

Ethiopian Government Plans Forced Repatriation of Anuak Refugees

(June 7, 2006)—On June 6, 2006, Genocide Watch received a report on current plans by the Ethiopian government to repatriate Anuak refugees who have fled from the genocide in Gambella province to Kenya and Sudan. This will mark the fourth attempt made by the Ethiopian government to repatriate the refugees.

Reportedly, a secret meeting was held in Addis Ababa on May 13, 2006, to discuss forced repatriation of the Anuak refugees in Kenya and Sudan. The meeting was chaired by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, and was attended by the following: Bereket Simon, Zenawi's advisor, Ato Hailu, the Minister of Regional Affairs, Ato Omot Obang Olom, from Gambella regional state, Gwanar, Olom's deputy, Ato Olero Opiew, and Sunday Gatch. The decisions made at the meeting were:

1. To send delegates to Sudan and Kenya to negotiate with both governments to force refugees back to Ethiopia;
2. To use Ethiopian government funds, including donations received from the international community for development in order to entice the refugees to return home. (This tactic was also used in 2004 to entice refugees to return from Pochalla, Sudan by Ato Olero Opiew; however, after the refugees returned home, many of them disappeared and their whereabouts are a mystery to this day.)

At the May 13 meeting, Regional Governor Ato Omot Obang Olom was given the authority to recruit delegates who will travel to Khartoum, Juba, and Nairobi to negotiate with the governments of Sudan and Kenya.

Regional Governor Olom held meetings from May 23, 2006 to May 27, 2006 in Gambella town and formed three task forces to implement the mandate of Prime Minister Zenawi. Task Force One will be led by Ato Obang Oman, Ato Alemayehu, and Ato Ojulu Bach, and will travel to Nairobi to negotiate with the Kenyan government. Task Force Two will be led by Ochan Obaru, Bol ket, Oman Buya, and Othieng, and will travel to Pochalla, Sudan via Khartoum. Task Force Three will be led by Olero Opiew, Weynetu Abera, and Alama Alameraw—one of the commanders of the December 13, 2003 genocide “Operation Sunny Mountain”—and will travel to Khartoum to negotiate with the Sudanese government. The deployment of the task forces is scheduled for June 16, 2006.

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