

One People, One Nation, One Ethiopia

by: Zeryihun Gebre-Meskel

November 17, 2007 marked the Ethiopian Millennium for some of us at the Anuak Justice Council Human Rights Conference. It resonated, the same hope felt by many during the months leading up to the historic May 2005 election. How is one left to feel when representatives of human rights activists under the leadership of Mr. Obang Metho himself sat side by side at the panelist table covered with the majestic green, yellow, red. It was an amazing sight that easily fed the soul. This memorable visual alone was the beacon of hope for those of us who had the privilege of witnessing this historical moment.



Mr. Robsan Itana from Oromo-American Citizens Council, Mr. Alemayehu Zemedkun former prosecutor in the higher court of Ethiopia, Mr. Teklabe Habtu from Gasha for Ethiopians, Mr. Jashu Godi Baykeda from the Southern Nations Human Rights Organization, Mr. Ibrahim Yousuf from Benishangul Human Rights Foundation, sat shoulder to shoulder as brothers united representing one people, one nation, one Ethiopia. [from left to right]

Mr. Guled Kassim, a dynamic young Ogadeni was entirely impressive and articulate but mainly a self professed proud Ethiopian- he declared that he was an Ethiopian first who is also an Ogadeni-Muslim; but certainly not a terrorist as many Ogadeni's are currently falsely labeled by the EPDRF. Much to all of our surprise, he served in the United States Marines, and is currently also a proud American citizen.

He urged that the human rights abuse and genocide committed all over Ethiopia is no different than what just took place this past Summer in the Ogaden region; the wiping out of villages upon villages of innocent families, women and children has left him with deep scars . The EPRDF apparently is consistent; it does not discriminate when it comes to wiping humans clean from the face of this planet; Zenawi and his supporters commit genocide equally with

unchallenged aggression throughout Ethiopia. Mr. Guled pointed so many similarities between what has happened in other regions such as in the Tigri, Gambella, Oromia, Benishangul and the Amara regions, and what shameless atrocities have been committed against humanity one village at a time. Venerable families have simply been completely wiped out in Ogaden- while the world, Mr. Guled conveyed with utter astonishment, has responded with silence. The crime of the Ogadeni people brought to bear genocide, well, simply living in a resource rich region of the country; in this case, oil.



As many of the panelist were solution driven, Mr. Guled, urged that at the very least we as Ethiopians need to demand that Zenawi's regime should not be allowed to commit genocide in the name of Ethiopia nor Ethiopians; a burden if we as a peace loving people are not all careful enough, will carry along with our children for generations to come. He urged the Diaspora community to demand from our Congressmen and Senators on Capitol Hill, that 'we do not want our tax dollars to fund the EPRDF's atrocious human rights abuse against our own people'.

Mr. Ibrahim Yousuf from Benishangul, described fear as our own worst enemy and not Zenawi himself; in fact he dared to conjecture that Zenawi himself fears all of us. He emphasized that the minute we let go of our fears, we will reclaim our beloved Ethiopia without any question.

He also stated that "Kibur Meles Zenawi" (which is how you would sarcastically refer to the Prime Minister with his hands over the microphone with a deep voice) was stuck- "he cannot move forward or backward not even from side to side". He began to tell the audience about his voyage to Canada from the confinement of a make-shift jail in Ethiopia where he was shot at three times and did not die. He reinforced how fear has been our worst enemy and that if he had been shot at 3 times and escaped death, we do not have anything to fear as "God is the only one who can take our life and not 'Kibur Meles Zenawi'; so quit being fearful and rise up to free Ethiopia", he shouted.

He fought his tears as he talked about how "Kibur Meles Zenawi" approached him and the liberation front under his command in Benishangul and invited them to fight side by side with the TPLF during the Derg regime. They had agreed to go to Mekele to an underground facility in the 'chaka' underground gorilla camps. Once the Derg was removed, Zenawi had the Benishangul sign a peace charter and were then told that there was no longer a need for tribal forces and that the TPLF would form a national military force to protect the rights of all. The Benishangul forces made the mistake of trusting the then TPLF and turned over their guns only to quickly find themselves rounded up and thrown in prison in less than 48 hours. He had only been able to "shower twice" during his imprisonment. He was later told by a prison guard that the bullet the guard

carried in his gun was “too precious” to be wasted on a worthless prisoner such as he, when Mr. Ibrahim begged to be shot in order to end his misery. The exchange later brewed into violence and the prison guard shot Mr. Ibrahim three times. Amazingly enough with God’s grace, he survived and made his great escape to a refugee camp where he was later rescued and currently resides in Canada with his family.

According to his personal experience, the EPRDF will stop at nothing to stay in power and the only people that can stop the massacre and oppression are the Ethiopian people with the help of their Diaspora extension. He urged us on to rid ourselves of fear, get organized and free Ethiopia from the crimes against humanity committed by non other than “Kibur Meles Zenawi” and his ruthless supporters.

Mr. Alemayehu Zemedkun who served in the high court introduced himself as a human rights activist who did not necessarily come to the gathering as a member of the Amara region, but mostly as an advocate of human rights and a genuine avid supporter of the human rights advocacy work Anuak Justice Council has delivered under the Directorship of Mr. Obang Metho.

Having served as a prosecutor, he witnessed countless human rights abuses which he lends this type of crime to the lack of the rule of law where the perpetrator, the prosecutor and the judge is the EPRDF government itself. He defected from Ethiopia as he could no longer serve as a prosecutor in a kangaroo court system. Since then, Mr. Alemayhu has been an advocate for human rights and campaigned against the Zenawi regime serving as a panelist on various occasions. Mr. Alemayehu reinforced the fact that the human rights abuse permeates throughout all regions of the country and must be stopped and urged the audience to support the Anuak Justice Council (AJC) and Mr. Obang’s reputable human rights advocacy work.

There was another kind gentleman, Mr. Teklabe Habtu, leader of an organization called ‘Gasha’ who advocates for the human rights abuse in the Tigri region. A year ago, no one would believe that the Tigrains were facing the same human rights abuses that the Zenawe regime is faulted for in other parts of the country. His compelling story told of the fact that being Tigriain could work against an individual if one does not support the EPRDF. Tigrains at this time are being seen as a threat to Woyane who will not stop at eradicating any opposition regardless the ethnicity of the group. Another gentleman from his organization spoke of what seems to be unbelievable. Tigrains have been buried alive for disagreeing with the EPRDF leadership or shall we say dictatorship; a title this government has rightfully earned on the charts in the international circuit.

The gentleman from the Oromo region, Mr. Robsan stated that, although the Oromia region has the largest population, the people of Oromia must be open to

discussion and work with the people of other regions to safe guard the sovereignty of Ethiopia and perhaps even for the good of the Oromo people. “It is with open channels of communication that we can achieve freedom and eradicate the obscene human rights abuses taking place throughout ALL regions in Ethiopia”. Mr. Robsan apologized to the audience that his talk was presented in English as he walked off the stage...he paused and stated ‘Amarigna bedenb echilalhu; yikirta, bengilizenga nigigereng silazegagew nuw!’ (I would like the audience to take note that I do speak Amharic very well and would have liked to present my talk today in Amharic; however, it just so happened that my presentation was prepared in English).

That comment alone said it all....

Mr. Jashu Godi Baykeda, recently defected to the U.S. during his attendance for a World Bank meeting. Funny enough, the most recent former Woyane member of the group, he certainly did not resemble the image of a ruthless killer; in fact, he was mild mannered as he politely told the audience that things are not any different in the Southern Regions than they are in other parts of Ethiopia. Almost every human rights abuse EPRDF commits on a regular basis under the leadership of “Kibur Meles Zenawi”, if I may borrow the words of Mr. Ibrahim, is undoubtedly taking place in the Southern Regions. What all Mr. Guled, Mr. Alemayehu, Mr. Teklabe, Mr. Ibrahim, and Mr. Robsan described was happening in their respective regions, the utter vicious killings that they eloquently described, rings true in the Southern Regions as well...”the killings simply must be stopped”.

I would like to dedicate this article to those brave Ethiopians who died for the sovereignty of Ethiopia; and for those mothers, brothers and sisters that shouldered these men to safety and made it possible for them to speak in front of us; to declare their people’s God given right to live in peace and harmony; and to be the voice of those who still languish under the terror of “Kibur Meles Zenawi”. I would also like to thank those who were present at the event with me who took the chance to meet individuals that not only care about human rights in Ethiopia but that are committed to doing something about it. There was some type of magic in the room where a diverse group of audience members welcomed representatives from all over Ethiopia. This face-to-face communication is what is going to save Ethiopia and serve as the glue to keep our country and people together while maintaining respect for each other. Mr. Metho, mentioned several times that the culture of “talking behind each other’s back” has to be phased out; that we must learn to talk to each other face to face. His position is clear- no one group should dominate the other and constant communication with each other will diminish the need for ethnic cleansing and impede any uprising of one ethnic group to dominate the others. Those who were present in the room including myself felt sorry for those who were not present to take part in this rich experience. Now is the time to support this type

of movement- human rights activism needs to grow along side the political stride to democracy. No democratic movement can survive without mutual respect and the protection of all country men and women. After all, isn't what democracy is about- an instrument of security for all whether it be safety, food and education as well as a medium of respect and tolerance of diverse people and ideas.

It is my hope that the Anuak Justice Council along with the other human rights organizations, join forces and push the agenda of human rights in Ethiopia. For those hundreds and thousands of you that were not present at this gathering for one reason or another and who truly care about bringing about change in Ethiopia, I urge you to support the AJC and its work and the next time such meeting is held in the Washington area, make sure you and your friends come and be enlightened and demonstrate your conviction to freeing your Ethiopia from oppression, dictatorship, suffering and marginalization.

The work of Mr. Obang and now his new found friends in the human rights arena must be heavily supported. This is not even a choice but a necessity. He is following in the paths of Mandela and Martin Luther King in a personal pursuit to end the violence and crimes against humanity of Ethiopia. It would serve us all well to support this blessed man and his Human Rights Organization's advocacy work with a proven track of exposing the crimes committed against the Ethiopian people by the EPRDF. Mr. Obang Metho, we would like a repeat of another such Human Rights conference in 2008

With that said, I am pleased to announce that some of us who had our hopes once again restored present at the Human Rights Conference promised each other that we shall each make a monthly contribution of \$100 to the AJC in support of its much needed work on its website: www.anuakjustice.org; the human rights advocacy work must go on- it is valuable to the future of Ethiopia- wont you please join us by pledging what you can to the much needed work of the AJC?!

Let no one be mistaken....Ethiopia and Ethiopians will prevail once again as one people, one nation, under one God.

send your comments to zeryhun@gmail.com