is our unity. Such unity must include our fellow Tigrayan brothers and sisters who stand up for freedom and justice. If we exclude them, they may feel that they will have to hang on to the “Woyane” for their survival even though they are in opposition to what the TPLF stands for.

The question becomes, what can we do now? By free election, the EPRDF would never have won. However, ask yourself—how did they gain so much power and control? The answer is—through dividing the rest of us. The biggest fear of this government is speaking out together in unity. Some who have just come from Ethiopia say, even in the rural areas, the mood is that when the next election comes, they will vote against this government. The EPRDF has forced many to join their ranks, but the word is out that their allegiance is only superficial and will change as soon as there is an alternative.

The biggest fear amongst those back home is that there will be no viable political opposition in place for the next election. It is those next five years following an unopposed election of 2010 that would be the biggest blow to them. We must take action so that does not occur. They expect those of us in the Diaspora to create an organization or movement that could launch a viable replacement that could transition them into a valid national election that gave people choices and one that was carried out to meet the highest international standards.

The people are afraid that if anything happened today, tomorrow or next month, which sent the “Woyane” running, that there is no strong and trusted opposition or organization prepared to provide transitional leadership. What we do know is that the Ethiopian people do not want a Meles, a Mengistu or any other recycled version of the two who would pretend to be “a new breed of leadership” before becoming another tyrant!

Unfortunately, when we examine the lessons of 2006, we must also look at our failures, as understanding our failures might provide the best lessons of how to succeed in 2007! In light of this, we must admit that despite the promise of such groups as the Kinijit, the UEDF, the AFD, the OLF, ENUPF, EPRP or others, nothing materialized for many reasons. Yet there is good in each of these and in many other organizations not mentioned. Kinijit divided in two and there is no sign of them coming together or of one of them gaining the overwhelming trust of the people. For a long time, I have not made a public statement because I am not a member of the party and do not know the inside situation, but as their conflict has become more publicly obvious and as I continue to be asked about this, I will comment.

We all know that within the Kinijit, something was done wrong, but since the two groups have split there does not seem to be any pressure from any direction to reconcile this division. Now, it is worsening and affecting all of us and has become personal. Also, the majority of people are claiming that one group is gaining more support, but as long as the two groups exist, both claiming to be the true Kinijit and possessors of the manifesto, the public will see them as two and the effort will be hindered. Perhaps this will improve in the coming months; however, it might take time. Yet, it is the Kinijit that has created the fertile environment for seeking our freedom and many in the Kinijit have sacrificed for that. That sacrifice should lead us to continue our struggle for freedom, peace and justice.

If I may have your permission to ask you to pause for a moment here; have we lost the true meaning of Coalition for Unity and Democracy? How is it that a Coalition with a massive support of Ethiopians under a united front with a mission to bring about true democracy in Ethiopia, turned to an instrument of division amongst ourselves?

Please do stop to think for a moment...have we failed thousands of gallant Ethiopian women, children and men who died for our Country; Our elected leaders, our prisoners of consciousness, our journalists and many of our brothers and sisters that are languishing in jail today across the country? Have we not been afforded unconditional love from our lost ones who died for our children's future? Who do we think we are to allow ourselves to fall victim, to become instruments of division for the empowerment of Woyane? Is this how we are going to repay those who fought for our freedom-- by fighting and dividing amongst ourselves?

My brothers and sisters, there are those including myself that will neither tolerate, nor stand by and watch the spread of this vicious virus of divisiveness that Meles and his supporters infected us with; it is rampantly spreading through our blood streams until its job is done — until, we kill each other or kill any hope of peace, justice and freedom for Our People and our Country.

No, we will not stand for that. I challenge you to either come forward leaving your personal or group's agendas behind and put your Country's future first; or choose to lay victim to this virus and continue to spread the message of hate, division and self destruction. Which path will you choose?

There are those of us who are prepared to jump start a mission of love and unity which will in turn transform itself to, respect for one another; from which human rights, justice, equality and the rule of law with democracy at its side will flourish in our land; we are finally on a focused path to ridding our system of this deadly virus of divisiveness and on our way to reclaiming what is Ours, Ethiopia and its rightful place in this world; a nation free of tyrants, dictators, corruption and poverty.

Those who have knowingly or unknowingly created division amongst themselves, amongst those of us back home and in the Diaspora will no longer have a place!

The year 2007 and beyond is a time for Zero tolerance of division! Fight to cure yourself from this vicious virus of hate! Step up to the plate and fight for Unity; fight for our brotherhood and sisterhood!

Our work in unity will not be done until those who have committed the grave crime of human rights abuse and murder are brought to justice in international courts and charged for the grave crimes they have committed; our job will not be done until all of our elected leaders, prisoners of consciousness, journalists, innocent victims currently incarcerated, are released; our work will not be done until democracy, equality, justice, peace and the rule of law reigns over Ethiopia; our work will not be done until our country is free of dictators and their evil ways; our work will not be done until those of us who want to return home and serve our country are able to do so.

My compatriots, our work has just begun.....

Our political leaders in Qaliti Prison and in other Detention centers around the country have chosen to be there rather than compromise their position as the recent letter from Dr. Yacob Hailemariam, former Norfolk University professor and the top attorney for the U.N. tribunal on war crimes and genocide in Rwanda, has explained. Dr Yacob expressed his deep concern over the unjust and unfair trial by the TPLF party. He said that it is only through reconciliation that healing and enduring peace will come to Ethiopia.

I hope that the Kinijit leaders in North America surprise us by sacrificing wherever possible for the sake of their leaders in Qaliti prison and for the sake of the Ethiopian people—through such reconciliation or through resigning from their positions, even if they know they are right.

The AFD was a new, truly extraordinary attempt to bring various groups together in a new partnership of cooperation, but we have not yet seen the execution of their hopes and vision. Yet, the formation of the AFD showed the readiness to change and to accept one another, especially because it was formed by liberation groups who had wanted to secede from the country. This in itself proves that if there were to be a good government that demonstrated equality for all, there would be few who would want to break away. The AFD was a real threat to the existing dictatorship and are the first to come to the table to join so many diverse groups for a common cause.

Even though the UEDF did not join the AFD and even though we do not know all their reasons, they are a political party that stands up for a better and more peaceful Ethiopia and is a group that should have a major role in the future of Ethiopia. They need to continue with their work, but we should not be working against each other or we all will lose. They have much experience and strength to contribute to the cause.

The OLF is another organization that has demonstrated that they are for Ethiopia and this is why they joined the AFD. They should be applauded for joining an organization that speaks up for the country in addition to their own people who have been so harshly persecuted and repressed. It shows that they care for the unity of Ethiopia despite what some might believe. They have wanted to secede for some understandable reasons, but have shown a willingness to contribute to the whole of Ethiopia.

The same situation applies to the people of Ogaden who are part of the ONLF and also joined the AFD, speaking up for all Ethiopians as well as for their own people who have been so neglected and who are now, even suffering more because of the invasion of Somalia. They have shown courage and strength as they have endured ongoing human rights abuses for years. We need them and they need us. We must also include the people of Sidamo who demonstrated the same willingness to join together for a united, free, democratic Ethiopia. Other regions, like Gambella, the Southern Nations, the Benishangul region, the Tigrayan region, the Afar region and many other places who have not been included in the AFD, but yet many of them support the formation of a government that respects and represents all of its people. All of these groups, should they truly sustain unity, could see the formation of a new, vibrant Ethiopia that could give opportunity to all.

Whatever our political agendas are, we all have the same common goal. That goal is to have a free society where our ethnic rights are respected across the entire country. We have different organizations, but we are fighting for one thing and that is a peaceful Ethiopia where people live in harmony with justice equally given. We have learned that we are all in the same boat together going for the same fertile ground as one. If the boat capsizes, we will all go down together. We must all, including myself, take responsibility for our failure to yet launch such an organization or movement that could unify the Ethiopian people. Such an organization does not have to be a political one, but should be an organization that has the respect, trust and credibility to speak on behalf of all Ethiopians for a broad agenda that would lead to the democratization of Ethiopia.

We have had four hard blows to our future hopes for Ethiopia since the massacre of the Anuak in 2003: (1) the hijacking of the National Election of 2005, (2) the killing and detaining of protestors related to the failed democratic election, (3) the imprisonment of the elected Opposition leaders, and (4) the division within the Opposition party.

Many Ethiopians may say that Ethiopians, as well as Africans, will never change. In frustration and disappointment, they will go back to improving their lives in the Diaspora, escaping from facing the difficulties going on with their people back home. However, in doing so, we may have given up the struggle just short of victory. Remember, it is just before the dawn begins to show its light when the darkness is the greatest. Instead, those willing to keep up the effort must encourage others to do the same. God will help us if we genuinely seek His help and follow His ways, but those ways may mean not worrying about our own political aspirations and instead being willing to serve each other and those back home with no reward other than attempting to do the right thing.

Consider Jesus' rebuke of his disciples when they became competitive with each other, wanting to be the greatest and most important: **"...a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table: But I am among you as one who serves."** Luke 22:24-28. Jesus later in the same chapter tells one of the most well-known disciples, Peter, that Peter was going to deny his association with Jesus three times. This greatly humbled Peter, but Jesus told him that He would pray for him, that after Peter was humbled, he would be able to strengthen his brothers.

What lessons can we get from this? The most important is this: when we leave our pride and ego behind, we will be better able to serve our brothers and sisters of Ethiopia who should be our guests of honor at the table. If we feel we have something to contribute, come forward. Each person is needed to help with the huge task ahead—but come as someone willing to serve. We have already failed in many ways, but let us admit it, humble ourselves and go out to strengthen our brothers and sisters, knowing more as a result of our failure. Let us pray that God helps us. We need each other. Together we can be interwoven together to make a colorful fabric like the wide variations amongst the many Ethiopian ethnic groups.

Those of us who have taken leadership roles this past year, must learn the lessons of 2006 so we can show new solidarity in 2007 in order to get "the work" done! Many are saying, 'Obang, do something,' but this job cannot be done by one person, two persons or by a hundred. The work of the Anuak Justice Council, even though very small in size, has been about people, Anuak and non-Anuak, men and women, some back home and many here who have all contributed in different ways. The same is needed for the people of Ethiopia.

I am willing to contribute my share, but first I want to ask the public to write down what you want to be done and then—not me, but "we" can do it together. I would be willing to be a referee or moderator between politicians, civic organizations and other interested parties as long as they are willing to work together and as long as we have the resources to do it.

In concluding my thoughts on lessons from 2006, I must recognize how much becoming part of the Ethiopian community personally enriched me. I want to extend many thanks to the many Ethiopians who have touched my life. You were people I did not know, but I have found we are alike. You were people I never would have met if it had not been for the tragedy of my people and our country. Together, we have discovered the joy of new relationships. We have discovered our mutual humanity, breaking down years of misunderstanding, suspicion and alienation. The best of 2006 is that we now can help each other through this struggle for a future for our children and grandchildren who will eventually live together despite their color, ethnicity, religion or language.

I first came forward from my independent life in Canada to speak out because of the death of my loved ones in the massacre of December 2003, but now in 2006, God has eased the pain of my loss by bringing about unexpected new relationships between many Ethiopian people so alike in our hearts and minds. Even though those loved ones can never be replaced, I have been greatly touched by the many new people who have become part of my life. This is the best gift of 2006. In 2007, may God teach us how to continue to build a more loving and caring society in our beloved country of Ethiopia.

Let us go forward, humbling ourselves, serving each other and looking to God for our help during this next year.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit...Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Romans 15:13 and Ephesians 4:2)

Thank you. If you have ideas for what you see could help us in this effort, please email those thoughts and suggestions to: advocacy@anuakjustice.org