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## Minnesota Ethiopians to Join Pan-Ethnic Washington Protest on Sunday

By Doug McGill

An unlikely, even unprecedented Ethiopian **protest march** will be held in Washington, DC this Sunday, bringing together for the first time members of many diverse Ethiopian ethnic groups.

All of these groups – including members of Ethiopia’s Oromo, Amhara, Tigray, Anuak, Ogaden, and other ethnicities – all say they have suffered brutal economic, military and social repression under the regime Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, which took power in Ethiopia in 1991.

But never before have members of a wide range of civic and political groups joined together in a large-scale march and protest in Washington. Some 20 Ethiopian immigrants living in Minnesota, representing several ethnic groups, will take part in the march, its organizers say.

“Ethiopians from one group or organisation usually don’t talk to others, thinking that the others are causing the problems,” said Ahmed Hussein, an Ethiopian immigrant of Oromo ethnicity from Brooklyn Park, MN who will participate in the Sunday march. “But now everyone is feeling the pain. This government is killing its own people and has no respect for human rights. This march is a way to show that Ethiopians are united against this government.”

The protest leaders of the rally called March For Freedom ([www.march4freedom.org](http://www.march4freedom.org)), which is sponsored by a wide variety of Ethiopian organisations and individuals, say they hope to draw several thousand Ethiopian marchers across a wide spectrum. The marchers will proceed from the White House to Capital Hill under banners reading: “Stop Genocide and Dictatorship in Ethiopia.”

Over the past two weeks, taxicabs with roof-mounted posters bearing the same slogan have been driving around Washington, DC.

Obang Metho, one of the rally organisers, is a member of Ethiopia's dark-skinned Anuak tribe from the western state of Gambella. He was politicized in 2003 when the Ethiopian army killed 425 Anuak people on December 13 of that year, as part of ethnic cleansing of that tribe that has gone on before and since December 13, 2003.

Originally, Metho founded the **Anuak Justice Council** to memorialize the victims of December 13 and to press the international community to bring Meles Zenawi and others in the Ethiopian government to justice for the **genocide** of the Anuak people.

More recently, Metho formed the Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia, whose membership is open to Ethiopians of all ethnicities, because he saw that the Anuak's plight was not unique in Ethiopia. The Oromo, the Amhara, the Ogadeni, the Tigray and members of many other Ethiopian ethnicities have all increasingly tried to draw the world's attention to crimes against humanity committed by the Meles regime.

Especially since the elections of 2005 which were followed by violence against peaceful demonstrators, many human rights groups, social justice groups, and other international organizations have taken notice of the Ethiopian government's actions – some of them publishing lengthy reports detailing thousands of cases of unlawful detention, torture, rape, and extrajudicial killings carried out by uniformed members of the Ethiopian army and related security forces.

For example, Human Rights Watch in 2008 published "**Collective Punishment: War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity in the Ogaden Area of Ethiopia's Somali Region.**" Human Rights watch in 2005 also published "**Targeting the Anuak: Human Rights Violations and Crimes Against Humanity in Ethiopia's Gambella Region.**"

Other groups including the International Committee for the Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, Genocide Watch, and The Advocates for Human Rights have all documented severe human rights abuses, often including crimes against humanity, carried out by the Ethiopian military against the members of many of Ethiopia's ethnic groups.

"In Ethiopia today, people live in terror and fear," Obang Metho said. "The whole country is under siege. It is filled with prisons. No one has been brought to justice and the killer is walking free. This march is not about political issues, it's about survival. We are trying to stop a dictatorship."

A primary goal of the march, Metho said, is to try to influence the United States to change its official policy of friendship and support for Ethiopia, which it considers an ally and as helpful as a base for anti-terrorism operations in the Horn of Africa. In December 2006, the U.S. gave military aid and training to **help Ethiopia crush** the Islamic Courts Union, an Islamist government that controlled Somalia.

"What we are saying to the U.S. taxpayer is, you are killing us," Metho said. "We are saying to the media, your silence is killing us. Where are you?"