



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

Justice, Peace and Freedom

NEWS RELEASE

Unelected Governor of Gambella, Accused of Deep Involvement in Crimes Against Humanity, has been Denied a Visa to Enter Canada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 7, 2008

Mr. Omot Obang Olum, the Gambella Region Governor who was appointed to his position following his suspected collaboration with the EPRDF regime of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in the massacre of 424 Anuak leaders in Gambella in December of 2003, has had his visa application for entry into Canada denied by Canadian government officials late on Friday, June 6, 2008.

Mr. Olum was scheduled to speak at a meeting in Calgary to Canadian Ethiopians from the Gambella region on Saturday, June 7, but now will not make it. In an earlier meeting held in Minnesota on May 31, many attendees were dissatisfied with Olum's emphasis on developing the region while appearing to evade questions or flatly deny his own alleged part in the human rights crimes going on in the region before, during and after the killings. Mr. Omot Olum failed to publicly take the higher ground and admit to his wrongdoing. Anuak would love to be so surprised—if it were deemed honest and sincere.

Efforts to deny his entry into the United States were unsuccessful even though we have learned from anonymous sources that United States officials had detained Olum for questioning after he arrived in the states on May 30, 2008, but that he was later released, allegedly, because he held a diplomatic visa that gave him special privileges and greater immunity against possible action.

Regardless, Canada has now taken a stand against an alleged perpetrator of genocide and human rights crimes. This is all the more significant to the family of these victims as Olum and other legitimate suspects all the way up to the federal offices in Addis Ababa, have never been held accountable for these actions within Ethiopia. Way to go, Canada! No longer do we want western countries to be used as safe havens for those who have committed gross human rights abuses.

Mr. Olum, who was the chief of security for the region at the time of the massacre, had been identified in testimony from witnesses given to human rights investigators from Genocide Watch, Survivors Rights' International and Human Rights Watch (HRW) as the individual responsible for compiling and handing over the list of Anuak leaders who were later targeted and killed.

Mr. Olum later was appointed as governor of the Gambella region in a suspected payoff for his loyalty to the EPRDF government of Ethiopian unelected Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. To date, no one has been held accountable for the massacre of the Anuak. Neither has anyone been held accountable for the over 200 Ethiopians killed in protests following the hijacking of the Ethiopian National Election of 2005 or for the gross human rights crimes being perpetrated in the Ogaden and into Somalia as well as for the countless other human rights abuses committed throughout Ethiopia.

In a comment made to the Calgary Herald, Karen Shadd, a spokeswoman for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, was quoted in their June 6, 2008 article as saying that “the department takes public safety seriously even though she could not comment on the visa.” We now see the proof that her statement had substance to it.

Canadian government figures show that there are over 800 war criminals or human rights abusers currently living in Canada. In 2000, Canada passed a new law that the Canadian courts have jurisdiction to hear cases in court of those found to be in the country—even one related to individuals visiting on a visa who are suspected of committing a human rights crime such as Omot Olum. Should he have been allowed to enter the country, this law could have taken effect on his case.

However, the current denial of Olum’s visa is the best first step and Canadians have taken it. This is the kind of action that is needed to bring to an end the human rights abuses and the repression of freedom and democracy in Ethiopia being carried out by the regime of Meles Zenawi.

We are hoping that this action is an indication of a new level of commitment to upholding the principles of freedom and democracy in Third World countries that western countries like Canada and the United States hold so dear.

The West’s War on Terror has contributed to the willingness of donor countries such as Canada and the United States to turn a blind eye to the horrific violations of human rights and oppression in countries such as Ethiopia whose partnership in the War on Terror has given them impunity. Yet, on the home front, the prime minister of Ethiopia, Meles Zenawi, is terrorizing his own people.

Canada’s partnership with Meles Zenawi, also seen by many Ethiopians as complicity with a dictator, is putting Canada’s own future relationship with Ethiopians in jeopardy. If Canadians in leadership and in the media fail to acknowledge how our support of this dictator is a means to perpetuate human rights abuses, the sabotage of the democratic process and the repression of the press, we will end up compromising not only our moral principles as a free country, but we will be putting our own future national interests at greater risk as these average Ethiopians become hostile to us in the west due to our silence and self-interest. Please do something to change the course of these events!

If there is a group interested in further pursuing this, please contact us for more information.

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