



Gambella Governor: Truth and Justice First!

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The Anuak Justice Council has learned that Omot Obang Olum, the governor of the Gambella region of Ethiopia, is coming to Minnesota on May 30th and Canada on June 4th for the purpose of meeting with the Anuak.

Who is Omot Obang Olum? We Anuak know him to be a loyal collaborator with the EPRDF government of Meles Zenawi. He has paid dearly for his favored relationship with the Woyane with our Anuak blood. Official reports back this up.

According to investigative reports completed by such human rights organizations as Human Rights Watch and Survivors Rights, he was a pro-EPRDF government official of Anuak ethnicity who collaborated in the genocide of his own people carried out by Ethiopian National Defense Forces on December 13-15, 2003. These reports allege that he, as head of security, compiled a list of Anuak leaders who were later killed.

Those targeted were Anuak who were educated, who were against federal control of regional interests, who were opposed to the oil explorations being planned for their region by the federal government without local involvement or who were a threat in some other way, like Pastor Okwier, the pastor of a growing church.

As early as 2002, Omot Obang Olum allegedly was responsible for the imprisonment of 45 Anuak intellectuals, who were seen as possible threats to government control in the area. These individuals were released four to five years later, with no charges.

Following the massacre of 2003, many more Anuak were victims of human rights crimes, including extra-judicial killings, torture, false imprisonment, rape and the destruction of property. He later received his post as governor—a possible payoff for his faithful complicity in these horrendous crimes against humanity.

A month ago, on April 26, delegates from Gambella came to meet with the Anuak in Minnesota and the AJC made a statement following that meeting that the meetings failed to meet the expectations of the Anuak. Those delegates avoided the topic of the genocide; yet, because they individually, were not believed to be personally responsible for it, like Omot Obang Olum, Anuak were willing to listen. However, Omot Obang Olum is different. He is seen as carrying major responsibility for the deaths, torture, rape and imprisonment of family members and friends of those in the Anuak community here in the United States of America and Canada.

Many in the Anuak community here and in Canada, where he is expected to go after this destination, oppose his coming even though some in the Anuak Community Association of North America (ACANA) are hosting him. It is questionable whether those in ACANA really support his coming leaving some questions of who is the driving force in this.

The AJC position is clear. We are strongly opposed to his visit as he is someone who has committed *crimes against humanity* as reported in the reports by Genocide Watch and Human Rights Watch. Any meeting should be taking place under some other venue—a legal hearing in a court, a truth and reconciliation hearing or at least an Anuak traditional approach where there is accountability for what one has done and where establishing the truth is held in high regard. Any meeting that does not address the loss of Anuak lives ends up devaluing those lives and the lives of those who loved them. Yes, people will need to forgive, but forgiveness is not the same thing as accountability. Perpetrators must still be held accountable.

Additionally, forgiving someone does not mean pretending these egregious acts never occurred. The fact is, they did occur! No amount of repressing the truth will take away the facts of what happened. Yet, what most perpetrators want from their victims is for them to just “move on.”

In an oppressive society like in Gambella and across all of Ethiopia, if citizens speak out, they might be imprisoned, tortured, killed or punished in some other way. Ethiopians have become fearful and the companion of fear is silence. However, we are in America. What we need from the Anuak community is not more silence or more fear. Yes, many are good-hearted people who want to genuinely help their people back home, but can we not find ways to do so without falling into the trap of Woyane who believe they can entice good people to invest, develop Gambella and divert us from holding them accountable?

We should be the voices of those we loved who are now gone. If the Woyane government had changed their ways, it might be at least somewhat more acceptable, but they have not. They have become more repressive instead of less. They should be upholding the rights and dignity of the people more instead of the reality that Woyane abuses of the people are widespread across the country. We should be the voices of those now suffering under the human rights atrocities still being perpetrated by EPRDF in other regions of the country like in the Ogaden, in Oromia and into Somalia.

We believe that the purpose of this meeting, if it follows the lines of the last meeting, is exactly opposite of what needs to happen.

Acknowledging the truth of what happened is essential as a first step, followed by admissions of wrongdoing if there is to be any healing and reconciliation. Any meeting that avoids truth and accountability is simply another way to prolong injustice.

As most people know, the Anuak Justice Council was created as an organization following the massacre of the Anuak with the goals of advocating for the respect of their human rights and in order to see the perpetrators brought to justice. The Anuak in Gambella are not the only ones affected but the Anuak Sudanese and the Anuak who live in the Diaspora have also been greatly impacted by what happened.

The pain felt by those in Gambella is the same pain being felt by Anuak worldwide. It has never gone away because those who have committed crimes against humanity have never been brought to justice or even admitted to the crimes. Not only that, many, especially the children, are still traumatized by the terror they witnessed when they saw their fathers or brothers hacked to death and executed in front of them. The widows of many of the slain still do not know the location of the mass graves of their husbands.

No one has explained why the Anuak were killed and who gave the orders from the top. Most of the people believe, including the former governor who was there, that the current government of Meles was responsible or his troops, but no one has been brought to justice other than a few that we all know are being scapegoated.

For instance, where are the two Ethiopian commanders who were in charge of Gambella who allegedly were the ones who ordered the troops to kill? They later disappeared as documented in the Human Rights Watch and Genocide Watch investigative reports. Other perpetrators within the military and security forces who were accused by the witnesses have never brought to justice and now you never hear about them anymore.

We in the AJC say that anyone who has been accused of being involved in the massacre, should be brought to justice regardless of who he is and whether or not he is an Anuak. Much evidence exists that Omot Obang Olum has betrayed his people over time.

- Consistently, investigations completed by Human Rights Watch, Genocide Watch, Survivors' Rights and other witness statements give evidence that Omot Obang Olum provided the names of those Anuak to be killed and was involved in other aspects of the planning.
- In October of 2005, many believe he was responsible for the arrest of former Governor Mr. Okello Negllo and for forty-five other Anuak who were then imprisoned in Addis Ababa for five years.
- He is believed to be responsible for the arrest, detention and torture of many other Anuak leading up to the massacre and in the many months following.
- While governor, countless extra-judicial killings, rapes and beatings were carried out by the ENDF with impunity in the Gambella region.
- Many Anuak are still languishing in jails, detention centers and prisons in the region.
- He appears to be highly trusted by the Woyane government and continues to be feared by the Anuak. Because of his acts against the Anuak, at one time, he discharged his Anuak bodyguards and replaced them with TPLF fighters.

All of this evidence points to the conclusion that he is guilty; however, he deserves a genuine trial in a fair and just court of law regarding his many suspected crimes. It would also be his chance to attempt to provide any evidence to the contrary before his accusers, but it is unlikely any real justice will be carried out in Gambella or elsewhere in Ethiopia. Regardless, Omot Obang Olum is not the right ambassador to come to the Anuak until justice is served.

This man cannot sweep all of this under the carpet. He is not the one to talk about development and this is not the time. What the Anuak have been waiting for since the massacre is to find out the truth regarding (1) who killed the Anuak, (2) who ordered the killing, (3) why were they killed and (4) why their killers have never been brought to justice. These are the issues that the Anuak should be talking about and if he comes, these are the topics he should address.

We are not surprised with his intent to tempt Anuak to forget about the genocide and to “work with this government.” That is what the government propaganda reported after the last meeting, that the Anuak wanted to work with the government. This is his intent to make it look like the Anuak are ready to be quiet about their pain and losses and to act as if everything is now okay in Gambella. If he cared about the Anuak, he should be meeting the Anuak in Sudan, in Kenya and in Gambella or exploring ways to give adequate reparations. He should care about the Anuak who are still suffering in the region.

For him to look at the Anuak in the Diaspora for a solution when he should first be dealing with those close by appears to be another diversionary tactic by the EPRDF. We won't fall for this game. The priority should not be to come to Minnesota, but if here, the priority should not be development and investment but he should talk about the injustices committed, apologize and then offer what he and the Woyane government will do about it—not only for the Anuak, but also for others in the region and in the country. Anything less is not enough.

As we have said it before, we stand for justice, whether now or later. The AJC is working for the justice for all Ethiopians because we believe justice will not come to the Anuak or others in Gambella, until it comes to all. We call others to stand with the Anuak who oppose the coming of this man. Divide and conquer politics of single, isolated groups dealing with only their own issues with the Woyane, must end for they will not bring a sustainable justice.

We are speaking against him and call others to stand with us until all the killers of the innocent are brought to justice. We will never rest unless justice comes to all Ethiopians whose precious lives have been taken away and whose blood has been split for no other reason than for speaking up for their God given rights. We will never rest until those people who are still in prison, guilty of nothing but the hunger for a country where there is freedom, peace, stability and prosperity. Until they are freed, we are not going to rest.

We call Anuak and all Ethiopians from east to west and from the north to the south. May the blood of those people who died unify us as one while together we fight to free our country. May their blood be the rain that creates fertile ground so that new life can emerge. May their deaths help us to stand together as one to create a new Ethiopia where we are proud of our ethnicity but most of all, we are connected by our humanity

This is a moral stand for truth and justice. Let us put aside all that might separate or distract us and stand together as one. May God empower and guide us!

For more information please contact Mr. Obang Metho, by email at: Obang@anuakjustice.org
