



## SMNE Press Release:

### Saudi Star Pakistani Foreign Workers and Ethiopians Killed in Raid on Saudi Farm Compound—Believed Related to Land grabs

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#### ***Indigenous people fear collective retaliation by TPLF/EPRDF Security Forces as was done in the Ogaden after the killing of the Chinese***

On April 28, 2012 at about 5:00 PM, unknown assailants attacked workers at the Saudi Star compound, killing innocent people. *According to what we have heard, a total of ten people or more were killed, with eleven others wounded. Six of the dead were foreigners from Pakistan; allegedly agricultural experts, hired by Saudi Star. The other four were Ethiopians; including an Anuak local police officer defending the workers.*

Apparently, the vehicle and its security agents that regularly picked up workers from the field, returned to the compound where the workers lived in order to drop them off at the end of the day. Once inside the compound and after the people got out of the car, the shooting began. Nobody seems to know if the shooters were from among those people in the car or if they were already inside the compound. There was chaos everywhere and the men with guns ran into the offices where most of these foreigners who were killed had been working.

*According to one eyewitness, there was a shootout between the local Anuak police and the assailants. In that shootout, one of the Anuak police officers was killed. As this was going on, the defense forces were seen running away from the compound rather than staying to defend the people. Most of those who were wounded or killed were inside the gated area. The entire incident lasted less than fifteen minutes.*

The assailants were then seen leaving the compound for the river nearby and the local police remained. The defense forces then came in to pick up the dead and wounded and to seize the compound. Sometime later on, the local police, who actually defended the compound after the defense forces had fled, ended up being the ten persons arrested and blamed for the incident. These are the people the government claims to have in their custody.

We in the **Solidarity Movement for a New Ethiopia (SMNE)** extend our deep condolences to all the families and friends of those people who lost their lives. *Our hearts are saddened by the loss of any human being. Sadly enough, these deaths could have been prevented. Since late 2009, we in the SMNE have been calling for transparency and inclusion of the local people in the decision-making surrounding the long term leasing of agricultural land in Ethiopia to foreign investors and regime cronies for next to nothing.*

*Multiple warnings, reports and investigations revealing the concerns of the people and the associated human rights abuses of the local people by Ethiopian defense forces have gone unheeded.* Instead, the Meles regime has proceeded to forcibly displace the local people from their homes, small farms and villages in order to free up the land for large-scale agricultural farms such as Saudi Star, a 10,000 hectare agricultural rice farm owned by the billionaire Saudi Sheik, Al Amoudi, who plans on exporting all the rice to Saudi Arabia.

*It is not surprising that violence has broken out in Gambella as this extremely fertile southwestern region of Ethiopia has become the epicenter in the world of what is now called “land-grabs.” News came out only last week of Al Amoudi’s plans to divert major amounts of water from the nearby Alwero River to his farms to irrigate his rice fields. Many depend on this water for their survival.*

*Neither the Meles regime, Al Amoudi nor any other investor should expect there to be no reaction to these “takeovers” of land and water sources from the people whose ancestors have claimed this indigenous land for centuries. When they take away land and water, they take away the means to sustain life for the people. Some Anuak have said they now are waiting to die; others will fight. This should not come as a shock to anyone.*

*Because this TPLF regime needs money and because these investors are seen as an important and needed source of that money, the regime has quickly arrested these Anuak police officers, most likely as scapegoats for the crimes in order to quickly assure the investors that the regime has everything under control. At the same time, Meles will crack down on all the people. It is the blueprint of their regime and they have done it many times before. This is who they are. They will still try to hunt down the rebels in the bush, but they will be hard to find so in their frustration and in order to teach all the people a “collective lesson” they will target the local people.*

*Sadly, this TPLF regime is too weak, fearful and set in its self-destructive ways to find solutions and to make the meaningful changes that could reduce resistance. Instead, as they clamp down further and deploy more troops to the region they will build up more support for the resistance.*

Right now, the region is not safe for anyone—not for the people or for the investors and it is not getting better soon. Those from Saudi Star must agree for we have heard that all workers at the Saudi Star compound have been evacuated after this incident. The only thing left there is the machinery. The TPLF/EPRDF defense troops have now been sent to the camp to protect it.

*We call on the Meles regime and Al Amoudi to stop ignoring the rights of the indigenous to their land and to stop targeting the local people with regime-sponsored crimes and terror. These long-term land leases and the deportation of people from their lawful land are all being done in violation of Ethiopian and international laws. We fear that without a reversal of these wrongs, the situation will worsen and it will be the people and the workers who will pay the costs—more human rights abuses, violence, needless death and instability.*

Any violence committed against any people is wrong and we in the SMNE will not support it; yet, the Meles regime has grossly failed its state duty to uphold the rule of law. Instead, the TPLF regime has become the primary threat to the lives and futures of the people of Gambella and of all of Ethiopia. Such a regime should not be surprised when acts of violence and lawlessness follow so closely behind their own.

May God intervene to bring justice, peace and harmony to Ethiopia!

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