

## **Testimony to the House of Commons of the United Kingdom in Collaboration with the Third World Solidarity regarding Ethiopia**

**Mr. Obang O. Metho  
Executive Director,  
Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia**

### **“Ethiopia Uncovered: Genocide, Massive Atrocities, Injustice and Dictatorship in Ethiopia—What are the Remedies?”**

**June 16, 2009**

**Mr. Chairman Dave Anderson, Honorable Members of the Parliament and Members of the Third  
World Solidarity:**

Thank you for inviting me to testify on Ethiopia today. I request that my statement be submitted into the record in its entirety.

I first would like to thank the honorable Members of the Parliament and the Chairman of Third World Solidarity, David Anderson, other esteemed members of Third World Solidarity: Councillor; Mushtaq Lasharie, Secretary; Saundra Satterlee, Sabra Mohammed and Kefale Alemu and many other members who cannot mention, who collaborated in organizing this critical meeting focused on the struggle of the Ethiopian people for peace, justice and democratic rights in Ethiopia.

I also thank the many other esteemed attendees who are present—diplomats, members of human rights and civic organizations, the media, friends of Ethiopia and my fellow Ethiopians. It is indeed a privilege to stand before you today to speak to you about the grave human rights situation in Ethiopia.

This is a milestone event for Ethiopians, made possible through Third World Solidarity, whose remarkable vision of trying to solve some of the most serious problems in the world through dialogue, have led them to advocate for many people whose voices would otherwise be unheard. I believe it is this kind of institution we need to make this world a more peaceful and just place.

It is also an honor to speak in the House of Commons, to law makers who represent one of the greatest countries in the world. Your love of freedom, justice and democratic rights has made your country a beacon of hope for many in the world, including Ethiopians who are seeking the same dignity of life for Ethiopia that is found and treasured here in the United Kingdom.

## **December 13, 2003 is the day when I learned how fragile and unstable the world is around us**

Let me introduce myself. My name is Obang Metho and before I start the main part of my talk, I would like to give you some background on who I am, how I became involved in human rights in Ethiopia and what I and others are doing to bring justice, peace and human rights to Ethiopia through a new organization we recently launched, the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, of which I am the executive director. Coincidentally, our name alone shows we have something in common with Third World Solidarity and yet, we may share an even broader goal of building a universal solidarity of “human beings;” grounded in equality, justice, freedom and prosperity.

I am currently a Canadian citizen. I grew up in Gambella, in the lowland region of southwestern Ethiopia, a member of a tiny, marginalized ethnic group called Anuak. We Anuak, along with other ethnic groups in the region were pretty much left alone until the discovery of petroleum in 2002. Gambella has had many undeveloped resources; however, because of the lack of infrastructure, hot climate and malaria, little was done to make use of them; that is, until December of 2003 when plans were made to develop the petroleum reserves found there earlier.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that December 13, 2003 is the day when I learned how fragile and unstable the world is around us. This was the day when my phone started ringing with many calls coming from friends, relatives and work colleagues of mine from Gambella where I had been working through a development organization I had begun in 2001. On this day, the same government who was supposed to protect the people, unleashed violence through its military troops using guns and local militia groups they incited and equipped with machetes and axes to kill Anuak leaders in Gambella town.

Using a prepared list with the names of those Anuak who were allegedly opposed to the development of petroleum reserves on indigenous land, with little or no input from the people, they went through town, chanting, “Today is the day to kill Anuak.” They went in mobs, accompanied by soldiers. They burned down homes, forcing occupants to run out and then brutally massacred mostly men in front of their families, sometimes raping the women first; chanting, “Now you will have no more Anuak babies.” Within three days, 424 Anuak were killed and much of the infrastructure was looted and destroyed—homes, crops, schools, health clinics and wells. Extra-judicial killing, rape, disappearances, arbitrary detentions, beatings and torture continued for many months afterwards. Nearly 10,000 Anuak fled to Sudan for safety.

I do not want to describe any more of the details, for you will see some of this in the seven minute video which I will soon show to you. This video will also be sent to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as well as the ICC. The horrific events of December 13, 2003 and following, is what led me and others to form the Anuak Justice Council in an attempt to protect the lives and well being of the Anuak people.

## **The Anuak were not alone in their suffering**

When we started, the Anuak were fighting alone against this regime; but later on we came to realize that the Anuak were not alone in their suffering, but that there were many more people—from different ethnicities, different regions, different religions and different groups—being killed throughout Ethiopia under the authority of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his government; all with impunity.

We also learned that what happened to the marginalized Anuak in the remote places of Ethiopia was spreading to the more open places and mainstream groups on the streets of Addis Ababa when 197 election protestors were shot and killed following the flawed Ethiopian National Election of 2005. These were innocent people, who if it had become necessary, could have been peaceably controlled through other harmless ways. Instead, they were killed by shots to the head by the same troops that were supposed to protect them—like in Gambella, in the Oromia region, in the Afar region, in Awassa, in Teppi, in the Amhara region, and in Benishangul-Gumuz

Right now in the Ogaden region of southeastern Ethiopia, the people are in acute danger of survival due to massive atrocities being carried out by the same troops who committed atrocities to the Anuak in Gambella. These acts continue and include extra-judicial killings, widespread disappearances, rape, beatings, torture, destruction of homes, property and even cattle, the poisoning of wells and the displacement of countless numbers from their homes and villages leading to harsh conditions and more death.

An atmosphere of terror exists as people perform the daily tasks of life, never knowing if they will encounter troops that will kill, rape, beat, torture, detain or cause them to simply “disappear.” Under the guise of “counter-insurgency” anyone can be shot for merely “looking suspicious.” A year ago, an official from the UN called the humanitarian crisis in the Ogaden and into Somalia, where Ethiopian troops were committing similar atrocities, “the worst humanitarian crisis in the world—a silent Darfur.”

It does not end there, for these massive human rights violations are affecting the stability of Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea as they fight proxy wars and align with different power holders to defeat another. Shady deals between Meles and the ICC indicted criminal, Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, over land and reports of cooperation in fomenting ethnic conflicts, work to undermine the overall peace in Ethiopia and in the Horn.

Ethiopia, the second largest country in Africa, with a population of 80 million people, is strategic to not only the Horn of Africa and Africa; but also to the Middle East and the world. Some of these neighbors—Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia—are some of the most politically unstable and impoverished countries in the world; holding some of the most abysmal records of human rights violations against their own people, creating a hotbed of ongoing conflict and regional instability.

Ethiopia is set in the center of the Horn and plays a pivotal role in much of what happens in the Horn, but to its detriment. If peace, justice and prosperity is to come to the Horn of Africa, we can no longer ignore Ethiopia's part in stirring up hostilities and undermining peace in one of the biggest trouble spots in the world. An example is his invasion of Somalia where according to Human Rights Watch, he is committing crimes against humanity and war crimes.

As we in the Anuak Justice Council began to look at all this suffering and all of these incidents throughout the country and in the Horn and as we saw how this government purposely fomented division and conflict between the people in order to maintain control, we realized that the battle for justice cannot be won alone—by one human rights organization, by one region or by one ethnic group. It would require the whole of Ethiopian society or even the unity of people in the Horn, to stand together in solidarity to stop tyranny.

Where tyranny has been brought down throughout the world, it has been through the solidarity of the people. In this case, we realized we needed to create a grassroots movement of Ethiopian people that would embrace our differences of ethnicity, color, religion, gender, regional background, political view and any other difference that had been separating us into divided and alienated groups. We had been ineffectively fighting against the same enemy for our own groups without recognizing how we could better empower all of us to move forward if we could come together.

### **Lack of morality is injustice.**

The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE) was founded on the principles of “humanity before ethnicity” and “no one will be free until all are free” as a means to bring about justice, peace and the respect for human rights through valuing each other as precious people, each of us created in the image of God and accountable before God to give justice to others, even if we manage to escape accountability before the courts for crimes done.

A society where there is no justice is a society where there is no morality. Lack of morality is injustice. To conquer the evil things in our society and world, it will require morality and living out these principles of putting **humanity before ethnicity** and valuing the justice, peace and freedom of others because **no one will be free until all are free**. When we act with true morality, it extends to all human kind, without limitations or boundaries imposed by “arbitrary lines of demarcation.” These could be national boundaries or differences of color, creed or class.

On the negative side, neither does injustice have boundaries; for power, greed and envy rarely respect such lines and limits. The reason we are here at this time is to build solidarity between groups like Third World Solidarity, the British House of Commons, the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, the Ethiopian people and other freedom-loving people. We need to take a moral stand, the likes of what Wilber Wilberforce did in this same British House of Commons a hundred years ago. We need to look back for a valuable lesson for today. He first stood up alone, with few supporters, when his conscience could no longer accept the evils of the slave trade.

He challenged his colleagues who were first resistant because they were entrenched in a system that benefited from the exploitation of others; but enough of them eventually joined with him and defeated slavery. It happened right here. Because they stood together in solidarity against slavery, we can see it as a bad stain of the past rather than as part of our present world.

We need that kind of Wilberforce courage today to take meaningful steps against genocide, human rights atrocities, injustice, corruption, the looting of countries and repressive dictatorships and their outside partners, all of which exploit the people. If we do this now, some future generation can look back at this time as simply a bad stain of the past that was finally changed rather than of the reality of their day. It is our time and our chance. What we do today, will shape who we are tomorrow.

### **Calling for Meles to face justice at the ICC**

A few years back, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia won the approval of world leaders like former Prime Minister Tony Blair and former President Bill Clinton who thought him to be “a new breed of African leader.” He won entrance into the mainstream of world leaders as he spoke of democracy, the rule of law, free elections and development. He became a strategic partner in the “War on Terror” and was even recently invited—as head of NEPAD—to take part in the G-20 when it was held here in April. At the same time, Ethiopians rallied in the streets of London, calling for Meles to face justice at the ICC rather than recognition at the G-20.

In March, just prior to the G-20, Dr. Gregory Stanton, President of Genocide Watch, wrote a letter to the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights recommending that an investigation be launched into the massive human rights abuses going on in Ethiopia due to evidence collected during multiple human rights field investigations by such groups as Genocide Watch, Survivors’ Rights International, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and the International Human Rights Clinic of Harvard that documented a continuing pattern of atrocities against civilians that according to Dr. Stanton, met the stringent definitions of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes; reportedly being perpetrated with impunity at the hands of the Ethiopian military and those who authorized such acts in the highest offices in the country.

The majority of Ethiopians will tell you that the Ethiopian people are fighting their own “War on Terror” against their own terrorist group, the Meles regime. Unless the truth is not only uncovered, but acted upon by people of moral courage, this pattern of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes will not end.

Do not expect anything but denials, lies and cover-ups from this government who is very sensitive about its public image and maintaining easy access to financial aid from international partners like the UK who expect improvements in human rights and democracy. Yet, at the same time, as resistance grows, PM Zenawi is becoming increasingly authoritarian in order to maintain control of a country of millions of people via a decreasing number of “trusted” party loyalists.

Many of us present here today know that this is a repressive regime that was not elected by the people. You also may know of the arrest of the popular political opposition leader, Ms. Birtukan Mideksa, who has done nothing wrong but take a courageous stand for truth. Yet, as a popular opponent, she has now been sentenced to life imprisonment and has been in solitary confinement since December of 2008. There are thousands of others like her who have been detained. These include journalists, activists, dissidents and any others who dare speak out against this illiberal regime.

There is no freedom of expression and all media outlets are under the scrutiny and control of the tentacles of Meles leadership. The Internet is blocked, mobile phone usage among the lowest in Africa and text messaging very limited. Spies are everywhere, even in the Diaspora and probably here in this room. Party membership is required for educational opportunities, business licenses, jobs and even fertilizers in a country of starving people.

Land cannot be owned, but yet this regime is practically “giving it away” in easy, long-term leases to party loyalists and outsiders, with little benefit to the people. Some of this land includes protected wildlife areas in Gambella and virgin forests that are now being cut down; something that will have long-term effects.

### **The values upon which the West was founded, are prohibited in Ethiopia**

The Ethiopian public, if given a chance, are ready to choose the government that they want, just like the people of Britain are able to freely do; but, they cannot do it alone. If they insist on freedom of political choice, they face intimidation, imprisonment or the barrel of the gun. If politically charged for a trumped up crime, there is no hope of a fair trial through the justice system that is totally controlled by party heads. The same conditions exist regarding the election board and all other aspects of society.

If you look at the overall system, the values upon which the West was founded, are prohibited in Ethiopia; however, one of the most disturbing things; not only to me, but to other Ethiopians, is that these very same western governments, including the British government, continue to pour aid money into the country, financially supporting the continuation of this regime of terror. This is something we have to stop and it will take the same kind of moral conviction and courage of Wilburforce that led him and others in Great Britain to end the slave trade. Is there such will today in this room?

Ethiopians are not asking members of the House of Commons to do it for them or free them, but they are asking you to not become a roadblock to the Ethiopian people by supplying this regime with their life blood which is the aid money. I have been told that if thirty parliament members can agree on this issue, they could pass a motion to deal with Ethiopia. Ethiopia has become a dumping ground where there is no rule of law, no justice and where morality is unwelcome.

### **The UK has the leverage in their hands to negotiate before it is too late.**

In the Oromia area of Ethiopia, a British tannery company is partnering with Ethiopians in dumping toxic wastes into the lakes, rivers and water systems, poisoning and killing Ethiopians, sometimes many in one family. Do parliamentarians know about this? It would never be tolerated in the UK. The violators would be found accountable. Why should it be tolerated in Ethiopia just because there is no law and no protection from the government of the people? This should be investigated.

Ethiopians are ready and expecting those in the free world, who have been holding up the value of democracy to the rest of the world, to join with the people rather than their dictator. If it does not happen, the Ethiopian public is determined to do something. If those preaching democracy from western countries do not support the peaceful struggle of the people, what may very likely happen is that some Ethiopians will believe they have no other option than to pick up arms.

The momentum for an armed struggle is gathering already and with it comes the destruction of lives, property and the creation of more chaos. How will this affect Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn? It is in the interest of the free world to stand with Ethiopians in bringing about a peaceful transition to real democracy. The UK has the leverage in their hands to negotiate before it is too late.

You may be from the first world, the free world, but we are all the same. Human hope and endurance can end and with it comes a time when some will say that life is not worth living in this way anymore. When that happens, violence could break out in the Horn and the outcome may be unthinkable. We will then be forced to deal with it if we do not deal with it now. Be on the side of the people, not the dictator. If you look at the terrible conflicts in this world, they are always worsened when people do not deal with them at the more controllable states; but if action is taken and reasonable controls put into place before it worsens, disaster can be averted. The time is now.

### **The suffering of other people should be our suffering.**

The Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia is willing to work with anyone for the betterment of not only Ethiopia, but for the betterment of the entire Horn of Africa because we realize until we are all free in Ethiopia and in the Horn, we will not be free. Until all Africans are free, we will not be free. Until there is peace in the “third world places” and anywhere else on this globe, we will not be free. The insecurity and lack of peace in this world affects all of us.

As I speak to those of you in this room, we know that many of us are different from another based on our citizenship or by our birthplace; but one thing for sure; we are all citizens of this earth. We are all unified by our humanity. Our citizenship may be different, but our humanity is the same. The suffering of other people should be our suffering. Pursuing our own happiness should also be extended to others in generosity. We depend on fellow human beings, so when one is affected all of us are. None of us are free until all are free. The world will not have true freedom, until there is freedom in every corner of the earth.

Let us be freedom fighters against injustice and let us be people who when we see evil, injustice and wrong, we take action. We only hope that you will stand by the side with the Ethiopian people like you have done with so many others. Help them to have the peace and justice that they deserve.

What makes us to be human beings is emotion that can cause us to have feelings of compassion towards other people. If we do things with compassion and morality, we do less harm towards others; without such constraints, we can cause great harm and injustice. The average Ethiopian would not have immigrated to Great Britain, seeking justice if they had not be yearning for it in their own country. Just help by standing with them for justice as they are trying to choose a different kind of government and bring about a New Ethiopia.

Before the slave trade was outlawed, it was legal and a boon to the economy, but what caused England to lead the way to abolish it? This is what we are searching for in 2009. Government bodies like the House of Commons, are made up of people who at certain pivotal times of human history, have had the moral convictions to stand against an entrenched system that exploits some to the benefit of others.

Wherever “deals” are being made with the Zenawi’s of this world, one can be sure there are victims at the other end. It is a humanity issue and we hope this great country that ended the slave trade, will find the moral courage, to again rise up to do whatever you can to end this brutal system of genocide, massive atrocities, injustice and dictatorship in Ethiopia!

Can we count on you? May God give us the ability not only to care for our family members or our own citizens, but instead to care for the citizens of humanity! Thank you!

## Recommended Actions:

---

1. Due to the ongoing pattern of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in the Ogaden and into Somalia that have gone on with impunity, urge the ICC to investigate these crimes committed under leadership of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi.
2. Do not accept statements and explanations made by the Meles regime without investigation and without talking to third parties on the ground; especially being a country where everything, including the media, is controlled by the government; for example, a highly respected UK-based organization, Amnesty International and US-based Human Rights Watch and others, including the US State Department’s own Human Rights Report, have been discredited by this regime despite extensive documentation to the contrary.
3. Assign a task force to investigate use of UK financial aid to Ethiopia and follow through with appropriate action for any misuse and/or crimes committed by individuals, organizations or the government. Reports indicate that more money is flowing out of the country into foreign banks, including in the UK, allegedly by some of the elite in the TPLF government, than is being given in aid.

4. Take action to ensure aid is not misused in future, avoiding general, non-designated aid where there is little transparency and accountability
5. Stop providing aid that will empower the military apparatus of this regime to terrorize its own people and commit further human rights crimes.
6. Support movements that endeavor to bring greater political space that will lead to free and fair elections.
7. Exert diplomatic pressure to release political prisoners, restore free speech, freedom of media, freedom of assembly and other basic rights.
8. Investigate Meles' role in fomenting crisis, human rights violations and instability in the Horn of Africa
9. Use your leverage as a major donor country to Ethiopia to cooperate with the EU and other donors to call for real, sustainable change.
10. Investigate British-based companies that exploit the lack of the rule of law in Ethiopia carrying out unethical business practices such as leasing at almost no cost, indigenous or protected land without consultation or compensation of the people; sometimes causing loss of livelihood, environmental damage and even loss of life like is alleged to be occurring to Lake Koka in the Oromia region of the country as well as in many other regions of the country. The people cannot depend on their own government to protect them.
11. Expect that under the right leadership, it should not take years for Ethiopia to quickly progress to become a more vibrant democracy with a more reconciled people and a more robust economy where Ethiopia can free itself from its overwhelming dependence on other nations to meet its basic needs and instead, become more equal partners with other nations.