



Press Release

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Allegations of Corruption Emerge Against Federal Government Examiners as they Investigate the Corruption of the Gambella Regional President, Mr. Omot Obang Olom, and His Administration

Who is more corrupt, the TPLF/EPRDF Federal Examiners, the President of the region or both?

In a yet unfolding drama involving the TPLF/EPRDF evaluation hearing surrounding allegations of corruption and mismanagement of the Gambella Regional Government under the current president, Omot Obang Olom, new allegations have now emerged accusing these same Ethiopian Federal government examiners of their own corruption in the execution of this hearing.

On December 27, 2011, senior officials in the regional administration and federal party officials initiated a hearing, which still has not concluded. Leading the meeting are two representatives from the EPRDF's federal office in Addis Ababa, Mr. Zemedie Zemedkun and Mr. Alebachew Nigussie, a high-ranking political advisor.

The official reason given for the hearing was to probe the performance of the regional administration and the Gambella Peoples Unity Democratic Movement (GPUDM) in matters of development and good governance, but from early on, most observers recognized the underlying intent of the hearing was to fire key regional authorities from their posts, including Mr. Omot Obang Olom who according to official protocol, held both the position as president of the region and as chair of the GPUDM.

Over the last weeks, the federal examiners have essentially removed Mr. Omot from his position, but then in a stunning reversal, they suddenly reinstated him to his former position as president for at least six more months. Others, like the Vice Chair of the GPUDM, deputy administrator of the region, Guaner Yer, and two other executive party members, Kor Powoch and James Deng, were all fired.

For those who do not know, Omot was the Chief of Security during the brutal massacre of the Anuak that began on December 13, 2003. He was accused of providing the list of Anuak to be targeted to TPLF/EPRDF officials. Ethiopian defense troops and militia groups then proceeded to slaughter 424 Anuak in less than three days. Following the massacre, he was awarded the position of regional president/governor, a position he remains in today.

On January 6, one of the federal examiners made a statement during the hearing to the effect that Omot was no longer capable of leading the region and gave specific reasons: 1) his work performance evaluation was graded as "C", essentially a failure to measure up to expected standards, 2) an audit dating back to when he came to power in 2004 revealed that 80 million birr was not accounted for and that was the reason for the lack of development and incidents of ethnic conflict in the region, and 4) the people in the region did not think he was capable of leading the region.

In this discussion, the official also stated that people from Omot's own ethnic were accusing him of providing the list of the Anuak to be targeted because these were the Anuak who most threatened his own power. The man went on to say that for all of these reasons and many more which had been determined from this evaluation, it was no wonder Omot was in nearly an impossible position to continue to lead this region.

Omot, probably sensing this could be the end of him, responded with anger. According to reliable eyewitnesses, with a loud voice, retorted that if this was a plan to get him out of power and to put him in jail that he should not go alone. He threatened that if he had been the one to give the list of those to be killed, it was Meles who provided the troops, the guns and gave the order; that the list by itself would not kill the people. Sources report he then said with defiance, "If I end up going to jail for giving the list, I should go together with Meles who gave the order!"

Omot was then removed from being chairman of the political regional party and all authority to sign any official documents or to do any official business was immediately withdrawn. Authority over the security and his role as head over the Chief of Police was ended. His body guards were removed and others were assigned to watch him. Most of the members of the regional executive board testified against him; however, rather than delivering any final verdict on that Friday, the federal officials of the hearing board said that all parties would be dismissed until Monday morning, January 9th when the hearing would again resume. Most of the people at the hearing believed Omot was done and that on Monday, he would be arrested.

Surprisingly, on Monday, everything abruptly changed. The hearing examiners determined that Omot would continue as the president for six months, although he would no longer be the chair of the party, a position which had always gone to whoever held the position of regional president. His vice president was stripped of any power and was dismissed.

People were shocked by this reversal and as to why the whole tone of the hearing was totally different. It was clear something had happened between the end of Friday's hearing and Monday morning, but only later has information leaked out regarding what it was. *According to inside sources, the decision to depose Omot Obang Olom was reversed by the hearing examiners after wealthy investors, who had bought large tracts of land in the region, and other business persons in town, used their money and influence to pressure and allegedly bribe the examining officials into changing their decision.*

The SMNE has obtained information alleging that key business people had met together to raise money and had come up with almost three million birr (\$175,000 USD) that they allegedly used to bribe three members of the evaluation board. It was said that some of these business people were very close to Omot and that some of them had been involved in the December 13th massacre. These co-conspirators may have had good reason to believe that if Omot went down, they would go with him.

It is alleged that Zemedie and Alebachew, in collaboration with another individual from Addis who is connected to the region, Mr. Bilien, a middle-man between the Federal EPRDF officials and the regional corrupt individuals, subverted the decision, and split the three million birr as a payoff for doing it.

Reportedly, the money was collected by persons who are residents in the region and who are involved in many aspects of business there. Those names reported as alleged conspirators include: Mr. Shewaye Birru, a leader in the business community, Mr. Seyid Negash, a contractor and the right hand man and intimate confidante of Omot Obang, Mr. Tadesse Haileselassie, Omot Obang's security chief as well as the head of the police of the city of Gambella during the 2003 Anuak massacre, someone who human rights investigation have identified as being actively involved in the massacre, Mr. Yasin Belay, a professional in the Gambella regional office, Mr. Desalegn Birru, a Southern Peoples Nations and Nationalities party representative from Kambatha, Mr. Mesfin Gezahegn, an Administration and Finance services department head under Omot Obang and Mr. Sisay Tesfaye, from Fact Ethiopia Logistics, an intimate friend of Omot Obang and someone who was brought up in Ichway, a village just outside of Gambella town.

Reporters also revealed that evidence does exist that Omot Obang has embezzled resources from the region in collaboration with other corrupt individuals in Addis Ababa who may include Mr. Adil Abdella, owner and president of Ethiopis College and Mr. Taye Arsi. Hearing examiners had also brought up accusations that Omot may have received bribes in the form of million-dollar real estate in Addis Ababa from a high-level foreign investor, even mentioning the name of that investor as being Karuturi. He denied it, but they then questioned him as to how he might have otherwise ever afforded such a costly acquisition.

This hearing is not yet concluded so another change of direction is possible; however, it really shows how the region has not been run by the people and how they have no say in what happens. As Omot was reinstated as president for six more months—supposedly for lack of another person who could take over—should the officials not have suggested that the regional representative council should elect a replacement? Yet, that subject never came up. This proves how things work in Ethiopia.

Wikileaks reported Bereket Simon as saying that Ethiopia did not need democracy and this entire process shows what he means. The entire country is run by regime cronies and those in power can get away with anything! No wonder Ethiopia is at the bottom of all indexes and no wonder that the equivalent of \$11.3 billion US dollars has left the country while the majority of Ethiopians live in below the poverty line.

Ironically, as the hearings come to an end, the corrupted process has backfired. In a truly remarkable response, the people of the region have become emboldened and after years of fear and silence, they are finally speaking their minds. For example, the ethnic representative from the Mazenger people who was present at the hearing said that if Omot continues in this position, the Mazengers will not consider him their leader. He then walked out of the meeting.

Another man said that the people of the region do not want Omot Obang Olom for another six months; nor even for the next six hours! An Anuak man spoke out saying it was an insult for the hearing examiners to think there was no one capable of leading the region until they find someone to replace Omot in six months. Another man complained that anyone who challenges Omot loses their job, goes into exile or is arrested. A Nuer man said that now that the vice governor is gone that Omot should go with him because both have failed to lead the region and both should go at the same time!

We do not know the verdict of this hearing, but the verdict of the people is in and the people have rejected Omot Obang Olam. Who is more corrupt, Omot Obang Olom or the TPLF/EPRDF Federal Examiners? Both and both should be held accountable! As we in the SMNE believe, anyone who has spilled the blood of Ethiopians or has stolen the resources of Ethiopians will be held accountable when the New Ethiopia is established!

May God help Ethiopians to start collecting evidence as well as the names of the people who have tortured and abused our fellow Ethiopians. For when the time comes, these individuals will face justice in an international criminal court for those who commit crimes against humanity or in an Ethiopian court for other crimes! May God Almighty bring His justice to Ethiopia!

=====ENDS=====

Please do not hesitate to e-mail your comments to Mr. Obang Metho, Executive Director of the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia. Email: Obang@solidaritymovement.org.