

# GENOCIDE WATCH: THE ANUAK OF ETHIOPIA

**Issued 8 January 2004. Updated 23 January 2004.**

Genocide Watch has received numerous reports of genocidal massacres of Anuak people in and around Gambella, Ethiopia in December 2003. At least 416 Anuak people were murdered. Genocide Watch has names of those killed and imprisoned. (See [Anuaks Massacred in Gambella](#).) The massacres were led by Ethiopian government troops in uniform, but they were joined by local people from highland areas. Genocide Watch has checked these reports carefully with eyewitnesses in Gambella as well as with the United States State Department and the United Nations, who have confirmed that the massacres were committed by Ethiopian government forces.

Between 3000 and 5000 additional Anuak refugees have fled into Sudan, where they have congregated around Pochalla. Genocide Watch has verified these reports with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees and with sources in Pochalla. Genocide Watch and Survivors' Rights International, with the assistance of concerned church groups, have sent field investigators to Pochalla, who corroborated the accounts of massacres in and around Gambella. The refugees say they are fleeing massacres of Anuak in Ethiopia.

The pretext for these massacres was the ambush of a van on December 13 by an unidentified gang who murdered its eight occupants, who were U.N. and Ethiopian government refugee camp officials. There is no evidence that the killers were Anuak. Even if they had been Anuak, the response of Ethiopian government troops was criminal. The troops responded by murdering hundreds of Anuak civilians in Gambella and surrounding areas. They also burned their homes. These massacres were not committed by Nuer who had prior conflicts with Anuak. The government cannot blame the victims.

Our sources indicate that those targeted particularly have been educated Anuak men, a tactic often intended to render a group leaderless and defenseless. Arrests of educated Anuak men that began over a year ago are continuing. 44 Anuak leaders have been held in jail in Addis Ababa for over a year without trial, and more are being held in Gambella. The Anuak in Ethiopia have also been disarmed, a threat to their ability to defend themselves.

Since many of the Anuak men have fled, there have also been systematic rapes of Anuak women, an early warning sign of genocidal intent. Some of the rapists have reportedly declared, “Now you won’t have an Anuak child.”

Massacres of people who are singled out and killed because of their ethnic group membership are genocidal. The Genocide Convention outlaws the intentional destruction of part of an ethnic group, not just destruction of the whole group. Ethiopia was one of the first signers of the Genocide Convention on December 11, 1948 and ratified it in July, 1949.

Ethiopia endured one of the worst genocidal man-made famines of the twentieth century under the Derg communist regime. Tens of thousands of Amhara, Tigray, and Oromo highlanders were resettled into Anuak traditional territory during this period, which ended with the overthrow of the Derg regime in 1991. They have stayed. The situation has grown worse since oil was discovered under Anuak lands by the Gambela Petroleum Corp., a subsidiary of Pinewood Resources, Ltd. of Canada. Highland Ethiopians who control the Ethiopian government now have strong economic motives to drive Anuak off of their land. The situation is similar to the plight of southern Sudanese across the border, where the central government in Khartoum has profited from oil discoveries under southern land.

There have been regular massacres of Anuak since 1980. Cultural Survival ([www.cs.org](http://www.cs.org)) has reported on them in six excellent reports published in the Cultural Survival Quarterly beginning in 1981. (See [Anuak Decimated by Ethiopian Government, Issue 5.3, 1981](#); [The Anuak – A Threatened Culture, Issue 8.2, 1984](#); [Ethiopia’s Policy of Genocide Against the Anuak of Gambella, Issue 10.3, 1986](#); [Resettlement and Villagization – Tools of Militarization in SW Ethiopia, Issue 11.4, 1987](#); [Anuak Displacement and Ethiopian Resettlement, Issue 12.4, 1988](#); [Oil Development In Ethiopia: A Threat to the Anuak of Gambella, Issue 25.3, 2001](#).) The 13 December 2003 massacre in Gambella has thus far gone unreported in the press, except for articles in the online [McGill Report](#) and [IRIN](#).

According to Genocide Watch sources, the massacres on 13 December 2003 were ordered by the commander of the Ethiopian army in Gambella, Nagu Beyene, with the authorization of Dr. Gebrhab Barnabas, an official of the Ethiopian government. The

accusation has also been made that lists of targeted individuals were drawn up with the assistance of Omot Obang Olom, who is himself Anuak, but holds an official position.

Impunity gives the green light to those who commit genocide. If they are not arrested, they and their followers will know they can literally get away with mass murder. They will kill again, and the massacres could become full-scale genocide.

The United States Department of State has confirmed and protested these massacres at the highest level of the Ethiopian government.

On 8 January 2004, Genocide Watch faxed an urgent letter to Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi imploring him to take three actions:

“1. We urge you to investigate and arrest the three men named above, as well as others who participated in the December massacres of Anuak in and around Gambella.

“2. We ask you to release the Anuak leaders who are being held in prison in Addis Ababa, in Gambella, and elsewhere in Ethiopia. Police should also be ordered to stop arresting Anuak leaders and students simply because they are Anuak.

“3. We encourage you to assist independent human rights experts who will investigate these massacres.”

“We would be happy to discuss this very dangerous situation with you, your Foreign Minister, and other Ethiopian officials.”

Respectfully,

Dr. Gregory H. Stanton

President, Genocide Watch

Coordinator, The International Campaign to End Genocide

Genocide Watch has received no reply to its letter to Prime Minister Meles. Instead, the Ethiopian government has undertaken a classic campaign of denial. It attempts to minimize the number killed (“only 57”) despite lists of those killed that exceed 400. The government has dug up mass graves and burned the bodies in an effort to cover up the crimes. Most typically, the government blames the massacres on the Nuer, traditional rivals of the Anuak, in an attempt to portray the killings as a “civil war” arising from “ancient tribal hatreds” and thus shift attention away from its own responsibility. Eyewitnesses, including both Africans and non-Africans, have confirmed that the massacres were in fact carried out by Ethiopian Defense Forces, not Nuer. The government also portrays the massacres as “tit for tat” reprisals for the ambush of the van, blaming the victims, who were unarmed civilians, for their own deaths.

The government has sent 5000 Ethiopian Defense Forces to the area to “restore calm.” In fact, they continue to rape and pillage the area. Nuer and highlanders are reportedly settling into abandoned Anuak homesteads. No Ethiopian government officials have been arrested for their roles in the massacres.

On 9 January, the President of Gambella state, Okelo Akuai, fled to Sudan after he was ordered to resign by those responsible for the massacres, who questioned his loyalty because he is Anuak. He arrived safely in Pochalla on 12 January.

An assessment mission of NGO and UN agencies went to Pochalla, Sudan from 15 – 18 January and on 19 January, planned relief assistance to the refugees there, including food, medicines, blankets, mosquito nets, cooking utensils, buckets, and sanitation programs.

Genocide Watch has urged the Prevention Team of the Department of Political Affairs at the United Nations to bring the massacres to the attention of the Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination and the United Nations Security Council. The outflow of refugees affects an area of Sudan controlled by the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army. There is thus danger of cross-border conflict and destabilization. The situation is a threat to international peace and security that should be brought before the Security Council.

However, there is no indication yet that the United Nations plans to take any political action.

**Genocide Watch is the Coordinator of the International Campaign to End Genocide**

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**Members of the International Campaign to End Genocide include: Genocide Watch, The Leo Kuper Foundation (UK), Physicians for Human Rights (UK), Prevent Genocide International (USA), International Alert, The International Crisis Group, The Genocide Studies Program of Yale University, the Cambodian Genocide Project, Inc., The Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide (Israel), The Committee for Effective International Criminal Law (Germany), the Aegis Trust (UK), the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global Mission, The Genocide Prevention Center (USA), Survivors' Rights International (USA), Prévention Génocides (Belgium), CALDH (Guatemala), INFORCE (UK), The Remembering Rwanda Trust (Canada), Minority Rights Group (UK), and Survival International (UK).**

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