

April 7, 2011

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**Open Letter to Mr. Haile Mariam Dessaegn,  
Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Ethiopia:**

**Dear Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Haile Mariam Dessaegn,**

On behalf of the Anuak Community Association of North America (ACANA), the Anuak Women's Association, the Anuak Youth Association, the Anuak Community in Kenya, the Anuak Community in Sudan, the Anuak Community in Canada, the Anuak Churches Council in USA, the Anuak Community in Australia, the Anuak Community in Europe and Anuak Justice Council (AJC), together, we are writing this notice of intended action to you in defense of the Anuak and other people of Gambella, whose land is being forcibly taken from them.

For over two years now, we have been calling on the EPRDF for a change of policy related to these land-grabs. We do not oppose investment that includes input from the local people in the decision-making and which brings benefit to the people; however, you have confiscated ancestral land, have failed to consult with the local people and have kept secret the details of land-lease agreements extending up to 99-years that will impact the people of Gambella for generations to come. Instead of listening, the EPRDF has intensified the rate, numbers and breadth of these transactions; all of which has reached an intolerable level.

In response to this and on behalf of the Anuak whom we represent both here in the Diaspora and those living in Gambella whose voices have been silenced, we are giving official written notice to the current EPRDF government and to you as its Deputy Prime Minister to our strong objections to these land development schemes being carried out in the Gambella region of Ethiopia and demand that they cease until further investigation, assessment and agreement can be reached.

We view these land-leasing agreements to be flagrant violations of the Ethiopian Constitution, the Ethiopian rule of law, international laws involving indigenous land rights and international human rights laws. Based on this, we request a full investigation of these past, current and pending transactions for their compliance with these laws; utilizing independent legal consultants and other experts in order to avoid future liabilities, penalties and losses to investors, consequences to the EPRDF government, hardship to the people and other avoidable problems. We will provide representatives of the Anuak interests in this matter as we believe the EPRDF has committed egregious wrongs and illegalities against the Anuak and other people of Gambella.

More specifically, based on these laws, we challenge the very foundational authority that forces the Anuak and other people of Gambella to leave, homes, land, crops, villages, forests, access to water and grazing land and other assets behind to free the land for long-term land-leasing agreements at give-away prices to foreign investors as well as to Ethiopian investors; all done without consulting the people or providing any compensation as required by law. Residents are then told to build new homes in resettlement areas. The EPRDF government admits that three-quarters of the people of Gambella—45,000 households—will be resettled in a large scale “villagization project” that has already begun.

The resettlement is called “voluntary” and is supposed to be a means to access improved services—schools, clean water, health care and the like; but in reality, services have not materialized and anyone who does not agree willingly can face the barrel of a gun. Despite the government’s denial of this, we all know the truth as we have families and communities experiencing this first hand.

The fact that we in the Diaspora must confront this issue on behalf of the local Gambella people on the ground bears witness to the widespread fear that has silenced most residents and prevented them from speaking openly about the forced nature of these land-grabs. Those who protest; even when following government protocol, can face grave repercussions—including intimidation, harassment, loss of employment, beatings, imprisonment and extrajudicial killings.

The regional governor of Gambella, Omot Obang Olum, is working for the federal government and cannot speak for us; therefore, on behalf of the people of Gambella, we declare our willingness to speak on their behalf; making clearly known our opposition to these land deals and forced evictions from ancestral land; seeing them as clear violation to the laws of Ethiopia.

If no redress is provided at this time, once the now- absent rule of law is restored to Ethiopia, this serves as a written warning from the people of Gambella that these investments will not be binding and that those transacting them will be held accountable. If you continue to proceed without restraint; resistance or rebellion may result as people rise up to defend the right to their homes and land.

We, representing the people of Gambella, seek to avoid that in every way possible through peaceful legal processes and negotiations; however, if the EPRDF refuses and illegally and immorally continues this policy, it is the EPRDF who will be at fault for violating the legal rights of the people.

Please review this matter among yourselves and respond to us at the earliest possibility. We seek a resolution to this urgent and highly critical issue.

We appeal to God for His strength, guidance and help to bring about justice in this matter, as He rules over nations and cares about the oppression of His people. May His will be done and may His name be honored!

The Anuak of the Diaspora on behalf of the Silenced People of Gambella

**For further details and information, please contact:**

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