



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

Open letter to Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi,

February 20, 2007

His Excellency Meles Zenawi
Prime Minister of Ethiopia
Office of the Prime Minister
P.O. BOX – 1031
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Dear Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi,

I, Obang Metho, am contacting you regarding the gross human rights abuses and current crisis within Ethiopia as I want to make some suggestions to you as the leader of Ethiopia, as an elder to me and as a fellow human being on this earth. Despite our differences—of our actions, beliefs, positions, backgrounds, ages and situations, when it comes down to the basics, we are both equal in the eyes of God and both needful of His mercy. I am seeking to approach you in our African tradition, a younger person to an elder, giving you the proper respect and dignity deserved in such situations as I attempt to present before you my perspectives on the serious issues we are facing as Ethiopians.

Mr. Prime Minister,

There can be no doubt; we are midstream in a deepening crisis. How we resolve these issues at this juncture will inevitably make a vast difference to the future not only of the Ethiopian people, but to the future of your children, grandchildren and ethnic group. Equally so, that future will be shared with the children of the Anuak and those children from every other ethnic group throughout our country. What kind of an Ethiopia will they have? What we do at this hour of history may make all the difference as to whether we pass on a curse or a blessing. Because of this, I come to you in order to urge you to carefully think about changing the course upon which we are on together as Ethiopians.

Mr. Prime Minister,

Despite the long-term situation looking very bleak for the future, particularly yours and that of the EPRDF's, I would suggest that it is not entirely hopeless for you under certain circumstances. Those circumstances though, will require such a change of direction for you that I am fairly certain you will not accept it; however, I feel I still must do my part in suggesting it to you. However, before I begin, first let me point out why I believe the current ruling party is short-lived—whether three months, thirteen months or three years. I obviously cannot be conclusive on how long your present regime will last; however, I can see many signs that it, in its present nature, is coming to an end and therefore believe that you and the rest of us should be preparing well for that day.

Consider this—the world has become very different today from when you overthrew Mengistu. For one thing, his own repressive regime, as well as the civil war in 1991, caused a great exodus of refugees to flee from Ethiopia to many places throughout the world. Currently, these refugees are entering a new stage of political empowerment made possible by their adaptation to their new cultures. They have learned the languages of the countries where they have settled, many gaining citizenship. Many of these Ethiopians who fled to the West were those who more probably had been targeted by the government—the politically active and those more well-educated. They have carried their skills with them.

In addition to these people are the many who were denied an education in Ethiopia, but who now have been able to earn college degrees and advanced degrees. Those in the Diaspora are now equipped beyond what they may have been able to gain access to in Ethiopia. Add more to that—they are finding their political voices as they are emotionally outraged regarding the suffering and pain of their family and friends who are remaining in Ethiopia. This is made more intense because they are able to have more direct access to information than ever before about what is going on daily in most every area of the country. Add to that an additional component to that equation—the rise in technology like the Internet, cell phones, cheap phone cards, PalTalk and so forth and the communication capacities of Ethiopians and people sympathetic to the Ethiopian cause has risen exponentially.

Additionally, a mind change is going on. The “old school” of political thought grounded in Marxist-Leninist thinking has perpetuated a style of repressive governance that has become the modus operandi of the EPRDF government, something that appears to be a system characterized by increasing resistance from the general population and an example of ultimate failure much like Ukraine, Romania and Belarus. If you rigorously hold on to this course, I warn you will discover greater and greater obstacles in maintaining your current strong hold on Ethiopians. Your best approach—divide and rule—will increasingly become more difficult as the leaders mature in their ability to overcome this tactic and as Ethiopians become more aware of how they are being played against each other. How is this happening you might ask?

Mr. Prime Minister,

For one, those in the Diaspora have mostly, if not exclusively, settled in free, democratic countries where their thinking has been influenced by enjoying the benefits of personal freedom and basic rights of such privileges as free speech, free press, and the right for peaceful assembly, the expectation that justice will be followed and equality under the law. They have been allowed to transition into communities where one does not have to be Tigrayan, Oromo, Anuak, Swedish, German, Chinese or Italian to gain access to opportunities. For instance, in Minnesota, Ontario, Washington D.C. or in California, most people only talk about their ethnic backgrounds as an interesting bit of conversation rather than as a way to divide and exclude. It is beginning to change the way Ethiopians think about ethnicity as they realize most citizens of the US, Canada, Europe and in other democratic societies see them as Ethiopians and usually do not understand or care much about which ethnic group they come from.

Now, compound this further by introducing the reality of an increasingly global economy where the walls between countries are breaking down as business ventures cross international borders in new and increasingly more transparent ways. When you consider all of this, you may realize that secrets and manipulations of a government that you were once able to keep hidden from the outside world, will no longer be possible. You may need to understand that for a vibrant economy to emerge in Ethiopia, the influence of outsiders will increase.

Mr. Prime Minister,

Secondly, as you are aware, the rift between your government and the Ethiopian people is widening and the speed of that separation is gaining momentum. As that happens, resistance to the status quo will emerge with greater strength and vigor. Despite your keen ability to discern an impending crisis, I would suggest that the way out of this crisis will easily elude you as it is so contradictory to who you really are, that, it may not seem like a choice at all. Instead, as it is likely that you will only intensify the use of oppression and force to control the people, you may not fully comprehend how you are creating a monster which will eventually turn around and destroy you. Your approach, instead of controlling the resistance of the people, is actually increasingly unifying the people against you in their struggle towards freedom, democracy and the rule of law. It is only a matter of time before they succeed.

Mr. Prime Minister,

The Ethiopian people are tired of ethnic politics, corruption, violence, repression of rights, poverty and manmade humanitarian crises. It is impossible to “control enough” so as to repress this movement. Incentives like the new land loan programs, encouragement of the Diaspora to come home to Ethiopia to celebrate the Ethiopian millennium and treating the Diaspora when visiting in Ethiopia with great honor so they will not speak out against you or your government, are good ideas for manipulation, but will only work for a short period of time. Instead, it is becoming a no-win situation that will just get more difficult to sustain.

For instance, the impending trial may only further destroy the reputation of the TPLF and EPRDF as it will be impossible to cover up the political nature of these charges. Thus, postponement of the court hearing was clearly an attempt on your part to avert further outrage over this injustice, but continued postponement of the legal process as you have done on February 19, 2007 regarding the top CUD leaders, journalists and human rights activists, a trick that has worked for years in remote areas of Ethiopia—like in Gambella, Ogaden and Oromyia—simply will not work in the same way with all the international attention. You can send the international journalists home, but it is easier now for all onlookers to witness further manipulation of the system.

Mr. Prime Minister,

My recommendation comes in two parts. The first invites you to consider a political solution and the second invites you to a personal transformation that could later lead to the integration of the two presenting the most remarkable results. You could do invariably implement one without the other, but I would suggest that a personal transformation within you, those in the TPLF or those in the EPRDF (including the military) could lead to a miracle in Ethiopia from which we all could benefit.

Let me be more clear—I am suggesting to you and others in the TPLF, the EPRDF and in the military, a revolutionary path and by this, I do not mean a revolution of guns, bullets and violence, but a revolution that comes out of transformation of the hearts, souls and minds of people, starting with you. You may find this ridiculous, but please hear me out and keep in mind that the key to getting out of this mess may be very close, yet difficult to see. Who knows but that such deep changes will cause Ethiopians to change their attitudes towards you and those near you, providing a real opportunity for forgiveness, reconciliation and positive fundamental change in our country?

Mr. Prime Minister,

The first suggestion is that you not continue postponing the trial of the Opposition leaders and others. Instead, I would suggest that you release them and all of the other political prisoners in Ethiopia. Make a public speech, acknowledging the need to forgive each other and invite a dialogue that could begin reconciliation and real change towards democracy, a legitimate election and the execution of real justice within Ethiopia—helping the entire country to be able to avoid bloodshed and more suffering. It will totally come unexpected and you might be amazed with the reaction of Ethiopian people to such a substantial change should you do it. Your legacy would forever be changed for good. As many have built a case against you and are preparing for your future trial in International Criminal Courts, who knows if the people would demand this with the same persistence and desire. I assure you, without such change being initiated by you, many are looking forward to that day in court. This is just one option alone which could potentially work along with the next recommendation.

Mr. Prime Minister,

You may find my next suggestion outrageous, however, perhaps worth considering. I suggest that you lead the way to real transformation in Ethiopia by truly seeking God. For many reasons, this path may not have been very clear to you in the past as you and those around you were brought up under the communist school of thought where God was denounced; however, may I suggest that you may wonder about the truth of this as a parent. You may have to go back to the models of faith given by a parent or a grandmother to understand what has been lost. If you have such models of faith, it will be easier to consider such a change; if not, it will be difficult but not impossible even though the communist ideology may have blinded that you. You may say you have already chosen so much wrong that you are afraid to face the consequences. I again say, who knows, if you make a total turn around, there may be solutions you never dreamed possible.

Think, if you would please, about this quote from **Jim Elliot, missionary martyr, recently depicted in the Hollywood film, “End of the Spear.”** He said, **"He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."** Taking a different direction may cost you much; yet, with it comes freedom for your soul—something that is priceless. Yet, most do not choose this path. In your case, how you proceed with your life can make a tremendous difference in the future of your party loyalists, of your family and of your descendents as they face the task of finding a way to prosper and live amongst the children of your victims.

Mr. Prime Minister

I would like to offer the following scripture from the Bible found in Ezekiel 18:30-31. Even though you may not be a believer in organized religion, most of us, when we consider the vastness, beauty, complexity, power and awesomeness of nature, realize that someone bigger than us was its Creator and will ultimately be our Judge, but yet, God reaches out to each one of us with the opportunity to seek His mercy. With this in mind, please consider these words and evaluate them for yourself. **“Therefore, O house of Israel (Ethiopia), I will judge you, each one according to his ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel (Ethiopia)? For I take no pleasure in the death (spiritual) of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!”**

I, as a man of faith, can only advise you that we are all children of a forgiving and loving God. Regardless of what you have done, you still have an opportunity to ask for forgiveness, repent all of your sins and surrender yourself to God, your people and your country. I urge you to also do this for the sake of your wife, your children and your future grandchildren. Give your innocent children a chance for a future devoid of the consequences of your (documented) crimes against humanity.

Mr. Prime Minister,

As you probably know, I am among those who have accused you of committing serious crimes against my people, the Anuak of Gambella, as well as to many other citizens of my country. You may not have been directly responsible for the acts themselves, but whether or not these acts were done by you or whether they were done under your orders and authority, you, as the head of the country, shall be held accountable. Just like the head of a household bears the burden of all that may go wrong in the family, so it is in a country where the head is held responsible for something as grave as murder and even genocide is committed.

Mr. Prime Minister,

You have been in power now for 18 years under the appearance of a democratic government, a difficult role for you to play as a self proclaimed Albanian communist. From the outside, people are questioning the reality you have attempted to camouflage so well; if Ethiopia is an emerging democracy, why is it that the ruling party and its Prime Minister are not stepping down to give others a chance- isn't that the rule of democracy, passing on leadership to the next elected party and its officials not to last more than 4 years as is done in most democratic nations?!

Something you may not realize is that we have some things in common with each other. For example, as a young man you left medical school, changing your plans midstream, in order to go to the bush to defend your people, not knowing whether or not you would lose your life during the struggle. You had seen evil and suffering perpetrated against your ethnic group and gave up your plans in order to confront injustice. In this, you went through more than I—enduring more hardship, pain and suffering—until Mengistu was overthrown. You fought for a platform of justice, equality, people's rights and greater opportunity for your people.

Mengistu was responsible for the deaths and suffering of many thousands of Ethiopians and he was stopped. These are good things. God wants us to confront injustice, no matter how big the obstacles ahead of us. In doing this, you followed your convictions to protect the vulnerable and to make Ethiopia a better place. God desires justice and protection of the poor and vulnerable. However, in accomplishing this, have you forgotten what brought you into the struggle, and in doing so, have you become another Mengistu?

Mr. Prime Minister,

Please consider what is happening—by your actions now, have you created someone like me to become like you once were—someone who is committed to fighting against injustice? It is not only me, but also many others throughout our country who are now rising up against the same injustice faced by the Tigrayans during Mengistu regime. Something went wrong Mr. Prime Minister, between the time you were under the protection of your mother's loving arms, to when you emerged as a man willing to fight in the bush against oppression and now, when you have become a man willing to rule Ethiopia with hate, anger and brutality. What happened within you to allow your soul to become so entrapped by the hardening of your heart, bringing along with it the slow death to a nation under your control, while you and your supporters feast on her riches much like scavengers over a helpless victim? Yet, such a feast will never satisfy you and your supporters—it will never be enough! And there in lies the danger and perhaps the end of your regime.

Mr. Prime Minister,

As an infant, you came to this world as an innocent child, free of all of your crimes. Deep fear and the wounds of loss, devaluation and mistreatment often give birth to such self-protective hate, anger and self-alienation, but there is an antidote for it—and that is God's love, mercy and forgiveness. I speak to you as a fellow Ethiopian brother here, who personally refuses, to have you sink your teeth into another unsuspecting peaceful innocent victim, yet I also speak to you as someone, who is committed to conveying the kind ways of God who can forgive you. Your outrageous rampage of shedding the blood of the innocent will come to an end and then what? I want you to know that even though I have taken a stand against human rights abuses and oppression of our people, I would rather see you do something that no one would ever think that you would do—repent, choose to change your ways and through that change, you will become part of the transformation of Ethiopia into a true democracy, with real freedom and the respect of all peoples as equal under God's eyes.

Mr. Prime Minister,

Let me tell you my story that led to me taking up the battle against injustice. On December 13, 2003 my uncle, other relatives, friends, my former teachers and my work colleagues, along with many other Anuak, totaling at least 424 in number were amongst those killed by your government within three days. Many more have been killed since that time and over four thousand have become refugees. You may not have been the one to pull the trigger, but as the head of this government, you were in charge and evidence points to your involvement in this massacre. Even if you deny your involvement, you still failed to speak out against it, lied about most every aspect of it, calling it fiction and then proceeded to cover up responsibility for it in your whitewashed Gambella Commission of Inquiry. Yet, the blood of the Anuak your government mowed down like grass, still cries out to me, sometimes waking me in the middle of the night; their tears now filling my eyes; my thoughts of them guiding my every move; their faith in God ensuring me that justice will be done.

It is your actions that created me—much like Mengistu created you—you have now become my Mengistu! I am asking you—when will this cycle end? If you will not do the Ethiopian people the honor of ending this cycle, myself and others like me along with the people of Ethiopia will join hands to do just that; end the cycle of ethnic based hate and divisiveness, crimes against humanity, injustice and clear the way to a democratic nation where peace, justice, rule of law, equality, respect and good governance will one day reign in Ethiopia.

Mr. Prime Minister,

If your mother and father asked you what you have accomplished in your life, what would you say about the massacre of the Anuak in Gambella, the 123 killed in Awassa, the 193 killed during the election protests, many hundreds more in Ogaden and Oromia and the thousands of political prisoners in the jails, prisons, detention centers and torture chambers throughout the country? What would your mother say to Mary, an Anuak woman who witnessed her husband being hacked to death by an enraged mob and then being shot in the head and back by Ethiopian soldiers under your authority? She is now a young widow with children, hardly managing to support herself and her family.

What would your father think about Alemzuria Teshome whose mother was shot in front of her as her mother protested the arrest of her father? What would your daughter think of the young Anuak girl who was raped by seven soldiers in uniform? How would you feel about sending your son to school only to find him dead on the road because “he looked suspicious?” How would your grandmother feel about burying the six bodies of her family members and being left alone? How would your brother feel if his pregnant wife was beaten and tortured by your security forces in an attempt to find out where he was, finally losing the baby? I ask you to see the killing, rape and torture of these people through the eyes of your children and grandchildren who will be reading about you in Ethiopian history textbooks in the near future. Such disregard for human life can only result from killing one’s conscience and numbing one’s own humanity. In doing so, you have created the memories of human loss within our society that will be passed on for generations.

Mr. Prime Minister,

What have you inherited from the wounds of your past that you are carrying on now against others? Are you prepared for your victims and their descendents and ethnic groups to do the same to your children, your descendants and your ethnic group (if they do not separate from you) or will you stop it all now? Do these innocent descendents deserve to be hated, despised and killed because of your actions? Worse yet, will they become haters, despisers and killers in their own right as you pass on such a curse to the next generation? Many Tigrayans are good and decent people who should not suffer for what you and other perpetrators have done, but yet you are creating so much ethnic hate that without proper management, other innocent Tigrayan people might suffer for your crimes?

Mr. Prime Minister,

We need a new Ethiopia where all people are equal and where we do not only speak for our own ethnic group. As a young man growing up in Gambella, I witnessed on a daily basis the hardship faced by Tigrayans after they were forced to settle in a new land with an inhospitable environment during the time of Mengistu. From my classroom window, in Ras Gobena elementary school, in front of the only hospital in the entire region, I could see a daily stream of grief-stricken Tigrayans, sometimes five or six in a day, carrying their dead children in their arms on their way to the graveyard nearby our school. Frequently, the mothers were alone and had to dig out a shallow grave for their beloved child. We then saw the mothers, empty-armed, some crying and others in the silence of grief, hanging on to a walking stick for support as they left, knowing they would never see their child again. This went on for months and months. We Anuak would wonder why such suffering was going on among these people. It affected me so much. I still can feel the pain. Each one of those children was precious and unique to their family.

At the time, I believed malaria was responsible—or the hot climate with its water borne diseases—but later, I realized that behind the deaths of so many of these Tigrayan children was a man—Mengistu—and his government—the Derg. Now you, Mr. Prime Minister, came into power, overthrowing this evil man, but as you have, you have caused continued untold suffering to the mothers, fathers and children of Ethiopia. As they ask, who is responsible for this suffering—we say it is you and the ruling party of the EPRDF.

Mr. Prime Minister,

How long must this legacy of shame be carried on? I challenge you to do the unthinkable—bring the country back to the people. There is much for you to fear for yourself, for the elite in TPLF and EPRDF, and all of your descendants if this curse is not stopped soon. I ask you to look for a solution to avoid a great catastrophe in Ethiopia. With God's help, who knows, he might show great mercy to us all and help us to find a way so that we can all live together without witnessing more bloodshed, replacing it with love and respect between all ethnic groups. Yet if you refuse to change your ways, God will still work on behalf of those who are now calling on Him for deliverance. May you choose well and find blessings that will change your direction from that of crime against humanity to that of reconciliation, peace and love for Ethiopia and its diverse, colorful and beautiful people. I look forward to hearing from you on the issues raised and the proposed recommendations.

Sincerely yours,



Obang Metho; Director of International Advocacy, Anuak Justice Council

CC:

United States of America Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice
Congresswoman, Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House
Congressman, Donald Payne, Chairman, House Subcommittee on Africa,
Congressman, Tom Lantos, Chair, House Committee on International Relations
Congressman Christopher H. Smith, Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Africa,
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