

December 13, the Anniversary of the Genocide of the Anuak: Two Years Later and Still No Justice

The Anuak Justice Council: December 13, 2005

December 13, 2005 will mark the second anniversary of the massacre of 424 Anuak educated leaders in Gambella, Ethiopia who were hacked, clubbed and shot to death by Ethiopian defense troops and some highlander militia groups in a three-day orgy of killing. Human rights investigators report that the number of dead or those who have disappeared may actually total more than fifteen hundred persons. Yet, the Ethiopian government refuses to acknowledge any responsibility or interest despite scores of witnesses, evidence and documentation by such credible organizations as Genocide Watch, which has released two reports on the massacres, **“Today Is The Day of Killing Anuaks,”** in February 2004, and **“Operation Sunny Mountain,”** on 13 December 2004 and Human Rights Watch which released its report, **“Targeting the Anuak: Human Rights Violations and Crimes Against Humanity in Ethiopia’s Gambella Region,”** in March, 2005. Two years later, not even one perpetrator has been brought to justice.

Instead, on December 13th, 2005 Anuak survivors will remember the nightmare of seeing the painful deaths of their loved ones, murdered in front of them by the same government troops who were supposed to protect them. They will remember the rape of Anuak women and will long for the freeing of over a thousand Anuak relatives or friends, languishing in prison for the last two years. They will be reminded of their family members who, with nearly ten thousand other Anuak, fled to Sudan for safety and are now living in deplorable conditions, waiting to come back home as soon as peace and stability return to the area. They will fear for their own safety as killings, disappearances and rape continue to plague the Anuak in the area.

For those Anuak in the Diaspora in North America, most everyone has lost relatives and friends or is concerned for those left behind. Many Anuak will travel miles to St. Paul, Minnesota for a memorial service of the massacre, sponsored by their community. They will meet not only to remember the past, but to grieve for the very future of the Anuak, a small ethnic group of less than 100,000 world wide who are deliberately being eliminated by the Ethiopian government as most the world just passively watches.

Last year, the Anuak in Gambella were warned not to organize any memorial services or church gatherings focused on marking the anniversary of December 13th. Anuaks were to go on with their lives, acting as if nothing had ever happened to them. They complied; however, it was not enough. Word reached Gambella of the memorial service in Minnesota and a day later, Omot Ojullu Abella, a well-known politician in the region who had been imprisoned just prior to the massacre, was brutally beaten and tortured by Ethiopian Defense troops while in prison in Gambella. As he was being assaulted, he was

accused of having relatives in the United States who had organized a service in memory of the Anuak killed on December 13th.

Because his torture was so extreme, Amnesty International issued a press release regarding this on December 17, 2004, calling for urgent action. As a result, the Ethiopian government apologized to him and he was given medical treatment and recovered. As of December 3, 2005, Omot Ojullu Abella has disappeared while in the custody of the Ethiopian government. Since that date, the Ethiopian government has not explained to his family what has happened to him.

Government Resistance to Accountability Related to its own Complicity?

It is not surprising that the Ethiopian government has ignored, if not resisted, securing justice and protection for the Anuak in Gambella. An atmosphere of continuing impunity is an indication of the government's own complicity in the crimes and the subsequent cover-up. In fact, evidence has been obtained by the **Anuak Justice Council**, (AJC) a non-political advocacy group pushing for the international community's participation in finding a peaceful solution to this crisis, that the Ethiopian government was directly involved in the planning of the killings.

The AJC received a report from a witness, who wants to remain anonymous, that a top-level secret meeting of government officials was held in September of 2003 in Addis Ababa. Allegedly, the agenda to be addressed was the potential problem of the Anuak who had formed a liberation front to fight the government, their supposed goal being to secede from Ethiopia (as per the Constitution) and become self-determining. The witness indicated that the second part of the agenda concerned the opposition of many educated Anuak leaders to the oil agreement between the EPRDF government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the Malaysian oil company, Petronas. Allegedly, at the conclusion of the meeting, it was decided that the government should confront them and 'weed them out' before they started anything; that the oil agreement should go ahead, by any means, including by force. Key influential Anuak were seen as roadblocks to the project, and reportedly, were to be arrested or eliminated in order to destroy their power, eliminating any threat by them to the government.

The massacre of December 13th was not spontaneous, as the killers in uniform went house-to-house, working from a list of educated Anuaks, who were supposedly opposed to the government. However, according to information provided to the AJC, what was supposed to be thirty minutes of killing, instead lasted for three days and has continued in lesser, but continued intensity for the last two years. Two years ago, many in the international community had a hard time accepting the duplicitous other face of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi as he had such a convincing public demeanor and command of all the right "pro-

democracy” words; however, since that time, his secret brutal side has intermittently exploded uncontrollably into new areas, allowing the world to see the cruel nature of this man and his regime.

Now, what the Anuak experienced for years, is becoming the experience of the average Ethiopian. As the situation in Addis Ababa worsens following the legitimate challenges to the government’s claim of winning the national election in May by opposition groups, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi’s government has responded in “survival mode” to protesters, using violence and the detention of thousands of Ethiopians in order to suppress dissent. Those in the international community, who were at first trying to raise up an awareness of the Anuak crisis, have now had to divert their attention to all of Ethiopia, as the last remains of the illusion of democratic governance in Ethiopia crumbles.

Federal Troops Return to Gambella as Oil Operations Start Up Again

The change of focus to Addis Ababa, now unfortunately, gives the green light of impunity and diminished visibility to the two to three thousand Ethiopian defense troops who are returning to the Gambella area now that the rainy season has ended. These troops accompany the oil company workers, returning to start the next phase of oil extraction from the large reserves in the area. They want to do so without any interference from the Anuak; hence the troops are there to “ensure stability.” With the return of the Ethiopian defense troops, Anuak fear the return of the daily killings, rape, harassment, torture and disappearances of Anuak who simply are involved in the basic chores of their lives, but are found by troops in the wrong place and at the wrong time.

The oil company, Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPEB), is a powerful subsidiary of the second largest national petroleum consortium in China, the China Petrochemical Corporation (SINOPEC). It is the principal petroleum exploration and development firm operating in Gambella at present, and is under subcontract to Malaysia’s national oil company PETRONAS.

In addition, the government and the oil company have essentially pushed the Anuak aside, moved onto land previously considered to be the indigenous tribal land of the Anuak, set up their camps, installed electricity and dug wells for clean water. In nearby Anuak villages, there is no clean water as wells have been mostly destroyed from overuse by defense troops. Schools are mostly non-functioning and in a state of disrepair after defense troops had previously used them as barracks, even using school chairs as firewood. Health care is non-existent. Yet, as other locals are being hired for jobs within the company, Anuak are excluded, simply because they are Anuak.

As Anuak see the central government in Addis working directly with the oil company, making all the decisions regarding the oil without any consultation with the regional authorities, they are realizing that they will never have a share in any of the benefits of this resource. The prosperity it may bring will be for others, but not for the Anuak. Instead, a total generation of Anuak is being affected with the loss of primary family members, malnutrition, disease and no education. The future of an entire generation of young Anuak may be wasted unless intervention comes soon.

Anuak Woman Looks Forward to Facing Meles in International Criminal Court

One Anuak woman from Gambella, Ethiopia told the AJC that when she recently saw Saddam Hussein in Court on CNN, that it strangely gave her hope. Two years ago, she witnessed her husband killed in front of her on December 13, 2003 by Ethiopian defense troops and highlander militia. Several days later, she was raped by seven Ethiopian defense troops in Ethiopian uniforms. They took turns with her, raping her for four hours.

She states, “They ripped me apart. I will never be the same. When I look at myself, I think of myself as ‘dirty.’ I feel helpless. I am not going to forget these people. I will never be the same person again. What the Ethiopian troops have done to me is what some people call ‘crimes against humanity’. They say these people could be brought to court, not today, but in some years. Now when I see Saddam on TV, someone who was at the top of the government, being held responsible for what his government did, it gives me hope.

“Meles was the one who gave these men the authority to do this. He is not less accountable than those men who did it. Those men may disappear, but their leader will never disappear. He will be tracked down and found wherever he goes, like the African snake who leaves its trail of dirt for you to follow. There may be many holes nearby, but as long as there is dirt on the ground, the trail of the vicious snake will identify which hole he is in. We, the Anuak, who have survived this unthinkable evil attack, will be like the dust that shows the trail of the snake through Anuakland. There will always be one of us who will be able to tell the tale of those who did not make it, to those who will carry on.

“I believe that one day God will give me the years to live to be able to tell what happened to me and to my people; when no one was there as a witness, when no international community was there to protect us and when no camera lens was there to bring this injustice to worldwide view. I, and those others who survived, will be able to be the missing lens that never before reached to Anuakland.

“Someday, the top of the Ethiopian government who ordered this will be in court just like Saddam, and I will be in front of the court and be able to describe every detail. This is giving me hope, when I see the once mighty leader, Saddam Hussein, looking like a young thief who has stolen candy!

“I am no longer concerned that my husband’s body was never found or that he has never had a proper burial, instead I am looking forward to sharing the last minutes of his life as he was hacked to death by machetes as he struggled to breathe. I have an obligation to pass this on to the next generation; not only to Anuak, but to human kind who want to leave the world behind the lens of suffering, pain, death and sadness to a world more filled with hope, joy and happiness.

“I hope that my voice from the darkness travels a distance to a far away land where I have never been. This voice of mine that I want them to hear is this, ‘The world does not have to be this way. Please, do not leave it this way. Take action. Every time you hear a voice of a desperate person in the darkness, do not ignore it. Please do something. Take the first step. You do not have to see the whole staircase to take the first step. Courage starts with one person, like a song that someone will start and others will join in to sing.’”

A Call to those in the Global Community to Join Voices with those in Dark Places

The Anuak Justice Council calls on those in the global community to join voices with this Anuak woman and with those other voices from Ethiopia where there is such widespread suffering. Even though the horrendous actions of the current regime of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi have been uncovered, the international community has not done enough to support the Ethiopian people in their mostly non-violent fight for democracy and the rule of law. Action is critical before frustration reaches to the point of inciting some to violence, resulting in more death and chaos. The stakes are high, yet each voice added to the chorus adds to the power of its reverberation throughout the global community of those who value human kind. No longer are there remote places in this world where brutal dictators can hide, as voices are coming through in new ways. We must not only listen, but also be willing to take action if we want our world to be a better place for our children.

Coverage of Saddam Hussein’s trial is far-reaching through the globalization of the media, giving a way for the world to see where previously there was no camera lens; to hear from people whose suffering can no longer be totally suppressed. If many join together in harmony; crossing national, ethnic, cultural and religious lines; defending the persecuted and oppressed in our world---it will indeed be a beautiful song!

For additional information about the Anuak Justice Council (AJC), please visit <http://www.anuakjustice.org/>.

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