



**SMNE's Responses to the following statements by the Chief
Executive Officer of the Karuturi Global Ltd,
Mr. Sai Ramakrishna Karuturi:**

November 10, 2010

1. *No one has been displaced.
2. They chose Gambella as it is relatively thinly-populated. He said like in Nevada you can drive 100 kms without seeing anyone. If they had chosen the shores of Lake Tana in heavily-populated Amhara then the 'land grab' critics would be justified.
3. *Ethiopia has 80 million hectares of arable land and only 12 cultivated. Foreign investment is needed to add the 3 million more the gov't is targeting. "What is the argument" when so much money will enter the economy?
4. *There was discussion of relocation of the people of Elliah [Ilea] - the only settlement in the farm area - but the company did not want this. 5.
5. Elliah's residents have been provided mosquito nets and electricity and live in "perfect communion" with the farm.

1. No one has been displaced.

The land has been taken over by Karuturi, but the clearing and cultivation is still in the beginning stages. *Many people have been told that they should expect to be removed from their homes and land during the dry season which has just begun, but many of these have not yet been forced to leave. Reportedly, they have been told that they can move themselves now or later be taken to a resettlement village.*

This is the case not in Ilea, but also in other areas around the Openo (Baro) River, and also in other districts; namely, Abobo, Jor, Dimma, Gog and Goderie whose local district and village leaders have received a similar mandate to be resettled elsewhere by officials sent from the regional and federal government. *Most of the people in these villages are refusing to cooperate; saying they will never leave their homes and land; however, Ethiopian military troops have become more prevalent in the area and people are fearful that these troops will use force to evict them. Two weeks ago, a young man was arrested in Abobo because some government officials assumed he was advising the elders not to leave their homes and land.*

Another highly sensitive issue is the fact that Karuturi has cleared Anuak burial ground that they have taken over; causing anger to simmer right beneath the surface. People cannot openly express their outrage due to fear of punitive actions on the part of the government; however, such an absence of public protest should in no way be reconstructed into thinking there is public approval of these land grabs. All of these issues have taken place without any input from the local people who have almost no information on what is going on even though it greatly impacts their lives and futures. Although Karuturi has commented about providing some kind of compensation to the people, no compensation has been given or even discussed with them.

- 2. They chose Gambella as it is relatively thinly-populated. He said like in Nevada you can drive 100 kms without seeing anyone. If they had chosen the shores of Lake Tana in heavily-populated Amhara then the 'land grab' critics would be justified.**

This would never happen in the Tigray region that this ethnic-based government favors so why is it permitted in other parts of the country? You can say that the land is not cultivated—and there are many reasons for that—however, the land still belongs to the people of Ethiopia and in Gambella—to the indigenous people.

Karuturi is doing business with an unelected and illegitimate government that took power by force, manipulation and corruption. The Ethiopian people do not consider them the rightful negotiators of their national assets; particularly while they are forced into silence by one of the most brutal dictatorships in Africa.

The people of Gambella should be welcome at the negotiation table instead of being excluded and kept in the dark. It is like someone walking into your house and saying your house is too big for you so I'll take these rooms over without consulting you and giving you any benefits. Is this right? This is why it is a land grab and justifies the criticism.

When I use the term “land grab” it means you “grabbed something” that was not rightfully yours without consulting the rightful owners. Is it not “land grabbing” when you exploit the vulnerability of people living under a repressive system where any protest is criminalized?

This is the Neo-colonization of Africa. If what is going on in Gambella was happening in New Delhi, India; in Oxford, England; in Bismarck, North Dakota; in Saskatoon, Canada; this would be unthinkable. If it is not allowed in these places, why is it justified in Ethiopia? Wrong is wrong! Just because the people are not educated or because, for a time, they are being controlled by a self-serving kleptocrat; it still does not make it okay to carry on such unethical business practices.

If one of the local Gambellans went to India and took over that much land without consultation with the people; would Indians be silent? This is a repeat of the Berlin conference where western colonizers met together; divvying up portions of Africa for themselves without ever including the Africans in the decision making.

- 3. Ethiopia has 80 million hectares of arable land and only 12 cultivated. Foreign investment is needed to add the 3 million more the gov't is targeting. "What is the argument" when so much money will enter the economy?**

Who is looking out for the best interests of the people? *It is certainly not the leadership of Ethiopia; nor is it a company like Karuturi who denies the truth of the injustice carried out in their name.*

If these deals are truly in the interest of Ethiopians, why is it all so hidden? If the people of Gambella are to benefit, why are the people of Gambella not in charge in any way? The same question can be asked of similar deals being executed in Benishangul-Gumuz, in the Southern Nations, in the Afar region, in Oromiya, in the Amhara region and elsewhere in the country—why are the people not consulted?

Secondly, no Ethiopians have confidence in ever benefiting from these deals, but instead see it as robbing them of their and their children's future as their land is being leased for up to 99 years. This is more than a lifetime for most. Will this land always be “under-utilized” or could Ethiopians develop their own land in 5, 10, 20 or 50 years if they had a government that actually invested in the people; advancing agriculture in a freer market economy where people could actually own land?

Ethiopians have seen how little aid has ever made it to its destination and believe that this investment will again benefit only a select few. *How will Ethiopians reap benefits from such economic development when they are already excluded from any decision-making? Instead, it is highly unlikely that the fruits of these land grabs will ever make it beyond the pockets of Meles, his cronies and those foreign partners willing to make these secret, backdoor deals.*

4. There was discussion of relocation of the people of Elliah - the only settlement in the farm area - but the company did not want this.

They can say this now; however, it is only temporary as Karuturi has “claims” on land now that government officials assert will require the relocation of the people. *Either Karuturi is not being told the “real” story or they are denying what is happening on the ground. In other words, if Karuturi was not there, this upcoming forced relocation would not be necessary. Ilea is only one place where this is happening as there are many more villages in the region being potentially impacted. It is not only affecting the Anuak, but some of the villages inhabited by the Nuer and Manjangir people are also targeted. Why is there no transparency? Why is there no honest discussion with the people? Karuturi may say they did not approve such resettlement, but the truth is that the people are being told they must be moved. No dates are set yet, but they know it is to happen in the near future.*

5. Ilea’s [Elliah's] residents have been provided mosquito nets and electricity and live in "perfect communion" with the farm.

This is false. Reports from the ground adamantly deny any knowledge of such improvements in a community where such news would be widely known. There is no electricity. Mosquito nets have not been distributed. As of November 9, 2010, the only bore hole being drilled for water was located within the Karuturi compound. Karuturi has told some that the local people can come inside the compound to use the water if they wanted to do so; however, if the water was supposed to bring the “farmers” in “perfect communion” with Karuturi, why are there no bore holes for access to water outside a compound that potentially could easily be closed off to the public for a multitude of reasons?

Karuturi has promised to bring health clinics, clean water and other benefits to the people but so far; *there is no sign or mention of any of this according to reports from the local people.*

What does “perfect communion” mean when peoples’ homes and farmland are being taken? What does this mean when burial grounds are being cleared? What does this mean when the people have never been consulted? What does this mean when the people say they will refuse to leave their homes for resettlement camps? Such a statement is strictly a denial of reality; flimsily supported only through the propaganda of government officials.

The people of Gambella live in a repressive climate where most all are afraid to speak out for fear of arrest, detentions, beatings or extra-judicial killings; all of which have taken place in the last year as Karuturi and others have endeavored to force this plan on the people.

The Anuak have already endured one genocide in 2003 at the hands of this TPLF/EPRDF government as they eliminated any leaders who might oppose the development of the oil reserves in the region. *No one knows what will happen this time, but Karuturi should reassess their approach if they truly seek such “perfect communion!”*=====

For more information please contact Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the SMNE.

Phone: 202 725-1616

Email: obang@solidaritymovement.org

Website: www.solidaritymovement.org

Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE), a grassroots social justice movement of diverse Ethiopians; committed to bringing truth, justice, freedom, equality, reconciliation, accountability and respect for human and civil rights to the people of Ethiopia and beyond.