

Ethiopian army moving against Anuak in South Sudan

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April 12, 2006 (LONDON) — The Ethiopian Army has entered Southern Sudan in cooperation with the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army as part of operations to disarm members of the Anuak ethnic minority, and is currently 24 km from Pochalla, where over 17,000 Anuak refugees are living.

In a press statement, the British charity group, Aegis Trust, said "large numbers of Anuak fled Gambella, Ethiopia, following a massacre in Gambella town in December 2003". A source inside Pochalla has indicated that the Anuak community there fears it may be about to face violence worse than that witnessed in 2003, and believes the troops may arrive within the next 24 hours.

The roads to Pochalla and nearby Otalo, which has a population of approximately 10,000 Anuak refugees, are reported to be blocked on the east by Ethiopian forces and on the west by the SPLA.

Members of the Anuak community state that disarmament operations commenced on 4 April and claim that they have been accompanied by violence against civilians, including a number of killings, rapes, the looting of property and the burning of houses.

The operations follow an attack on highlanders reported in Dimma, Gambella, and a reported request by the Ethiopian authorities for the SPLA to hand over 18 leading Anuak living in Pochalla, some of Sudanese nationality, accused of supporting Anuak rebels against the Ethiopians in Gambella.

In the past two days, members of the Merle ethnic minority are reported to have taken advantage of the disarmament of Anuak by attacking members of the community near Pochalla and also at Ajwara, wounding two people and stealing cattle.

In 2003, oil giant Petronas obtained a concession from the Ethiopian Government to conduct exploration activity in the Gambella basin. Anuak activists claim that the start of their recent troubles is linked to the discovery of Gambella's natural wealth. 12 Apr 06 - The Ethiopian Army has entered Southern Sudan in cooperation with the SPLA as part of operations to disarm members of the Anuak ethnic minority, according to reports received by the Aegis Trust . At 6am on the morning of 12 April, troops were understood to be half an hours walk from Pochalla (approximately 25km inside Sudan), where over 17,000 Anuak refugees are living.

Large numbers of Anuak fled Gambella, Ethiopia, following a massacre in Gambella town in December 2003. A source inside Pochalla has indicated that the Anuak

community there fears it may be about to face violence worse than that witnessed in 2003, and believes the troops may arrive within the next 24 hours.

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