



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL
Justice, Peace and Freedom

A DECEMBER 13 “DAY OF REMEMBRANCE” FOR ALL ETHIOPIANS Thirteen Years After the Massacre of the Anuak and Still No Justice for Any of Us!

PRESS RELEASE. FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 13, 2016. (Vancouver, BC, Canada)--Today is December 13, a day which will remind the Anuak of the painful loss of their loved ones in Gambella on the same date in 2003— thirteen years ago.

It is a Day of Remembrance that is not easy for the Anuak, wherever they are in the world. It is a time that brings back memories of the horrific killing of 424 Anuak in less than three days. Destruction, pillaging and other egregious human rights abuses accompanied the slaughter of these precious lives. It signaled the beginning of a three-year period of regime brutality and intimidation that resulted in the death of nearly fifteen hundred more Anuak. This is a huge percentage among a very tiny ethnic group numbering only about 100,000 people worldwide. Thousands more Anuak fled to refugee camps. At the core was the Tigre People's Liberation Front (TPLF) regime's plan to exploit the oil found on their indigenous land. The TPLF is an ethnic minority regime in Ethiopia makes less than the 6% percent of the Ethiopian population and it controls over 90% of the Ethiopian economy.

A few years later, it became clear to the Anuak that they were being eliminated due to their resource-rich land, especially the fertile, well-watered lowlands of the Upper Nile where they have lived for millenniums. Gambella has been said to be the potential bread basket of Ethiopia. At the end of the decade, Gambella had become the epicenter of land grabs in Ethiopia as well as in all of Africa. Some 78% of the most arable land was taken from the local people and given to Tigrayans who were well-connected to the TPLF as well as to foreign investors. An example of the favoritism in distributing these land leases was revealed in documents leaked from the regional government. In those documents was noted the number of persons given land leases from the government and their ethnicity. Out of 165 leases, all were of Tigrayan ethnicity with the exception of three persons, who were from non-indigenous ethnic groups outside of Gambella. Not one Anuak, Nuer, Majanger or other indigenous Gambellan received a lease. Those persons with leases were then able to obtain government loans based on the collateral of their land, which they did not own according to Ethiopian law. The amount they received totaled 92 million USD.

The situation of the Anuak people did not improve, as the ethnic apartheid regime wanted their resources, but not the people; yet, the genocide marks the day when everything changed. Every year since 2003, the Anuak gather together to remember this tragic day. To those survivors who witnessed the trauma, it still can feel like it happened yesterday. Some who lost their family members have resigned themselves to the fact their loved ones will never come back; yet, they are still dealing with the impact of these losses, often making their lives much more difficult. Those born afterwards or who were too young at the time to understand what had happened; still find it difficult to grasp how one's own government could turn on its own people it was supposed to protect. Instead, the TPLF regime used a prepared list to target many of the leaders in the community. How could regime-led defense forces and militias, the former made up of neighbors, go door-to-door and methodically slaughter the people in front of their families? This is why it is such a painful day to the Anuak.

After 13 years, still no justice has been served; yet, the TPLF-controlled regime still blocks the Anuak from openly commemorating this day, fearing criticism, shame and guilt. Today, we talked to someone in Gambella who shared the frustration of many who are prohibited from assembling together to sing, pray, find comfort, talk and eat together. This is another reason it remains painful.

The Anuak Justice Council calls on friends of the Anuak, who are commemorating this day throughout the world, to take time to encourage, call, pray and lift up the Anuak at this time. Yet, how many others have their “days” of “remembering” throughout the year. There are so many Ethiopians who have lost their lives both before and after December 13, 2003. For example, think and pray for the families of the more than 1,000 Oromo and Amhara young people who have died this past year. There will be an empty place at the table. Think and pray for those whose loved ones, many of them parents or youth, who are still locked up in jails prisons and detentions centers across the country. The TPLF regime attests to recently arresting and detaining 11,700 persons since the beginning of October when the state of emergency was declared. Add to this number, the many youth who died trying to find refuge and security in a foreign land only to die as they were trafficked, some in the sea, others in the desert, and still more in refugee camps and other hard places. This year alone, the number from this group could reach one to two thousand— or even more. It is so tragic. Let us remember all of these precious lives that have been lost when we remember this day.

For the Anuak of Gambella, like for others who have been targeted and displaced, conditions have not improved, but have actually worsened. The Anuak who fled to South Sudan are living under terrible conditions in a country that has fallen apart. Conversely, it is ironic that citizens of South Sudan are running to Gambella for refuge in the same land where the Anuak could not live in safety. Other Anuak refugees can be found in Kenya and Uganda. Many who were evicted from their land that was then given to foreign investors, remain in Gambella, struggling to survive under inferior conditions to what they had before.

Again, their story and experience is repeated in the lives of Ethiopians across the country. It applies to the people in the Omo Valley, in the Oromo region, to the Afar, to the Amhara and many others, including some Tigrayans who have suffered greatly under the TPLF. Conditions have not improved in the country and the evidence of this has been clearly seen in the rising numbers and intensity of protests throughout the country, particularly led by the Oromo and Amhara youth. It sent the TPLF into panic mode, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency.

In essence, this is not really different from a coup d’etat since it has given the TPLF Central Committee license to do whatever they want, whether it is murder, wide-scale arrests, re-education—another word for torture, censorship, closing down the Internet and media, preventing due process, or denying constitutional rights; all of it justified by the “urgency” to protect “law and order.” Whatever power was in the hands of elected officials, the prime minister, regional authorities and/or others, has now been stripped away, leaving this one-ethnic apartheid committee of the TPLF to openly and non-ashamedly control everything under the justification that they are now protecting the country. To further cover for themselves and provide appearances of legitimacy, they reshuffled positions so there are new and diverse faces seen as the new front; yet, the same TPLF central committee continues to control all decision-making.

Where do we go from here? As we remember this December 13, we should never forget that there are equivalent “December 13ths” for countless individual Ethiopians as well as for many different ethnic groups throughout the country. What we often fail to focus on, despite seeing it before our eyes, is that the perpetrators are one small group; yet the victims are all of us. Victims have failed to realize that the only solution is not to stand as one alone; but instead, as one people for the good of all.

May God help us to understand that when pain is inflicted on one ethnic group; it has been inflicted on the body of Ethiopians. Let us seek God’s way forward towards conflict transformation for all Ethiopians, leading to sustainable and constructive solutions for building peace, well being and reconciliation in our divided society.

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