

Genocide Watch: Gambella, Ethiopia Update 19 December 2006

Genocide Watch has received reports that the situation remains tense in Gambela since 13 December 2006, the third anniversary of the genocidal massacres of 2003. The house of Seventh Day Adventist Church pastor, Babura, was burned down by an identified group of people on the night of December 17. The information from Gambela points to arson by Ethiopian Highlanders in the town. One of pastor Babura's children was burned to death and the second one was treated in the hospital. The second child was treated in the hospital, but died on December 18, and is to be buried December 19. Pastor Babura was admitted to the Gambella hospital and remains under intensive care.

Four days earlier, two houses belonging to Obang Ojwato and Biru Okuri of the Anywaa (Anuak) ethnic group were set on fire. Obang Ojwato is a teacher at the former American Mission primary school at Pokwo or Akado. Biru Okuri is reported to be a staff member of the Agriculture office of the Gambela region. Biru personally fought his attacker, whom he identified as an Ethiopian Highlander.

There is ample information from the region that suggests that members of the Nuer ethnic group who currently occupy Anywaa land are being used by the Ethiopian government and Highlanders to spark bloody conflict with members of the Anywaa ethnic group in the coming days or weeks. On December 16, a meeting was reportedly held at one of the hotels owned by an Ethiopian Highlander named Dessie in Gambela town to plan for conflict with the Anywaa. Dessie, a local trader, was reported to have been actively involved in the December 2003 genocidal massacres by distributing machetes.

Present at the meeting were: Asamano- Highlander (a trader,) Abraha- Highlander (a former staff member of RRC,) Taswo Amanuel-Highlander (former History teacher,) Beyene Asafa- Highlander (former Biology teacher,) Bol Ket –Nuer (Curriculum Development Head of Education office,) Chol Gew-Nuer (ACCORD staff,) and four other unidentified ethnic Nuers from the Ochom the area brought to attend the planning meeting for the impending conflict.

Genocide Watch calls for strong pressure to be placed on the Ethiopian government to prevent atrocities in Gambella and to avert full-scale conflict and more genocidal massacres in the region.

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