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## **EPRDF Attempt to use Ethnic Isolation With “Incentives” to Silence Gambellans Fails**

**May 5, 2008**

Ethnic isolation accompanied by promised development and other “payoffs” for “your group” in exchange for your compliance with the EPRDF government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is a favorite approach by this regime.

On April 26, 2008 four Ethiopian government-sponsored delegates from Gambella, Ethiopia and one from the Ethiopian Embassy in Washington D.C. met with the Anuak community and some Nuer in Minnesota and Nebraska. The delegation included: Two Anuak, two Nuer (one is vice president), One Mazengir (speaker of the house in Gambella, other two, minister of transportation and the other minister of Diaspora.

If these Ethiopian government-sponsored delegates who recently came thought they could buy, flatter and persuade the Anuak in the Diaspora into forgetting about the Anuak massacre of 2003 and other gross crimes and injustices, they underestimated the intelligence and memory of their audience. They clearly did not succeed in doing so at their meeting in Minneapolis; nor will they succeed later on this month when the second delegation, led by the Chief Administrator or the current governor of Gambella, Mr. Omot Obang Olum travels to Canada.

Mr. Omot Obang Olum, is one of those TPLF or Woyane considered to have the blood of the Anuak on his hands and the stain is still there. In fact, it was the blood of the Anuak that gave him entry into the fellowship of the EPRDF and with it, the post of governor of Gambella. He is one of the thousands of Ethiopians from different ethnic groups who have gained access to special perks by virtue of their loyalty to the EPRDF.

Together with the government of Meles Zenawi, they hold the whole nation hostage through applying the “right tactics”—fear, intimidation and human rights abuses for some, but favors, opportunities and a full assortment of bribes for others. The former do not work so well outside the country and therefore, these “ambassadors bearing gifts” from the regime have been trying to silence their critics in the Diaspora for the last year by offering invitations, opportunities and investments in the country. Until this meeting, the Anuak and other people of Gambella have been ignored, but for some reason, they have now been approached with such offers.

However, most of the Anuak who attended the meeting were outraged by the presumption that they could be “bought” when what was really needed was even a little acknowledgement of the government’s direct involvement in the perpetration of the horrific crimes committed starting on December 13, 2003. Other crimes before and after have also involved additional Anuak as well as other people in the region—the Nuer, Mazenger, Komo, Opo and others from the highland—who have all suffered due to the actions and policies of this government.

Additionally, the people of Gambella know very well how the EPRDF plays the game of divide and conquer in order to create conflict between them, purposely to gain more control of the region and its resources. Many lives have been lost as a result and nothing this government can offer will ever be able to compensate for the deep and painful losses of family members, friends, community leaders and neighbors.

That is why so many were disturbed because the EPRDF delegates came all the way from Ethiopia to Minnesota and acted as if the massacre of the Anuak and other gross human rights crimes against them never occurred! Instead, the representatives spoke of all the “promising” development being planned for the Gambella region, inviting those in the Gambella Diaspora community to “come back” to contribute to the development in the region now that they had an education. This should not have been the subject of the first meeting with the Anuak since the massacre.

It could have been an opportunity to address the genocide, the widespread destruction of the infrastructure in the region, the lack of holding the perpetrators accountable, reparations for the families of victims, the lack of electoral representation, and the two to three hundred Anuak political prisoners who remain locked up. Instead, the promises of “perks” for Gambellans was clearly another “divide and conquer” game by a government well-known to offer “gifts” and “special perks” to some who are willing to “cooperate” while terrorizing others elsewhere.

They offered development, but the Ethiopian National Defense Forces had destroyed a significant amount of infrastructure. For instance, before December 2003, there were 119 working wells; afterwards, only 5. Before this date, there were 22 health clinics; afterwards, there were 7 clinics, stripped of all supplies. Before this date, there were 136 schools in operation, but afterwards, only 27.

When we consider how these Gambella delegates are encouraging the educated Anuak to return to contribute to the development, no one said it out loud, but many Anuak must have thought about the 424 educated leaders who had worked hard to obtain an education only to be killed because of it. Many sitting in that room must know that had they been there at the time, they too would be dead. There are still 191 Anuak buried in a mass grave and their families are still seeking to recover their bodies in order to give them a proper burial.

These realities will not disappear simply when asked to enter the world of illusion. However, this was only part of what was so wrong about this meeting. The EPRDF loves to “deal” with groups on a “one-to-one” basis. The entire Meles system is a policy of ethnic isolation along with the promotion of division between Ethiopians.

It is based on the belief that Ethiopians only care about “their ethnic groups” or their regions and therefore; if the “price is right”, they will “sell-out” at the expense of everyone else. This system only works if Ethiopians are self-interested enough as well as foolish enough to negotiate in isolation and without concern for others throughout the country. We say foolish enough because the agreement you make will eventually backfire on those who actually think it is sustainable.

Consider this—the EPRD want to buy your silence and compliance because you, or especially you and others, have something they fear—perhaps power, unity, truth, wisdom or influence—meaning, if you are a threat of some sort to their complete control, they will engage with you, but always, secretly or in isolation from others.

For instance, whether true or false, we in the Anuak Justice Council have heard rumors that Omot Obang Olum wants to meet Anuak and other Gambellans in Canada—including in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan where I live. Why should he come to Saskatoon when I am almost the only Anuak here? If such a meeting should take place, it should be in Washington D.C. or in Toronto in the presence of other Ethiopians and other advocates for Ethiopian national freedom.

It should be obvious to most everyone that the goal of such a meeting is to undermine or discredit the worldwide protest and demonstration for freedom and the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia where ethnic affiliations are left behind for the national interests of all Ethiopians. Such unity based on shared principles of freedom, justice, equality, harmony and the rule of law, is a real threat to them.

What they do not understand is that Ethiopians are beginning to see through these tactics and that is why the voices of Ethiopians calling for unity and reconciliation are increasing in volume. None of us will have a better Ethiopia by thinking we can advance our factionalized self-interest groups at the expense of everyone else!

We Ethiopians must never accept selling out to others by settling for the “promises” of the EPRDF. If we stick together, we should be able to address those real needs in every region of the country much more equitably and justly than this current regime who comes with its own ulterior motives. We will all fail if we fall for this TPLF divide and conquer game, which requires isolating us from each other.

The divide and conquer tactics are at the foundation of the EPRDF regime. Article 39 is the foundational cornerstone, which gives every region the right to govern themselves and the right to self-determination, even seceding. It sounds good to start with—to good to be true! What country includes in its Constitution, the right to secede from the country? This in itself shows its lack of genuineness.

Instead, the EPRDF have incorporated a systemic divider of people into its Constitution that gives it ample room to manipulate the good parts of “decentralization” to its own advantage so they can survive as a minority government that is not “of the people”, “by the people” or “for the people.” They have been doing it all along and have unfortunately, succeeded in dominating the rest of Ethiopia because of it.

Reaching out to each other to form coalitions based on shared national interests is the greatest of threats to the EPRDF. The democratic process is a threat. Any group willing to work together is a threat. That is why I must warn all Anuak, Nuer, Mazenger, Komo, Opo and other Gambellan people to not fall into the trap these delegates are attempting to hide under the ruse of promised development. It is something I must make public. If they wanted to make a genuine attempt for reparations with the Anuak, this is not the way to do it. We Ethiopians must set conditions and a transparent structure when there is genuine motivation to deal with the injustices and crimes committed.

We know instead, these representatives from Meles are trying to put the Anuak in a corner by themselves and by doing so, to silence and control them. For them to come to the US to tell Anuak to come back, bringing their money and skills, when not one perpetrator of the massacre has been held accountable, is a tool of deception and entrapment. It is the moral obligation of all of us to expose and inform the people and the government that we understand their game.

What we have heard from the Anuak is that this meeting brought back the trauma, wounds and pain of that day when they heard about the death of their loved ones. Yet, some were afraid to speak out to ask why they were asking them to come home when many of the Anuak in Gambella still live under fear, intimidation and repression, just like the millions of other Ethiopians throughout the country.

Some Anuak, like other opportunistic Ethiopians, will fall for their enticements, but not the majority. In fact, it might actually unify the Anuak to work more closely with their Ethiopian brothers and sisters in Gambella and throughout the country. These delegates may have been trying to convince the Anuak to be on their side or to divide the Anuak, even perhaps try to get the Anuak to pressure the Anuak Justice Council to stop speaking up against this government. Even if the Anuak choose to do this (doubtful), we are not following the Anuak, but instead, what is right in the eyes of God.

In other words, it is our goal to do what we believe God wants us to do as revealed in his Scripture by standing up for the oppressed and needy because they are ALL PRECIOUS to God. This means caring about others in the family of Ethiopians as well as caring for the Anuak. This is in complete opposition to the ethnic policies of the EPRDF. Each of us must choose which companions we want on our road through life. Please consider this reference: ***For he [God] will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.*** (Psalm 72:12-14)

We are all to reach out to others in love, including EPRDF, but with uncompromising truth, not accepting their distortions of it. They may want to silence us, but they chose the wrong way because genuine justice for all Ethiopians is the only way to our silence. For those Anuak at the meeting, from what we hear, the delegates did not accomplish their goals.

With the AJC, it will not stop the work because the train has already left the ethnic railroad station. The politics of a few on the top, of ethnic hatred, of selective justice, education and opportunity only for those connected to those in power, is a system doomed to implode. The politics of ethnic loyalty and tribalism is a disease that is killing Ethiopians and Africans.

EPRDF and their supporters need to know that the AJC no longer is advocating only for the Anuak, but for all Ethiopians who are suffering because the pain of the Anuak who lost their son is the same pain of the Tigrayan, the Oromo, the Ogadeni and any other group in Ethiopia. We will not only advocate for the Anuak.

We will not give in to ethnic isolation accompanied by pay-offs that will ultimately defeat all of us. We will speak up for the truth and urge all other Ethiopians to do the same. I give thanks to the Anuak community in Minnesota who attended the meeting who did not fall for these tactics.

To create a better life in Ethiopia or anywhere, it will not be through this kind of government. It is not worth supporting because what they stand for is temporary and not based on the principles of truth, justice and the value of all humankind as God has laid out in the Scripture. Promising to give Anuak or the people of Gambella something much better than to those in the rest of Ethiopia, is not genuine and it is not right.

All we need to do is look at the nature of a pack of hungry dogs. We all know you cannot throw meat to a pack of dogs and not expect them to fight over it. The same thing with people, you cannot give privileges and justice to one particular ethnic group and leave all the others out because you will not succeed.

Everyone has to work for the betterment of everyone in Ethiopia. All of us, including the EPRDF and their supporters, will help Ethiopia thrive as a country if we contribute to genuine liberty, justice and concern for all. Devaluing others, while thriving alone will not bring about the kind of sustainable environment of peace, stability and harmony for the children of Ethiopia.

Dividing people will not free anyone. If we want true freedom, let us be people of integrity, love and justice who love God above anything else and act like it!

May each one of us stand up for the truth for not only will the truth set us free, it will connect us together as a people, enabling us to thrive as a nation. May God help us build up relationships that will bind us together for the good of those who come after us.

May God bless Ethiopia!

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