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## Anuak to Sue Ethiopia for Human Rights Crimes

By Doug McGill  
[The McGill Report](#)

ROCHESTER, MN -- An international human rights campaign is forming to bring to justice the perpetrators of a massacre of more than 425 members of the Anuak minority in Gambella state in western of Ethiopia one year ago.

The massacre was first reported by The McGill Report on December 22, 2003, after hundreds of Anuak refugees living in Minnesota reported receiving frantic telephone calls from their relatives living in Gambella state in Ethiopia.

At a memorial service and legal conference held last Saturday at the Calvary Baptist Church in Vadnais Heights, Minnesota, lawyers from international law and human rights groups announced plans to bring legal proceedings against the Ethiopian government for crimes against humanity and genocide.

Exactly one year ago, from December 13 to 15, uniformed Ethiopian soldiers invaded the town of Gambella, the capital of Gambella state, systematically calling out of their homes and then executing educated males of the Anuak tribe.

The Anuak in Minnesota listened horrified as the sounds of gunshots and screams went off in the background on their telephone calls, and their relatives described the massacre as it unfolded. Sometimes, soldiers were heard to grab the telephones and slam them down, and the relatives never heard from again.

### **Forced Displacement**

More than 1,500 Anuak immigrants live in southern Minnesota. They began arriving in the middle 1990s, to escape ethnic cleansing in Ethiopia.

More than a dozen Minnesota churches and civic groups have rallied to support the Anuak during the past year, raising tens of thousands of dollars in relief aid and hosting many educational events.

Some 200 Anuak met for the Saturday memorial service for their lost relatives, and more than a dozen experts on Anuak history, culture, and politics came from the University of California at Santa Barbara; Osaka University in Osaka, Japan; and Genocide Watch in McLean, Virginia.

International human rights lawyers from the Public International Law & Policy Group (PILPG), and the International Human Rights Clinic of American University, both in Washington, D.C., also spoke.

“Murder, rape, forced displacement, and destruction of property were committed not just individually but systematically” against the Anuak in Gambella, said Elisabeth W. Dallas, a lawyer and senior fellow at PILPG. “What we need to do now is bring that information to the world.”

### **10,000 Refugees**

The group has provided legal expertise at international criminal trials against former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands; at the International Criminal Tribunal prosecuting genocide crimes in Rwanda; and other trials.

The PILPG will file a claim against Ethiopia at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Dallas said. The claim will technically be termed provisional because Ethiopia has not joined the court, and the ICC will have no jurisdiction over Ethiopian officials until Ethiopia ratifies the ICC statutes.

But crimes against humanity and genocide can still be charged provisionally under the principle of jus cogens, an absolute norm of international law that is binding on all states, Dallas said.

Lawyers for the group released a 22-page document at the conference, detailing its findings of “a prima facie case against the Ethiopian government for committing the crimes against humanity of murder, forcible transfer of a population, rape, and persecution of a group.”

After the December 13, 2003 massacre, more than 10,000 Anuak refugees fled for safety from western Ethiopia into refugee camps in Kenya and southern Sudan.

### **Ethnic Targeting**

As many as 2,500 Anuak, out of a total population of about 100,000, have been killed since last December in raids carried by the Ethiopian army in villages throughout Gambella state, according to a field report by the Genocide Watch and Survivor’s Rights International human rights groups.

The Ethiopian government says only a few dozen Anuak have been killed in “inter-tribal violence,” and has denied involvement in the killings.

Amnesty International, one of the two largest human rights groups, also weighed in at the Saturday memorial service and conference.

Martin Hill, an Amnesty International researcher based in London, was not present but sent a “Dear Friends” letter addressed to the Minnesota Anuak and others who gathered at the church.

“Hundreds of Anuaks were ethnically targeted and murdered in cold blood,” Hill wrote. Amnesty International is continuing its investigation, he said, adding that “the victims and survivors have the right to justice. The abuse of people’s fundamental rights must not be allowed to continue.”

### **Prayer and Lobbying**

The Ethiopian army is using guns against the Anuak, who are fighting back with prayer, conversation, fellowship, scholarship, political lobbying, field research, talking to journalists, and now with international lawsuits.

The Anuak tribe’s tiny size has worked against it so far, as the Darfur genocide has grabbed all the world’s headlines. But now, with the very existence of the tiny tribe in question, the David-and-Goliath nature of the Anuak's non-violent struggle against the Ethiopian army may finally start to work in the tribe's favor.

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