



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Appeal to the Media and Policymakers to Break the Silence about the Gross Human Rights Violations in Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Struggle for Peace, Justice, Freedom and Democracy

Press Release: February 5, 2007

Ethiopians are struggling for freedom and democracy in their country and either no one is listening or worse, could we in the United States, United Kingdoms, UN, European Union, Australia, Canada, South Africa and especially the African Union have adopted a “no talk” rule about it in an attempt to advance our own interests? How will history and the Ethiopian people judge us if this indeed is the case? Are we creating enemies needlessly or must their movement for true democracy be sacrificed for a greater good? Is the greater good only ours? Is it necessary that our interests be in competition with the needs of the Ethiopian people? We invite you to consider the situation from the perspective of Ethiopians.

On February 19, 2007 a trial of the leaders of the Opposition Party who ran against the current ruling party of the Ethiopian Peoples’ Republic Democratic Front (EPRDF) in the Ethiopian National Election of May 2005 will be taking place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Federal Special Court in Ethiopia is set to make a final ruling against CUD leaders, journalists and anti-poverty activists. Most Ethiopians believe that these leaders would have actually won the election had it not been rigged. Independent observers, such as the Chief Observer of the Election Process from the European Union, Ana Gomes, reported that the election did not meet international standards and has challenged the outcome of that election.

When the EPRDF self-proclaimed themselves as the winners, protest broke out that was met with excessive violence from security forces under the authority of PM Meles leading to the killing of 193 of the protestors. In November of 2005, these leaders were imprisoned on fabricated charges of genocide and treason. They now face a probable serious outcome at this trial where most do not expect true justice to be executed. Such an outcome would further undermine the struggle for democracy in Ethiopia.

Many Ethiopians are asking—will there be any international media coverage of this trial and if so, will it be biased or will it accurately represent the reality of the situation in Ethiopia? Will elected officials in the United States and other democratic countries speak out for a fair trial, as emissaries of the principals of free elections that gave them their own offices? Will pressure be put on the ruling government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi to release these leaders and thousands of others who are considered prisoners of conscience, languishing in prisons across Ethiopia whose only crime was speaking out against the current government?

In addition, they ask—as Ethiopia and its prime minister have been in the news for invading Somalia as a partner in the War on Terror, will there continue to be silence in the public media about the gross human rights abuses which are widespread across Ethiopia, including the ethnic cleansing of the Anuak people of the Gambella region of southwestern Ethiopia by Ethiopian National Defense Forces that began in December of 2003—their main offense—their indigenous land sits on significant oil reserves? Such human rights abuses have been documented by many groups like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and others, but little action as resulted and abuses, repression and suffering continues.

When our organization, the Anuak Justice Council, presented the case of the Anuak before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 2004, the Ethiopian Human Rights Council present at the time told us that it was the United States that was primarily responsible for holding up the Ethiopian government of Prime Minister Meles—the same government that was killing the Anuak. At the same time, we met representatives from Darfur regarding the genocide occurring there. Since that time, Darfur and the Northern Sudanese government of Omar al-Bashir has received much attention but no action, and the story of the Anuak and other victims of the widespread human rights abuses perpetrated by the current military under the government of Meles Zenawi, has been largely ignored or even repressed by the media and those elected officials and other policy makers in free countries. There is increasing reason to believe that some in these groups view the Ethiopian struggle for democracy to be in competition with our own interests in the US, the UK, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and African Union.

In the US, we suspect this is because Meles and his EPRDF government is considered to be a strategic partner in the War on Terror and that it is in the interest of the United States to advance this relationship for such reasons as have now become apparent in Somalia. In fact, some believe it may be related to gaining access to oil, gas and other natural resources in Somalia. Yet, as the Bush administration calls for an end to tyranny and for the support of democracy movements, they and others are enabling the repression of the democracy movement in Ethiopia by following such policy positions. As a result, Ethiopians are experiencing increasing disillusionment with one of the primary countries they are attempting to emulate in the struggle for democracy—the United States. The current US administration and many in other branches of government are not alone in ignoring the plight of the Ethiopian people. The media, in their silence on the situation, also appears to have colluded. When there has been coverage, most frequently it has been highly slanted in favor of the EPRDF government.

We should be concerned, as members of the free world, with what happens in Ethiopia and in the rest of the Horn of Africa. For instance, much of our oil for many free countries comes through the Red Sea and if we destabilize the Horn of Africa, we stand to endanger our source of oil. In other words, if our integrity on this whole issue fails us, let us look at it from a point of self-interest with the future in mind. By holding up this regime that is alienating and terrorizing their own people, are we standing in the way of democracy building by the people of Ethiopia and if we do, what are the potential consequences to us of doing that?

Keep in mind, the US has provided millions of dollars in training to the same military that is turning Ethiopia into a police state. In addition, Ethiopia receives a large proportion of the total financial aid sent to Africa. Reportedly, the US has given 21 billion dollars to the EPRDF government since they have come to power in 1991. Yet, most of the money is not reaching the people, most of whom remain in poverty and underdevelopment. At the same time, recent reports indicate that the money coming from Ethiopia to banks in the UK has increased by 103% in the last year.

We in the US do not need to sell our souls, denying Ethiopians their right to freedom and to the legitimate process of exercising their rights, just because Meles is giving us what we think we want in the War on Terror! It will create justifiable anger towards us if we betray the people in this way. Once this government is gone, they may seek new alliances and many others are ready and waiting, hoping to gain the vast resources in Ethiopia and in other African countries as natural resources are diminishing elsewhere.

We are seeing abundant early warning signs already to what soon may become irreparable damage to the relationship between Ethiopians and the United States. Many Ethiopians, many who live here in the US, are greatly disappointed in what they see as an obvious bias in favor of the repressive and brutal current government. They see this as being at the expense of peace, justice, freedom and the democratization of

Ethiopia. But we should ask—what happens when Meles’ time is over? Meles is so unpopular right now with the Ethiopian people that his rule may be very short-lived, but peoples’ memories live on! Are we willing to sacrifice the future relationship with Ethiopians who have previously considered us as amongst their closest friends?

In fact, there may be a more urgent matter evolving than is commonly known. We are hearing that if things go worse in Somalia, with insurgency groups killing increasingly more Ethiopian troops, the Ethiopian military may defect and take it into their own hands for several reasons: (1) they are fighting for an unpopular government that is not paying them very well, (2) their families are being suppressed at home by that same government, and (3) they believe they have been pulled into this war by a government that is a puppet of foreigners who have their own interests in mind. As a result, some are concerned that the makings of a coup de tat may be evolving, which could result in greater chaos, violence and repression than what Ethiopians have at present with Meles. On a worse note, there are no guarantees that those with the guns, might not be “for sale” to the highest bidders and those bidders may, in all probability, not be free, democratic countries, like China or Russia. We could all lose in such a situation and if it occurred, the failure of the West would have heavily contributed to it.

Many Ethiopians believe the United States and others are now actively standing in the way of their own freedom, peace, justice and democracy. Do the interests of those in free-societies have to conflict with those who are working for freedom, justice and the rule of law in Ethiopia? Is there a way to stand up for what we in the US believe and need, not only for ourselves, but for others as well?

It is important to consider our own situation in a free country. Many of us in the United States, Canada, Europe and in the free countries of the world take for granted the preciousness of our freedom and democratic government under which we live, work, raise our families and in most every aspect of life, flourish as people and as a nation. We are beneficiaries of the work and sacrifice of many honorable men and women who have struggled for the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness that we now enjoy.

We take enormous pride in what we have achieved and believe we have become entitled to enjoy the great economic success, privilege and power in this world that such a society of opportunity has brought to us due to what we believe is our own hard work. As we continue to benefit from our position in the world, we frequently have become severe critics of those countries and people groups who do not enjoy the same. Although it is seldom openly spoken, we believe that the difficulties and struggles of those in corrupt, totalitarian, violent and impoverished countries are the result of their own bad choices, backwardness, passivity or that of their leaders.

Instead, we believe that to get what we have, they must struggle like we did to free their societies and to develop robust economies from within that would enable them to join others in the larger global economy. Therefore, when they do not succeed, we tend to ignore or blame them for their plight.

When we feel guilty about all we have, usually because of some international attention, we provide humanitarian or developmental aid, but then, when this frequently does not succeed in creating durable change, we tend to accept superficial excuses for the failure rather than looking more deeply into how we might be contributors to the problem. This is not to say that these developing countries do not bear a major responsibility for creating and sustaining change for themselves, but oftentimes, such as in the case of Ethiopia, we in the free world may be sabotaging their efforts from the outside.

We invite you to consider how you might re-examine what you could do to give life, not death to the struggle for justice, peace, freedom, democracy and the rule of law in Ethiopia. On Feb, 19 The Federal Special Court in Ethiopia is set to make a final ruling against opposition party leaders, journalists, human rights activists and anti-poverty activists.

On that day we ask you to do your best to speak out the truth for the people of Ethiopia in whatever capacity you can for peace, freedom, the fair execution of justice and democracy building in Ethiopia and then, act on it. Amnesty International has declared these **“prisoners of conscience....imprisoned solely on account of their non-violent opinions and activities” and has condemned the trial for its ‘failure to observe internationally recognized standards of fair trial before impartial and independent judges.’**

Refuse to compromise the truth and what is right! Too many of our “political” decisions are based on reasons that we might be embarrassed to admit to even ourselves should they be brought into the light of our individual or group consciences.

We hope you will do your best to face the conscience that must guide America and other free nations—it is God-given. It is only by courageously living by the higher moral principles that we have held dear for many years, that we will maintain the integrity needed to be real leaders in this complex world. We need to hear your voice on February 19, 2007!

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