



**ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL**

*Justice, Peace and Freedom*

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

### **Human Rights Abusers: “Watch Out, You May Not Find the West a Safe Haven Anymore!”**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**June 17, 2008**

As pleased as the Anuak Justice Council is with the recent decision by Canadian authorities to deny entry into Canada to Omot Obang Olum, the Anuak governor of the Gambella region suspected of complicity in the Anuak massacre of 2003, we are far more pleased with the prospects of what this means to other Ethiopians suspected of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity who may attempt to seek entry or asylum in the West.

For the Canadian authorities to deny a visa to a human rights criminal suspect like Olum, is a victory for justice and is an encouraging indication to other victims of such crimes within Ethiopia. For perpetrators who have inflicted unbearable pain on their fellow Ethiopians, thinking they are above the law of God and country, it is a stern and chilling warning to find out that a door in the West has just slammed shut to them as a potential safe haven.

In Ethiopia, human rights crimes can be committed without legal consequence if one is “rightly connected” to the government, but after this action by Canadians, these perpetrators can no longer automatically assume they will be able to escape to the West should the brutal and repressive Meles regime fall.

For the Anuak who were tortured, put in jail or who lost loved ones at the hands of such suspected human rights criminals as Olum, they will be encouraged that finally someone has been held accountable for crimes covered up and seemingly forgotten, even though it was done by strangers living over a thousand miles away from where it was perpetrated.

Even though many Anuak and other victims of oppression within Ethiopia are afraid to confront their Woyane governor or Meles himself, fearful of their power to punish any objecting to their rule, the denial of this visa into Canada serves as proof that those guilty of such crimes may finally answer for their actions.

Justice, righteousness and truth are all parts of God’s holy character and those who violate these principles violate universal codes set in place not by man but by God. Most every human being knows this in his or her heart which is exactly the reason for the extensive lies, denials and cover-up being advanced by the Ethiopian propaganda machine of Meles Zenawi.

The truth would demand a just response and they know it! That is why they continue to offer up pathetically weak lies in the face of voluminous evidence to the contrary. In other words, they want to escape the consequences of their actions, but thankfully, it did not work this time!

That same desire for truth is the reason why some Anuak and I boycotted the meeting—because we knew the truth would be dodged and manipulated. Establishing the truth is the same reason why the AJC was initially set up because in December of 2003, something evil and outrageous happened in a dark corner of Africa when the Anuak were massacred by their own government.

In arrogance, the Meles regime thought they could get away with it, but it led to the formation of the AJC and the truth got out. In fact, with the visit of Olum the heinous crimes committed against the Anuak were again repeated in newspapers all over the world through new press articles.

Now, with the release of the recent Human Rights Watch report on what is happening in the Ogaden and into Somalia, more publicity is directed towards the horrific tactics of the Meles government, but with it, more predictable denials. It is only a matter of time before incidents in the Afar region, in Beningshagul-Gumuz, in Oromia, along the Sudanese-Ethiopian border and in other parts of the country will be added to the list.

Strangely, the lying is becoming progressively more absurd in the face of mounting evidence; but the more it does so, the less likely it seems that Meles and company will ever change. Everything is pretense on the outside and fake on the inside—democracy, justice, stability, development and even our gold—are all just trappings. Instead, we are left with a hollow core, expected to live an illusion while desperately needing healing.

We have become a country of lies and we all are experiencing the consequences of that. Meles' government is even lying about the hunger and starvation of millions of Ethiopians in fear of being found responsible. Yet, such lies will never feed the people. Instead, Jesus Christ said, "the truth will set us free."

This is the reason why the AJC has been speaking up for the last four years and the reason why we are now also speaking for the rest of Ethiopians as we firmly believe that unless justice comes to all of Ethiopia, justice will not come to any one group. The suffering and pain of all Ethiopians is the same.

The truth that the Anuak are seeking is the same truth sought by Ethiopians throughout the country. The same justice Anuak desire, is the same justice for which other Ethiopians also hunger. That is why the AJC extended to other Ethiopians and took the initiative to reach out to others. To seek truth and justice is foundational to the AJC, but what Omot Olum wants us to do is this—to settle for less than the truth, for less than justice and for less than righteous living. This is something we refuse to do and it is the reason we continue to speak and advocate for change and will never settle for anything less.

Be warned, this is not what the Meles regime wants for Ethiopians. He and his puppets in charge in every district and region of the country want us to agree to be silent about injustice and to compromise on the truth and our morality.

Omot Olum is an Anuak and people within the AJC know him. As a person we have nothing against him, but we stand against the evil things he has done. We even know that no one has ever reported seeing him pull the trigger to kill anyone, but we have strong evidence that his actions have contributed to the loss of Anuak lives and caused great pain to many Anuak. For that reason, we want him to be held accountable.

We also know he was responsible for the arrests and imprisonment of many Anuak, especially Anuak leaders arrested in 2002 who were imprisoned in Addis Ababa until 2007, losing productive years of their lives. Their families suffered from their absence. Some of the prisoners died while in prison.

Mr. Olum arrested them because he was the most trusted supporter of the Meles regime and because he did was threatened by his own people who were upholding truth and justice in the way they conducted their lives. He was also in charge of security for the region when the massacre took place. The governor at the time reported that Olum was the one who gave the names to the military commander who later issued the order to kill the Anuak.

Without his help, the TPLF military would not have known which Anuak were threats to their total sovereignty. Now, for them to come to ask Anuak to talk about peace, investment, and development is settling for something far less than justice and that is unsettling! Olum and his counterparts in other regions throughout the country should be found accountable.

We know that Olum is a tiny fish among bigger fish and we know that he and many more within the TPLF throughout Ethiopia have done the same for those on the top, but the benefits will not last. The denial of his visa is sending a message to Meles and his gang-style government that seems willing to do most anything to remain in power even if its own citizens are starving or being killed that when this government finally goes down, and it will like every other one like it, there will be no room for Meles and his supporters in the West for safe haven.

This message is not only for lower ranking perpetrators like Olum, but also for top officials complicit with gross human rights crimes. Not only is Canadians are working on policies prohibiting war criminals and human rights criminals from entering their country, but similar policies are being discussed by human rights advocates and policy makers in the US, the UK and in the EU. This is what HR 2003 is all about.

Once these policies become law, there will be no room for people like Olum in the West. We say to Meles supporters who have helped in one way or another in committing human rights abuses, your time to face justice has come and there is no room for you to hide. People know who you are and all the authorities may need is your name, your involvement and your crime. One by one justice can be done. The choice is yours to continue supporting this government and committing crimes against humanity under the short-lived protection of a dying regime or changing your ways for good.

If you do not, you may never find the same impunity enabling you to live in luxury in another country that you have relished in Ethiopia during these fleeting last days under the Meles regime. To those who are now working in the administration, take the higher moral ground and refuse to take part in crimes against your fellow Ethiopians like one of the delegates accompanying Olum recently did.

When Olum came, five EPRDF delegates from Gambella accompanied him. One of them was another Anuak man named Obang Oman. He gave the government line publicly, but when it came time to return to Ethiopia, he was nowhere to be found and remains in America. It is not surprising that this additional downturn in Olum's visit, this defection, was not covered in the EPRDF news

Apparently, Obang Oman stated that even though he and the others had come to encourage the Anuak to return to Gambella to help develop the region and to invest, what they had told the attendees about Ethiopia being more democratic, more stable and full of more opportunities right now was a lie, and he did not want to continue to advance this lie and be part of it. This man has now stood up for the truth and that is why he remained in the US. His refusal to return to Ethiopia speaks more loudly than any words.

In fact, the truth always speaks for itself, much more strongly than the lie. Even a recent Ethiopian News agency press release falsely claimed that 2500 Gambella people had attended the meeting with the Olum and the other Gambella delegates, and that the people wanted to come back to develop the region.

The truth is, the number at the meetings in both Minnesota and Nebraska was closer to 300—combined—and the article’s writer failed to mention three important points: the angry response of many of the people; the fact that one of their delegates remained in America, and the fact that Omot Olum’s meeting was cancelled in Canada because he was denied entrance into Canada—not surprising oversights!

This illegitimate government of Meles has demonstrated a lack of morality accompanied by the willingness to lie about anything, just to remain in power. Meles Zenawi even maintained his power during the last election through lies and force. He and his EPRDF government were never legitimately elected and they obviously care very little for the people they are supposed to be serving, like a parent who has abandoned his own children after abusing them.

Our encouragement to Ethiopians and peace loving people is to not give up in our struggle to revive this nation no matter what obstacles we face because the truth is on our side. More than that, God is on our side, but only if we continue to seek Him, His truth and do what is right. If we do, not only could we bring justice and hope back to the country, but we could be the ones to help revive a country where everyone has become an orphan without a protector or nurturer.

Our only hope is in our only real father, God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth who loves the children He has created. Do we return that love with our obedience to His life-giving principles?

May our God help us to rise up and to stand, side by side, as humans first, and as Ethiopians second. May we put our humanity before our ethnicity and do what God wants us to do to protect, care, nurture and revive this dying nation. May God use each of us to help bring such revival to the soul of Ethiopia!

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