



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

Mr. Obang Metho Addresses Ethiopians in Washington DC: Why Should All Ethiopians See the Border Issue as a Collective Threat to Our Existence as a Nation and People?

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Hello! I am thrilled and honored to be here to speak to my fellow Ethiopians. First of all I would like to applaud the Ethiopia-Sudan Border Affairs Committee for their hard work, commitment and vision in convening us here today to address this matter of most urgent importance—the next chapter in the destruction of Ethiopia—now happening on our western border with Sudan.

I thank this committee for inviting me to speak. It is a real privilege and I am looking forward to working further with all Ethiopians of diverse political, religious, ethnic, regional and cultural backgrounds in order to find new and workable solutions to the crises we are now facing as Ethiopians. This is everybody's issue. It is not just about one group.

As most of you know, I do not belong to any political group and that when I speak, I am free to speak honestly about human rights as well as what I see is going wrong in Ethiopia without having to claim or favor one group over another. When I speak of human rights, I am speaking about the human rights of every person—of all Ethiopians.

When I speak of justice, it is not limited to the Anuak people just because I am an Anuak. Instead, I speak about all the people of Ethiopia because I firmly believe that unless justice comes to all, no one will have long-lasting justice. I am not even speaking only for the rights of Ethiopians, but I am speaking for the rights of others in the Horn, others in Africa and others in our world.

The human rights of every human being is fundamental to their survival. The same applies to the people of Ethiopia and how this applies to the crisis at our border is the focus of my talk today because failure to resolve this issue will only lead to other issues until our country is destroyed.

If any of you have children, perhaps you have seen the toy where the child is supposed to quickly hammer the head of whichever animal head pops up, but as soon as one head is hit, another one pops up somewhere. Unfortunately, this reminds me too closely of Ethiopia.

Problems are popping up all over. As soon as one is discovered, another one rears its ugly head. We must pay attention well or we will lose the game Meles loves to play—the game of “surprise, deceive, divide and conquer.”

The purpose of my talk today will be to call Ethiopians together to refuse to play by Meles' imposed rules anymore. One of the reasons he is playing this game is because we leave ourselves open to be manipulated because of our greed for short-lived pleasures and self-interest instead of protecting the country and its people.

As I address this topic, I will attempt to answer four questions:

- 1) Why should all Ethiopians take this border issue seriously as a threat to their future?
- 2) What is the background of this border issue?
- 3) Which account of what is happening should we believe—that of the Ethiopian people on the ground or the version given by Meles—and why?
- 4) What are the solutions?

Why Should All Ethiopians See the Border Issue as a Collective Threat to Our Existence as a Nation and People?

Ethiopia just recently was placed near the top of an index that explored factors most likely present or absent in countries at risk of becoming failed states. Ethiopia was number sixteen in the world. Its neighbors were on the top of the list—Somalia at number one and Sudan at number two.

Many of us Ethiopians would agree that the Meles government has played a contributory role in undermining the stability of both of these countries as well as Eritrea. In fact, the Horn of Africa is a mess and Ethiopia is in the middle of it-- geographically, politically, militarily and strategically. The border issue between Ethiopia and Sudan is one more dangerous sign that Ethiopia is at risk of further disintegration, but there are also problems at our border with Eritrea and Somalia. It is critical to our future that we pay attention to what is happening!

Most of us assume that it is the responsibility of the government to keep Ethiopia intact as one country, but in Ethiopia, we have witnessed the opposite while pretending to be different. The Meles regime has repeatedly justified its use of brutal military force against Ethiopian separatist groups, most all of whom claim they want to separate from Ethiopia due to the harsh abuse, oppression and marginalization they have been enduring under this regime, but this new threat of losing a piece of Ethiopia to the Sudan comes from those most loudly proclaiming their efforts to protect its integrity. In other words, the primary threat to the breaking apart of the country is from **the biggest separatist of all—Meles Zenawi**.

While Meles is refusing to give up Badme, in violation of the United Nations demarcation, he is moving secretly, behind the backs of the Ethiopian people, to hand over land to Sudan—as if he were an agent of Sudan! He is manipulating Ethiopian law, principle and the will of the people to do so, similarly to what he did in Eritrea when Ethiopia lost all its ports on the Red Sea.

At that time, the only threat to the TPLF was the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF), a much stronger organization than Meles' own TPLF group. So, allegedly, in order to rid himself of any competition for power, he simply gave Eritrea away in a power grab for Ethiopia. According to some insider's reports, some believed Meles wanted Eritrea to break away from Ethiopia even more than Eritreans wanted to separate—for this major reason—to gain control of Ethiopia. It makes one very suspicious of his motives regarding this border give-away now.

The prospects of losing even more land, especially to another major violator of human rights like Omar al Bashir of Sudan, is almost too outrageous to believe, but too outrageous and dangerous to ignore! To those who have experienced the deteriorating public policies of Meles and his total lack of care regarding the Ethiopian people, the inconceivable becomes almost predictable.

For instance, in one classified document recently released to the public from the Libyan Embassy (if it is accurate), it was indicated that right after Meles took power in 1991, he had spoken to members of the Arab League stating that he was more Yemeni than Ethiopian—no surprise to us! The evidence of what he has done is the evidence that has little allegiance to Ethiopia and he has said this himself.

Because of this, we must get ready. If the government that claims to be ours will not protect us, we must do it. If Meles is willing to do such a thing in one place, it will happen in others. If it is not about land, it will be about something else of value to the Ethiopian people like its resources. This already happened in Gambella and in the Ogaden.

Every Ethiopian should be concerned regarding what seems to be the increasingly rapid rate of destruction to our country. For us to do something we must act quickly or the Ethiopia we know today will only be an illusion of “days gone by” to future generations. This is not an issue for one political group. It is not only an issue for the Ethio-Sudan Border Committee, the civic organizations, the religious organizations or the political organizations, but it is an issue for all Ethiopians to address.

Background:

The first rumors that some “deal” was being made between Ethiopia and the Sudan regarding the border started circulating as early as 2004. However, most people did not take it seriously at that time because of their hope that a more legitimate electoral process in the Ethiopian National Elections of 2005 would lead to the ousting of Meles Zenawi. If Meles did not win, the border issue would resolve on its own. However, as we all know, Meles Zenawi hijacked the election, and even though the public heard little about any “plans” for the border following that, those plans apparently still continued to be made, but underneath the radar of the people.

Information again surfaced in May of 2007 when the Sudan Tribune published a lengthy report with information that an agreement had been reached between Ethiopia and the Sudanese government for the demarcation of a different border. Their newly formed Meles’s government organization, called the Border Commission, facilitated meetings between the two countries, with most occurring between October and December of 2007.

They allegedly met secretly in Ethiopia with Ethiopian government authorities from regions sharing a common border with Sudan—from Gambella to Gondor. They reportedly alleged that the demarcation was originally done incorrectly and that they wanted to restore it to its proper place, once and for all. The agenda items covered in these meetings supposedly were called: **“Cultural Exchange,” “Economic Development”** and **“Border Demarcation.”**

Although most of the general public knew nothing of these plans, there were some concerned Ethiopians who found out and sent letters of inquiry and opposition to the governments of both Ethiopia and the Sudan; however, no response was given by either Ethiopia or the Sudan.

In January of 2008, the governor of the Sudanese regional state of Gadariff reportedly began giving speeches throughout his state, informing the people of that region that the land now under Ethiopian ownership would soon be given back to them. He allegedly told them this was “their land,” and that it was “very fertile” and had “plenty of water.” This was when word began to spread further and Ethiopians began to hear more, greatly raising concerns for their future.

On February 26, 2008, there was a meeting of the Ethiopian Border Commission at Abderafi, near Gondor in the Amhara region. The purpose of the meeting was allegedly to finalize their agreement, but before that could take place, local Ethiopians had risen up in resistance to the plan.

As Meles always does, he tried to get his government agents to ward off resistance from the people by meeting with them and assuring them that they need not worry. At the meeting, the young government official from within the local government who had been appointed to address the people listened to what they had to say and then promised that this would remain their land forever and that it was not negotiable. Reports from the public attending the meeting indicated that the official seemed genuine and “spoke their own words back to them.” They reported that at the time, they felt “defended by him,” pacified, at least for the short term.

However, on March 18, 2008, the Sudanese government military troops suddenly crossed the border into Ethiopia and ordered the local farmers to leave their homes and land. Farmers in Nabsgebya resisted, defending their right to remain, but in retaliation for this resistance, the Sudanese military troops burned down approximately twenty-four farms and took thirty people across the border to Sudan as prisoners of the Sudanese government.

There was a public outcry, demanding that the Ethiopian government of Meles needed to intervene, but even though the government gave promises to do so, they were never carried out. In apparent frustration, some of the young Ethiopians took the matter into their own hands and crossed the border into Sudan in Gardariff State where they hijacked a bus. With all of the passengers still inside of it, they drove the bus back to Ethiopia. There, they parked the bus under a large tree where the bus was hidden from public view by the leaves. The hostages remained in the bus, but were cared for by the local farmers who fed them and provided water.

The hijackers then asked that the Meles government retrieve the 30 Ethiopian prisoners still being held in Sudan and promised that they would release the hostages in exchange for their return, but Meles refused to do so until they first returned the bus and released its passengers. When they also refused, Meles sent a helicopter to locate the bus and when it was found, he sent a local militia to the area. Fighting broke out between the militia and the people holding the bus. None of the hostages died, but twenty-two local Ethiopian people were killed and twenty-six from the militia before the militia gained control. Then, Meles released the hostages and bus, allowing them to go back to the Sudan, but the abducted Ethiopians remained as prisoners in the Sudan.

On May 11, 2008, according to reports, the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs met with the Sudanese government in Khartoum to assure them that they had “effectively dealt with” the resistance to their plan and that they could move ahead on it. This is when the issue exploded into public view.

On May 20, 2008 Meles attempted to control the escalating outrage by going to the Parliament and denying most everything that had taken place, saying it had not ever occurred. He blamed Ethiopians for having the attitude—“let me keep mine, but let’s share yours!” In other words, he said that the Sudanese were more generous and future-thinking than were Ethiopians who were unwilling to share their land and therefore, Ethiopians should “shut up and stop complaining!”

He made some additional comments to the effect that if a tiny part of the country went to the Sudan—“big deal!” People questioned how Meles could operate as if he were the prime minister of Sudan instead of Ethiopia? In my opinion, it is the same as an act of treason along with other illegal actions he has committed against Ethiopians since he came to power.

It may be no “big deal” to Meles, but neither are the countless injustices, hardships and atrocities being perpetrated by his government against millions of Ethiopians throughout the country. Meles may have much to gain from this “deal” while once again, we have much to lose. It does matter to us and has been affecting us one area at a time, particularly in areas of promising natural resources.

The Gondor region is an example. It is a very rich area of fertile land, forests and abundant water with both lowlands and highlands. In the report written by the Sudan Tribune in 2007 it had said that the change in the border demarcation would affect regions approximately twenty to thirty miles deep into Ethiopia along the 1600 kilometer border line reaching from Gondor to Gambella. However, in the other regions, the demarcation line might reach much further into Ethiopian territory. No one knows for sure because no one has seen the map.

International law requires that such new demarcation should be submitted to the United Nations, but of course, Meles has not complied with this because he wants to keep it secret. However, the impact of what he is doing will have great effect to many Ethiopians as we learn more how it will affect those in more southwestern regions of the country such as in the resource rich land of the Beningshangul-Gumuz region and into the region I know so well—Gambella.

Gambella is also a very rich area of natural resources with the promise of oil, minerals, fertile land and water. It may only be a matter of time before the same crisis explodes in this area as it did in 2003 when the exploratory drilling for oil began. Again, just like the farmers' resistance in Gondor, Anuak resistance to that drilling on their ancestral land without any input from them was dealt with by the massacre of resistors by the Ethiopian military and local militia groups.

However, there is a slight difference between how the two areas are being considered right now. Gambellan land is now being claimed as the rightful property of the Sudan by a Sudanese government official, among others, who voiced his opinion on the program "Straight Talk Africa" in his answer to a question regarding the border issue. His comment indicated that the question regarding the border issue in the north (Gondor region) could be dealt with differently than that of Gambella because "Gambella was really their land!"

Who Do We Believe—the People or Meles?

Who are we going to believe—the detailed accounts of the people on the ground or the quick denials from Meles in the face of evidence to the contrary? As we know, a dog does not bark without reason. Furthermore, we know that when a dog barks, it faces the direction of the threat. Right now, the dogs all over Ethiopia are barking and they are facing Menelik Palace! I ask you, "All these dogs cannot be pointing in the wrong direction can they?" There is the answer to my question---I believe the people. There is simply too much incriminating evidence and history of similar offenses to the people of Ethiopia by the Meles government!

Because of this, Ethiopians, of different ethnicity, region, religion, vocation, age, political belief and culture, are all pointing one direction and that is towards our un-elected leaders who have repeatedly been caught red-handed betraying the people and the country. Their persistent lying, manipulation and deceiving has become so expected that anything they say only confirms that the opposite must be true.

However, Meles is obviously mad that the "cat is out of the bag." For someone who loves the darkness, the light of truth must be infuriating. When none of us talked to each other it was much simpler for Meles. Now we have discovered the commonality of our experience and none of us like what we have been going through! So now, what should we do?

What are the Solutions?

Ethiopia has become like a hut whose grass roof has been removed and whose mud walls are caving in. As it does, all those inside suffer for it. When it rains, all of those inside the hut get wet. When the mud walls start to cave in, it no longer can offer protection to its inhabitants and they must leave or start rebuilding. All Ethiopians cannot simply flee the country—somehow, we must find a way to start anew.

Throughout world, since the dawn of civilization, people have fought over preserving their homes, land and territory. Millions of lives have been lost over land issues because it becomes so much part of our identity as well as a sanctuary from hardship and difficulty.

When the Italians invaded, we Ethiopians united to fight to protect our country, putting our individual and tribal differences aside to resist the common enemy. Victory prevailed.

When Meles claimed Eritrea had invaded Ethiopia, Ethiopians from all over the country believed him and joined hands to fight a war for the same government that oppressed them because they felt endangered from forces outside the country.

Now, we are in a totally different situation. We are defending our land and country from the very one who is supposed to lead the way in our defense—Meles Zenawi! However, even he is not claiming that Sudan is invading the country, but appears to be selling us out behind our backs; yet, a hundred thousand Ethiopian lives were lost over Badme!

It is obvious that he is making some kind of a deal, but we may not know until it is too late unless we take action now. Look at the devastation being perpetrated in Somalia by Ethiopian troops, many of them who have been forced into the military. He and his cronies are like an army of locusts leaving destruction behind wherever they go.

Solution One: Working Together in Unity of Purpose

The border issue is a prime example of a critical issue facing Ethiopians that can draw commitment and unity from a broad spectrum of Ethiopians. We all can understand the injustice of what is happening and that it could easily happen to others under the current ruthless regime. The Ethiopia-Sudan Border Affairs Committee has already done a great job in reaching out to others in order to organize a more powerful and united response to this violation of Ethiopian law by those highest in command.

Meles' actions are indicative of the depth of dysfunction he is wreaking throughout Ethiopian society and we must attack it at its root, remembering that the problem faced by those on the border is also "our problem" of tomorrow.

Communication and support to those facing these crises are both essential if we are to stand up together in unity—for peace, justice, peace, hope and prosperity. Coming together does not mean leaving behind your own values, beliefs and culture, but instead working together to create a political and social landscape where diverse people can flourish.

It is time to bring people together in a **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia** to address problems such as this one. If you are someone wanting to find a lasting solution, come and join. This is a time to embrace all the vast diversity of Ethiopians so no one is excluded. This includes opposition leaders from various groups as well as Ethiopians who have never been involved in politics!

The future of Ethiopia depends on what decisions we make today. If we are to be successful, we must leave behind our fights over dominance and any ambition to be the next Meles. If we do not, we will fail. In other words, we must put aside our differences to fight for Ethiopia against ethnic hatred, economic exploitation, corruption, the perversion of justice, brutal repression, human rights violations and the marginalization of many groups within the country. We must get involved in advocating for each other or the inaction, infighting and indifference of Ethiopians will destroy us one by one, region by region, ethnic group by ethnic group and no one will escape.

The solution is unity, not to become the next Meles, but unity based on trust. Unity is key, not a unity to use people and deceive them with hidden agendas like Meles, because even he spoke in support of human rights and democracy from the bush.

Worshipping leaders without holding them accountable will set us up for being deceived and betrayed again. Instead, we should have expectations from our leaders that they mean what they say and remember that no leader is above the law. We must remember that no leader can remain a leader without followers.

Those of us who are followers are really in charge because the public must decide on the future of Ethiopia by better examining the kind of leaders we want and then expecting that they will lead by being servants of the people, willing to give over power to the next leader. In Ethiopia and in most of Africa, leaders become leaders for life unless they are kicked out by force.

The border committee has already started the work. This is not a committee committed to only one ethnic group, but a committee of Ethiopians committed to save the country from breaking into pieces. This is a committee dedicated to looking for solutions rather than one who has been using its resources to fight one another, to attack, insult, accuse or blame.

This approach is being used by some others as well and hopefully, will become the expected model for how we Ethiopians operate in the future. Right now, the collective energy and climate for change within individuals and organizations will shape whether we can successfully work together in solidarity for a new Ethiopia.

This border issue is one of those critical issues that Ethiopians care about that can unify us—but only if we make the right choices.

Solution Two: Reviving the Soul of Ethiopia: Moral and Spiritual Transformation

Our country is dying. Every day we see another warning sign that Ethiopia, as we know it, is being destroyed. Today it is our western border, but tomorrow it will be in the Ogaden or the Afar region or in Oromia. It sometimes seems bigger than us, but I assure you, with God's help, it is not. In fact, oftentimes, crisis is a tremendous opportunity and motivation for change—either for the good or for bad.

After Haile Selassie, we accept Mengistu. After Mengistu, we accept Meles. This is not about these specific people, but our repeated failure to change our thinking, which caused us to pick look-alike leaders instead of something different. Perhaps this has been caused the hardening of our hearts towards God and our fellow human beings. It was shown by our continued ethnic hatred, greed, self-serving policies, division, abuse of human rights and apathy towards the poor and marginalized. These were evidence of our individual and collective moral failure.

We are at another crisis. What will we choose? Without a moral and spiritual transformation in the individual souls of Ethiopians, we will certainly only continue to decline and break apart. This is a time to revive the soul of Ethiopia one person at a time!

Consider what one person can do for evil. For instance, every person killed by this government was killed by the decisions or actions of another human being. Every person thrown into prison, tortured, harassed, threatened or devalued can be linked to at least one other human being who is filled with hate, greed, selfishness, bitterness, fear, anger or a hard heart. Those of us who walk by, looking the other way, contribute to the continuation of such violence against another human being.

On the other hand, one person can have a tremendous impact on others for good and that person can be you! Let us turn to God for healing and restoration so He empowers each of us to become like a river of water for a thirsty land. As it flows, it brings new life along its path even without knowing it. But we cannot have transformation without repenting of the wrongful acts we have committed as people and as a society in the past.

We must turn away from what is destroying us and instead look towards our Almighty Creator for the deep change that must sweep over the nation to bring new life and revive it from otherwise most certain death.

We have become enslaved to the destructive thinking and actions of the past just like an alcoholic who cannot change his or her patterns of self-destruction. We have replaced freedom of the soul with death from bondage to a way of life that will kill us. The key to our recovery may be similar. Let us consider how that might be played out to bring back freedom and life to Ethiopia.

1. We must first admit that the life and soul of Ethiopia is dying and that we are powerless to change it without God's help, truth and light.
2. We must admit our own individual and collective moral failures and rebellion against God.
3. We must admit our individual and collective wrongful attitudes and actions against our Ethiopian brothers and sisters.
4. We must individually and collectively apologize for what we have done to others and do our best to set things right in the future.
5. We must come together in new relationship, caring about others and seeking their freedom, justice and well-being as if it were our own through the establishment of a government whose policies exemplify these values and attitudes in practical action.

We cannot ever hope to accomplish perfect justice, equality and opportunity but we should seek it with diligence, transparency and accountability. Today is the day to stand up and commit to change.

Solution three: Commitment to Moral Transformation, Change and Action

Words mean nothing without application. That is why I am now calling you to make an individual commitment to moral transformation, change and action. I call on you to become a change agent. If we simply walk away, go home and carry out our daily tasks, we will have failed and have not accomplished anything by coming here today.

Today, you are faced with a choice and it is time to go one way or the other. You can walk away, refusing to take part or you can choose to walk forward towards life. If you walk out of here without deciding, that is a decision, yet do not take it lightly.

I am calling on you to be part of what frees and revives Ethiopia, but if you do it wholeheartedly, with God leading, it will not only bring life to Ethiopia. It will bring life to you, your family, your friends and your future. Destructive thinking is our enemy and let us say no to it! Let us come together with new resolve and commitment. Let this be a day that changes the direction of our lives, people and country!

Stand up if you are against this brutal regime that is dividing, imprisoning, repressing, killing and destroying Ethiopia.

Stand up if you are willing to join the struggle for human rights, justice and freedom for all Ethiopians.

Stand up if you are willing to denounce ethnic hatred and division between the people of Ethiopia.

Stand up if you are willing to commit and sacrifice so that the people of Ethiopia and the future children of Ethiopia might know we are their co-fighters in the struggle for a better life for them.

Stand up if you are willing to contribute your time, effort, skills and resources to bring freedom, justice and peace to Ethiopia.

Raise up your hands to the heavens to God our only hope who calls us to repentance and change.

Raise up your hands for God's help to face oppression and injustice with courage and moral commitment that He can provide only as we step out in obedience.

Sign this petition if you are willing to come together in unity against the evil and destruction of Ethiopian life and if you are willing to be part of reviving Ethiopia.

Call out to our Creator God to Revive Ethiopia, asking Him to bring us Ethiopians to repentance, healing, reconciliation and new life!

God will not force us to change. His promises of delivery are conditional on our willingness to be obedient to Him. It will require us becoming different people—people of love and action in demonstrating that love towards those around us in revolutionary ways. I now end my talk by calling all Ethiopians to a revolution of moral transformation and revival. Will you join?

Thank you.

For more information please contact me by email at: Obang@anuakjustice.org
