



## ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

*Justice, Peace and Freedom*

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### **Open Letter to Ethiopians: Concerning the discouragement that has taken such a huge toll on our movement for freedom, justice and equality.**

**March 8, 2008.**

**Dear Fellow Ethiopian,**

I am writing this letter to you to address the problem of discouragement that has taken such a huge toll on our movement for freedom, justice, equality and democracy. What I am hearing in most every recent phone call, email and communication is that many Ethiopians are just too hurt, disappointed and discouraged over the failure of all political organizations to unite and move forward to bring freedom, justice, peace, stability and prosperity to Ethiopia and because of that, no one should expect them to do anything more at this time. Instead, they are giving up and have decided instead to just carry on with their own lives.

The main purpose of this letter is to remind Ethiopians of the reality that we really cannot afford the luxury of this discouragement! Do we really think it entitles us to give up? Do we really think it is an adequate excuse for turning our backs on our suffering Ethiopian brothers and sisters back home? Ask the mothers whose sons EPRDF or Woyane shot during the election. Ask the Ethiopians who cannot afford to give food to their children. Ask the Ogadenis who are being killed and living daily in what is being called the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. Ask the Oromo who have been locked up in prison for years, hoping that the Diaspora will act on their behalf for their release.

What will they say to us who live outside of Ethiopia when we tell them we are quitting because we are too emotionally upset with the Kinijit leaders to care about their suffering anymore? Do they realize that we in the Diaspora do not want to sacrifice any more of our time, emotional energy or hard-earned money? Do they understand that we believe that if someone has to sacrifice, that some non-Ethiopians should do it?

As we turn our backs on the suffering Ethiopians in the country, what do you think someone like Nelson Mandela would say if after the first two-plus years of his 27-year prison term, everyone had lost interest and quit? What would the world be like if no one had persisted in the battle against Hitler? Yet, we are hearing from many saying, **“I don’t want anything to do with Ethiopian politics anymore because of the leaders.”**

However, I ask you, who said it was going to be easy? Re-evaluate your views if you think it was going to be done without continuing sacrifice! To further clarify with you where we are at and what must be done, let us review what has happened over the last few years so that Ethiopians might reconsider their decision to drop out of the struggle.

Before starting, it must be pointed out that this letter is being addressed to all Ethiopians, meaning anyone inside of the boundaries of the map of Ethiopia or anyone in the Diaspora who originally has come from within Ethiopia. Some will claim that because of what was done to them in the past or what is happening to them now, that they are not true or proud Ethiopians.

As a brother Ethiopian told me last year when I was in Washington, “Obang, don’t preach about Ethiopian-ness or making everyone Ethiopian.” However, this is not something subjective; but instead, as long as the international community accepts the national boundaries we now have, we are all still factually Ethiopian.

Also, I am writing this to individual, average Ethiopians. I am not expecting everyone to agree with me. Some will not agree with any of it and others may agree with parts of it. Only a few may agree with most of it. The ideas are mine, spoken as an individual. I know I am imperfect, but if there is something here from which you can benefit, take it, otherwise feel free to disregard some or all of it. The reason I am convinced you are an Ethiopian who cares about Ethiopia is because otherwise, you would not be reading it.

As I have said it many times before, I do not belong to any political party. If I have to belong to something, I belong to all Ethiopian groups. I am not “pro” any one group, but am “pro” all. What I am saying is not limited to one, but I am hoping to reach out to even the Woyane.

The main theme of this open letter is about the struggle in Ethiopia for freedom, justice, equality and democracy. As most people know, I became involved in the struggle because of the injustice committed to my loved ones and to my people, the Anuak. My passion was to speak and advocate for them in order to help bring about peace, security and justice, including holding those perpetrators of these crimes accountable.

A year and a half after the massacre of the Anuak, the killing in Addis Ababa occurred and I realized that unless justice, freedom and equality came to the whole country, it would not come to the Anuak. I realized what was devastating and killing the Anuak, was the same system that was devastating and killing the people of Ethiopia all over the country.

This was one of the reasons that led me to speak up in front of the Congress when I said, “I am not here only for the Anuak, but I am here for the Tigrayan, the Oromo, the Amhara and all other groups.” It was the reason we in the AJC reached out to other Ethiopians, realizing that we needed each other and that we had more in common than what divided us. I saw that we were one family and could greatly benefit from knowing each other and working together. As a result, Ethiopians from many places in North America and Europe invited me to speak to them.

Now, I want to say I have discovered the beauty of the Ethiopian people. They are very caring and loving, something that I did not know before, especially as I have come from a group of people who were marginalized and therefore had little interaction with other groups outside our region. After meeting so many wonderful Ethiopian people from many different ethnic and religious groups, I came to realize that what made us feel abandoned were the leaders in charge, not the Ethiopian public—who were more like us than not. I realized there was a small elite group that benefited from keeping us separate, bitter and hostile towards each other so that they could maintain power, privilege and dominance in most every area of Ethiopian society.

What I have discovered is that it was this average Ethiopian who was ready to make a change in Ethiopia when they were empowered by what they witnessed as two million people flooded into the streets of Addis Ababa in May of 2005. Some came because of their great emotional response to the many young Ethiopians who were shot dead in the streets only because they wanted such change. Ethiopians came out because of the leaders who chose to go to prison. In every city I went to—some thirty or more cities—people showed up because they also wanted something better for Ethiopia. To me, it made me realize how much we shared this goal and how much we had in common.

People mobilized in the country and all throughout the Diaspora, coming out to protest or to hold candlelight vigils in the cold or in the rain in North America, Australia, Africa and in Europe. They wanted the opposition leaders released and did not rest until the Kinijit leaders were finally freed on July 20, 2007. With their release, most people, even those outside of the Kinijit, like myself, were hoping that the struggle would greatly intensify under their leadership.

We felt the excitement ripple throughout the world of Ethiopians on that day. I had gotten a phone call at 2:00 AM from Addis from someone who told me that the leaders were now free and that their mini-bus had left the gates and was driving on the streets of the city. There was lots of hope and anticipation, even tears of joy, not pain, that the momentum would be so overwhelming now that we would reach the mountaintops.

We thought the time had come when together, we could conquer injustice and oppression so that genuine life could return to Ethiopia. We believed we could fix this broken country. Even the liberation Fronts felt this despite not being part of the Kinijit. All of us could not wait to see what could be done. However, almost immediately, there were rumors regarding a division within the leadership. Because of the declared commitment to the principles of democracy and because of the suffering they had endured together for 20 months, it was hard to believe that they would not put aside their personal differences for the sake of the movement and for the sake of the young who had died defending it.

Because of this, thousands of Ethiopians packed International Airports in Europe and Dallas International Airport in the United States of America in a huge display of support for these leaders who had gone to jail for them. The leaders arrived, but the chairman did not come with them until few days later. Cars packed the streets, following the leader's car. The Ethiopian flag was waving. The greeting was like that of a rock star—no western leaders would have even gotten this kind of reception. Eventually the rumors of the division came true, but at first we could not accept it as crowds attended meetings throughout the Diaspora. Yet, it soon became painfully obvious that there was a serious division despite words to the contrary.

People became concerned. At the time, I reached out to both sides and offered to mediate together with other Ethiopian minorities as someone from the minority who was not a member of the party, but there was no response. I sent out an open letter to them and still no response. After that, one accusation after another started and people began to align with one side or the other. At that time, if the leadership of the Kinijit had sat down to try to resolve the problem and to find a consensus, we might not be where we are today, but they did not do that and we now know what has happened.

Today, Ethiopians all over the Diaspora and in Ethiopia are expressing deep disappointment. Even you the reader may be discouraged or you may know many who are. The thousands, who were mobilized before, have now disappeared. The movement looks as if it is dead.

Close your eyes and ask—what happened to the two million Ethiopians who flooded the streets in May of 2005? Where did they go? What happened to them? Has the reason that they came out for been settled? Has what they protested against been changed? Are things better now than they were?

What happened to the 26 million people who voted? Did they get the change they walked miles for and then stood in line for hours for? Were their goals accomplished? If someone asked the nearly 200 Ethiopians who were shot and killed if the cause they died for was achieved, what would they say?

These Ethiopians died like soldiers in a war, knowing that their wives might be widowed and their children orphaned, but they were willing to stand with courage so that their wives, children and other Ethiopians would be able to live without fear and be free. Did these brave Ethiopians who died accomplish these purposes? Did those youth who stood up and said they would not allow the TPLF troops to take away their leaders and would protect these leaders even with their own lives, get anything in return?

There were many more Ethiopians who paid dearly. Consider the more than 50,000 Ethiopians arrested and detained in five concentration camps across the country. It was done secretly, but was verified in September of 2007 at the time of the Ethiopian millennium when the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Seyoum Mesfin, publicly announced that they released 18,000 of these detainees. Of those 50,000 who were arrested, tortured and put in prison, did they get what they were tortured for over these many months?

From December 2003 until 2005, over fifteen hundred Anuak were killed and until today, no one has been held accountable in a court of real justice for these crimes. In Awassa, over 200 were killed and no one has been brought to justice. The same is true regarding the 200 who were killed after the election. We can go on and on.

No one has been brought to justice for the thousands of Oromo who have been killed, tortured or still remain in jail today just because they are Oromo. The same thing can apply to the Afar people, to many in the Southern Nations, the Amhara, the Tigrayan, the Benishangul, Hariri and in the Ogaden where they are being killed daily in a silent, continuing genocide.

To the reader who is really discouraged, you should ask yourself if things are really better today than they were at the last election or even a year ago? I am sure you will agree that nothing has changed, but instead, things have worsened—that is, if you are not among the Woyane or those who are making deals with the Woyane—all of whom are benefiting right now from the suffering of others.

If we have to blame someone, who would that be? There are many people we could blame in addition to Woyane, and this would include some of the leaders of the Kinijit. Why? Because people were more active when they were in prison than they are now. After their release, some of them—not all—contributed to killing the movement. Much of the discouragement we have has come from that, but our real problem is that a good part of the reason for it is because we unrealistically worship our leaders. This sets us up for disappointment, but because of human failings, there will always be reasons for disappointment, even more so when there appears to be some other unknown agendas involved. As a result, we get crushed and give up.

Yet, the crisis in Ethiopia remains as nothing has really changed. Instead, what has changed is we now do not have leaders to oppose the tyrannical Ethiopian regime led by Meles. To his glee, we have become like the snake whose head has been chopped off. We have become a large body that is immobile and silent. We can choose to remain still, blaming others, complaining incessantly and being discouraged or if each of us starts to only wiggle here and there, we will start to feel our bodies come to life again.

If we move in harmony, our impact can be massive, but it will take that first motion to get the blood flowing again. Anything less than rising up and unifying will contribute to the destruction of all of us. We can sit by and watch ourselves disintegrate through our lack of action or through our lack of working together, something that will only help EPRDF. On the other hand, I am convinced that once we choose life and freedom, our disappointment will fade as a bad dream is forgotten by morning.

We do not have time to waste. Most of the Ethiopian people are living under worsening economic conditions as inflation has reached 28 %. People are going hungry from being unable to afford the cost of food that is more expensive than ever. The unemployment rate is 70% and people are calling for jobs. Again, the only group to be benefiting is the TPLF.

However, the EPRDF are starting to reach out to the public because they do not want to make the same mistake they did before the last national election when the Kinijit reached out to the disaffected public, worsening their own hold on power. So now, they are bribing the farmer and reaching out to the women and the youth. They are preaching that if the opposition or Kinijit cannot even agree, how can they think that they can lead the country? The EPRDF are not doing these things to really empower the people, but instead to prolong their own power.

Tragically, the whole country has become a prison. Most of the Ethiopian people do not know what is going on inside or outside of the country because the government has restricted their access to most information. Their phones are tapped, the Internet is blocked and all of the news—radio, television, newspaper and other media—is government controlled.

For instance, during the recent crisis in Kenya, most Ethiopians were unaware of what was happening as the strength of the opposition party in resisting Kibaki's fraudulent claim to the presidency was threatening to the Meles government. In fact, it was so threatened by what was happening that Meles, himself, made a strong statement in the press supporting Kibaki and saying that the "Western policy towards Africa is ill-informed and inconsistent" so they should stay out of the African problem. It was obvious that there was fear that if the Ethiopian public knew what was going on, that they might be empowered enough to rise up after seeing the example of the Kenyan opposition.

Even though the situation in Ethiopia looks so impossible right now, the increasing restrictions and repression is evidence that it is not. We can and must find a way out and take up the struggle ourselves even though the leaders have failed to do. People in the country are dying and suffering each and every day and the government does not care about them. This is wrong! We on the outside have the power to change things if we really want to and if we seek God's help to do it. If we shift the responsibility to someone else to do it, it will not get done. No one cares as much as we Ethiopians and therefore, we should be the ones to do it.

To succeed, we must change our thinking, expanding our concern for others beyond just our relatives to whom we send money by Western Union. Our relatives should become every Ethiopian—all of those who are suffering. We have to put ourselves in their shoes and have compassion for the homeless, the beggar, the blind, the prostitute and those who are dying daily—they are all our family!

Close your eyes and imagine those you have seen on the streets of Addis and across the country. Imagine yourself as those people because they could be you if you had not gotten the opportunity to find a better life abroad. Who is our family? If it includes these others, we will find a solution!

Ethiopia is a country of misery, pain and sorrow—run by immoral leaders who do not care about anyone else except themselves and their families. If we want to change Ethiopia, we cannot simply replace these leaders with others who are like them—those who think only of their own tribe and who refuse to work with other people while preaching unity! We do not want feudalistic thinking any more! We can reject these leaders who give us this misery and look for those more willing to serve the people rather than themselves.

Consider Mengistu—what did he offer to the Ethiopian people? As a young boy, I can remember the suffering of the Tigrayan people who were displaced and resettled in Gambella. I remember their hardship and grief as they buried their children, day after day, because of malaria, water-borne diseases and because they were so unfamiliar with how to survive in the difficult climate of Gambella. Many Ethiopians recall during the great famine of 1984, seeing the great numbers of skeleton bodies of Ethiopians, whose corpses were lying on the ground, covered with blankets by the thousands. Mengistu could have prevented many of these from dying, but he basically did not care.

When Meles came into power, he brought the same misery to the people. Yet, we think our problem is only Meles and that the solution is changing the government, but if we think this way, we are certain to make the same mistakes again. We must change our own thinking and then change our system so that a strong system of government, with checks and balances, led by people of integrity, will help ensure a sustainable freedom. All of this will cause us to think much more carefully about who we want to lead us in the future and then to hold those people more accountable once in leadership.

Right now, we have witnessed the division of the Kinijit and many are blaming the Kinijit leaders for their own inactions, but we Ethiopians seem to be restricted by responding with an emotional matchbox-type reaction that contributes to our destruction. We started a matchbox on fire, but before it could even ignite anything, we threw it down and the flame has died before even reaching the ground.

When most Ethiopians became active, it was right after the May election killings because we could see the pictures. Now, our commitment should have matured so that we do not need those kinds of graphic and inflammatory pictures of the killing of our Ethiopian youth to remain active. Yes, our leaders failed us, unquestionably, but can we not regroup and reorganize? When a problem in a family occurs and it is not confronted right away, it usually does not just disappear, but often gets worse. Instead, if there is a problem in a family, it can be frequently resolved if done quickly rather than ignoring it when sometimes it can ferment into something worse.

A few years ago, I helped a friend whose girlfriend's father was a dairy farmer in Saskatchewan, Canada. My friend was supposed to milk the cows for a few days while the farmer was gone, putting the milk in a very large cooled container. Early on, an electrical power outage interrupted the cooling of the milk, but only for a short time, so my friend did not want to go to the work and waste of throwing away the small amount of milk already collected there in the tank. Instead, he continued adding more milk. When his girlfriend's father came back several days later, the tank was full, but the small amount of milk that he could have dealt with easily at the beginning, had now soured all 6000 liters in the tank.

As I said before, some Ethiopians tried to reach out to help resolve the problem in the Kinijit leadership early on, but there was little interest at that time as no one thought it would reach to this point we are at today. Yet, the reality is, we are at a desperate point and it is not the time to turn our backs on our people. We must mature as a movement and the signs of that will be our perseverance despite the obstacles. No group ever wins the struggle overnight. It takes sacrifice. Freedom is not a handout and we should not bank on outsiders investing more in it than do we.

The dairy farmer I mentioned, who lost 6000 liters of milk, after trusting someone who mistakenly made a wrong decision, did not respond to his loss and disappointment by selling all his cows. Instead, he cleaned out the tank and started over again. I am sure if my friend took care of his cows another time, that he did not make the same mistake again.

What can we learn from this? Because we made a costly mistake, do we sell our cows and give up or can we accept our error and learn from it? Are we quitters or marathon runners?

Ethiopians take pride in all the world-class marathon runners that have come from our country. We can think of Haile Gebrselassie, Hailu Negussie, Belayneh Densame, Mamo Wolde and too many others from the present and the past to name! What made them win? They were able to run long distances with determination, focus and speed, despite the competition, the obstacles, the pain, the disappointment and the great demands. Think of Abebe Bikila, the son of a shepherd, who won a gold medal and set a world record while running barefoot at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome and then won again in 1964 in Tokyo with an even better time, only one month after having an appendectomy.

Mr. Abebe Bikila will always be known as the first Ethiopian who led the Ethiopian National Anthem at an Olympic Stadium. Since that time and until today, Ethiopian runners have been conquering their opponents at stadiums throughout the world, year after year. Mr. Abebe started it, but other Ethiopians have now followed his example. He did it not only for himself, his family and his ethnic group; he did it for the country. If we conquer the obstacles in front of us like Abebe did, we may become known for years as the people who brought true peace, justice, harmony and democracy to Ethiopia.

The choices we make right now will determine whether we Ethiopians are marathon runners or quitters. Think about this is the context of the victory of the Battle of Adwa as we celebrate its 112<sup>th</sup> anniversary this week. Those Ethiopians who fought at Adwa did not fight for themselves, but this multi-ethnic group of Ethiopians really fought to liberate the country. It was a battle for the future of Ethiopia.

Our fight today should be the battle for the future in the same way. They struggled and many died so that the flag of Ethiopia would continue waving for the whole country. What we do today can keep the flag of Ethiopia waving for the future or our inaction can make our country break into pieces. What we do now, we will be doing not only for ourselves, but for our future generations, just like those brave Ethiopians who fought for us at Adwa.

If we give up so easily in the midst of this discouragement, we will never really know what we could have done to change Ethiopia. We must regroup, reorganize and take the initiative to get back into the struggle. These deep valleys are part of our journey to the mountains. Yes, we must wise up and reject those opportunistic leaders who will bring a curse to us rather than a blessing. Yes, we have fallen down along the way in our current struggle, but we can learn from our mistakes. Yet, we cannot learn from them if we give up and choose discouragement. Do we want to die some day, looking back at this time with blame towards others for our failure when it was our own inaction that prevented us from freeing our country?

Even me, as a human being, I reach the point where I want to quit, but knowing of the deaths of the Anuak and the suffering, pain and death of the Ethiopian people, the African and human kind in general, gives me the determination to carry on despite the difficulty.

When I was young boy, I was struck by the suffering of the Southern Sudanese as they came through our area on their way to the refugee camps near Gambella, exhausted, hungry and so weak that many died along the way. I remember older people telling us kids to block our noses and run by so we would not smell the rotting corpses on the sides of the road between Gog and Abobo town. I linked their suffering to someone else and held them responsible, but I did not know whom. It really devastated me.

When the TPLF took over the country, driving their tanks into the city of Addis Ababa on that evening in May of 1991, I was there to witness it. Like other Ethiopians, we did not know what the TPLF would bring, but we heard that they were fighting for freedom so we all hoped that our lives would improve.

The radio ordered people to stay off the streets which quickly became totally deserted, like a ghost city. As we looked out our windows with fear, we could see TPLF soldiers with AK-47 guns driving tanks and walking through the city. I was in the vicinity of Meskel Square when I heard so many gunshots that it sounded like corn popping around Menelik Palace.

On the third day, when the public was finally allowed to go out to the streets, I joined them. I saw dead people lying on the streets, especially near Mexico Square, where I saw the corpses of at least five people. I was like everyone else. We saw the bodies, but just kept walking. Some of the dead looked like young civilians, as they had no uniforms on. I started wondering about these victims, thinking that they were each someone's son, brother or loved one, yet we were walking by without stopping because of our own fear. I witnessed Derg troops on the streets being arrested.

About a week later, I went to Gambella as I had found a ride in the back of a large truck, along with about fifteen other people. Between Matu and Gambella, near the Bonga Refugee Camp, we came across the site of a battle where there were many corpses laying on the ground. The TPLF were targeting the SPLA, the Southern Peoples' Liberation Army, like they were those in the Derg since they believed they were supporting each other.

As we passed the site, we could see that one of the men was still alive and had crawled with a broken leg to the side of road. I still remember the zebra looking fabric of the shirt he had on as he reached out with his hands for our help as we approached. When the driver slowed down, as if he might stop, I saw the man gesture to his stomach and mouth, trying to communicate to us that he needed food and water. We all saw him. But instead of stopping, our driver sped up and drove around him.

I could not believe we had left a human being in that shape and I asked the older man next to me what would happen to the man. He told me with little emotion that he would probably die by the next day when a hyena would get him. I wondered what he thought about the driver of the car and the rest of us in the truck who would not stop to help him? There was room in the truck for him and we could have easily saved his life, but our driver made a different choice for us and for him.

One may wonder why I am telling you about these early traumatic experiences, but it has a lot to do with why I became involved first in development work and then as a human rights activist. It has a lot to do with why I remain in the struggle for justice despite the costs to me personally.

It all began with me as I passed that first dead Sudanese refugee as a boy. I witnessed thousands of Southern Sudanese young children, most between eight and thirteen, who came by the thousands, walking with no clothes on, no blankets, barefoot with swollen feet from walking hundreds of miles in the bush. Most of them were so malnourished and weak that they could not even raise their hands to brush away the flies hovering around their eyes and faces. The blinking of their eyes and the uplifting of their chests as they breathed were the only indications that they were still alive.

The influx of children, coming day after day, settling under Mango trees and in the empty fields in Pinyudo is an image I will never forget. They slept on the hard ground with the sky as their only blanket and roof. Many never rose up again from where they slept. The older and stronger ones among them tried to comfort those still alive, acting as parents to those younger and weaker. They are the children who now are known as the "Lost Boys of Sudan."

This had a huge impact on me because the Anuak who lived there had compassion for them; yet, they did not have enough to give to them despite trying the best they could. I did not know what tribes these children came from, but I knew that each of these children had a name and a mom and a dad who loved them. I knew they were victims of evil people that led them to become the forgotten children of the world. Later I learned that one of those responsible for their deaths and suffering was Omar al Bashir who killed two million southern Sudanese and is still causing the ongoing genocide in Darfur.

Because I have seen all the desperate situations of Ethiopians as a young person and again when I returned there in 2001, 2002 and 2003, every day, I see a mirror in my head with the images of a suffering Africa and ask the questions of why do they have to suffer? I see that I am unhappy with this life of mine because I am never free of these images of the misery and now know that in most of these cases, someone is responsible for the bad things that happen while understanding that others of us can be responsible for finding solutions.

I used to view a life as something that God takes away when people die, but then I started seeing that often it was people, guns, violence and indifference behind their deaths and suffering that had caused it or perpetuated it. It was not God doing it, but it was God who called other human beings to stop treating each other in these ways and to instead care about each other as He cared about us.

Why is it that so often we humans fail to do take this higher calling and instead speed right the starving, dying and wounded on the side of the road, like so many of us are tempted to do right now in Ethiopia because of the excuse of our discouragement? If we neglect to do anything, will we ever be able to forget about these lost opportunities or will they torment and convict us for what we “might have done?”

If we do not rise up to fight against the causes of this suffering, we will have to walk into the shadows of our own humanity, giving up precious parts of it as we deaden our emotions. This is what many, but not all, Gambellans did at the time of the Anuak massacre. This is what the privileged must do to take advantage of the “financial opportunities.”

This is what various groups within Ethiopia are doing to other groups as they ignore their oppression. This is what we in the Diaspora are doing as we give up the struggle—we are plugging our noses, turning our heads, diverting our attention and giving up what makes us most human and most alive—our compassion. If we walk away from the pain of our brothers and sisters in Ethiopia, there is a cost to our souls. Are we willing to pay such a dear price?

I must confess that I am asking these questions of you because it has also been a struggle for me. I have felt the great tension between running away from the problem myself and the images of suffering that continue to call to me and to my conscience to not stop caring about the plight of the people. I remind you, the people I speak of includes all Ethiopians and Africans.

I am caught in the middle of these two competing voices. Any normality in my own personal life is gone, leading me to experience some of the deepest struggles in my own life. I question why I should continue to persist when so many others have gone on to pursue their personal life goals. Sometimes, I confess, I have felt angry because of lack of commitment and willing to reach out and work with each other. I have told some of you about this.

I think of the story of Jonah in the Bible who becomes exasperated and runs away from God’s call to minister to the people of Ninevah, a people who were in great distress because of the evil and violence they were committing against each other, starting with the King.

Yet, God says to him, “Ninevah has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?” Think about the 80 million people of Ethiopia.

This is the basic answer to my dilemma of why should I care—it is simply because God cares. Please pray that God will draw us so close to Him that we will feel ever so much more deeply, His compassion for the hurting and wounded—even for those committing the evil who could repent of their ways—so that we will overcome the discouraging voices in our minds that call us to give up and to not resist the evil around us.

I recently received an email from a non-Ethiopian woman from Saskatoon, Canada who was in Ethiopia. She wrote the following, “Obang, I’m in Ethiopia - the country of authoritarianism, hunger and suppressed violence amidst a people kind and still not ready to resist.” What does this say about us? What will it take for us to resist the wrongs being perpetrated against an entire society of Ethiopians?

In Jonah’s case, it was after he was swallowed by the whale when he finally called out to God. **“In my distress, I called to the LORD, and he answered me.”** (Jonah 2:2). God also caused a tall vine to grow to shade Jonah, but then brought a worm to destroy it the next day which caused Jonah to be more angry about the vine than about the desperate people of Ninevah.

Was the Kinijit our vine that God raised up and brought down in order to teach us something of great value? Were we trusting in the “vine of the Kinijit” more than in God. Do we care more about being angry at the Kinijit than caring about the dying and suffering people of Ethiopia? If we do, keep in mind, God did tell Jonah that he should care more about the people than his own personal comfort and this lesson can apply to us today as well, including to me.

With God’s help, obstacles can be overcome, but perhaps the greatest obstacles are within ourselves. If we are perfected from within, we will be more ready to take the right steps and to be successful as we take them. For instance, are we more ready to create the kind of organization that will lead all Ethiopians into a better future? If there is no organization, let us create one—but one that is even stronger than before because we are ready to be more inclusive and less self-serving.

If there are not leaders right now, let us create and develop new leaders who are willing to leave behind tribal agendas and personal ambitions. Let us revive the movement where we left off—building on its many successes and learning from its failures. EPRDF will not change and give up what they have fought for if we do not demand it with persistence and in unity! With enough pressure from a united public, some EPRDF may even regret their wrongdoing and change, but it will not happen without such pressure! Look at Kenya!

What makes Kenya different from Ethiopia? It is the fact that their opposition party is more united in their mission and objectives and much less divided along tribal lines. What we need to do is to have a national conference—with political, civic, religious and other groups involved—in order to discuss and develop a plan for the country’s political future, one based on consensus.

This national conference would have two goals: (1) to address the demand for political freedom; in other words, what do we want for Ethiopia and how can we best resolve our differences so we can work together to accomplish it, and (2) what is a viable plan, with all its components and steps, for bringing about the changes we want?

For instance, two priorities come immediately to mind. Right now, the country is locked down with no communication. For any new movement in the country, communication is essential in order to mobilize the people. We could help overcome this huge obstacle if many of the Ethiopians abroad would consider contributing \$20 a month—or even less if many helped—altogether, it could be enough to set up a **Voices of Ethiopia Satellite Radio Station** to communicate to the public in most languages. If the TPLF government jammed the station, it could be changed to another right away. We would need to organize a team of experts to look into this more thoroughly.

A second priority would be the organization of a unified team of spokespeople who could exert pressure representative of a broad spectrum of Ethiopians on the western countries, like the US and EU, so as to convince them that Ethiopians deserve something better than this repressive regime of Meles'. We also must be able to offer something better to them than the Woyane.

Again, this means that it cannot be based on tribal interests or on personal egos and agendas. This priority could be accomplished; however, it is key that the motivation of this group is not to run the country, but instead, to free the country. Political agendas and platforms can come later when the people decide for themselves who best represents their interests.

If Ethiopia is to be freed, the solution is you—the reader. The EPRDF will not hand it over easily. We will have to fight for it. With God's help, we can make it possible, but it will demand much and it will not be easy. We must remember there are people suffering every day and that if we do not do anything, they will continue to die. By taking action, you will save lives, so do not be a bystander.

Let us rise up again and mobilize so that we are more effective than we have ever been before. Let us not fear change. Anyone who fears change will never get anything better. We can find those leaders we are looking for to carry on this movement. All we are asking for is for you to declare yourself ready to commit to a new movement for a new Ethiopia.

On November 17, 2007 the AJC sponsored an event where Ethiopians from most every region in the country came together in a memorable meeting. We formed new relationships, finding we had much in common and many of the same goals for our people and our country.

We were not members of one particular group, but represented part of the beautiful garden of Ethiopians. Because we were a mixture of groups who had never come together before, some, like the EPRDF, found it threatening, but this is exactly the type of societal mixing that will strengthen and sharpen us, preparing fertile ground for political groups and other leaders. We are willing to join with any others who hold to these values.

If you agree with this idea, share it with your friends and form a group, appoint a coordinator wherever you are and contact us or others. What is unifying us is that people are in the same position and are becoming ready for something new and truly inclusive where only one ethnic group is not leading it. Despite what seems to be the case, there are still many people who are active or who are willing to be active.

For instance, there is a new Solidarity Forum of Ethiopia that is being started by Ethiopians. Kinijit, as well, still has many active and committed members who are doing all they can to keep up the work despite limited support. The same thing is going on in Hebrat, in the Liberation Fronts and in other political, civic, ethnic and religious groups. Eventually, all of these groups could be connected into one large movement. It could be very powerful!

It is only by being organized into a larger movement that we will be able to exert effective pressure on EPRDF, like what was done with the Kenyan opposition—the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). If we are united, EPRDF will not be able to resist 80 million Ethiopians who stand up together against EPRDF oppression and tyrannical rule.

Like my good friend Mr. Raila Odinga from the ODM said, and I paraphrase, “President Kibaki has 200,000 gun-carrying men, but there are 30 million Kenyans.” Kibaki would never have agreed to share power willingly, but he is totally over-powered by the people of Kenya and after resisting as best as he could, he now has submitted.

We have similar assets in the Ethiopian people that we could use to give Meles no choice but to succumb to the power of millions of united Ethiopians. Will you be one of them? Are you willing to put aside your discouragement and take up the fight again? We can do it and you are part of what will make us succeed!

Please feel free to email your thoughts on this to me, whether you agree or disagree. May God help us to be people of virtue, integrity, compassion and justice!

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Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Obang Metho', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Obang Metho  
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