



ANUAK JUSTICE COUNCIL

*Justice, Peace and Freedom*

---

## **Mr. Obang Metho Addresses Law students and faculty At the College of Law, University of Saskatchewan**

**March 12, 2008**

I would like to thank the College of Law at the University of Saskatchewan and especially the faculty and students for inviting me to speak tonight. I would also like to thank Scales of Social Justice League (SOS Justice League): for giving me the honor of being your keynote speaker at Access to Justice Week.

When I first received the invitation a month ago to speak about justice, I was asked to speak on the topic, **International Law: Does it Create Barriers in Access to Justice? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Convention, the Rome statutes—what do these mean to the world, especially to those suffering the worst violations of these principles, laws and codes around the world?**

I was told that I should speak in reference to my testimony of the case of my own ethnic group, the Anuak, before the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 2004 and because of my human rights work, including the two legal cases I have been working on with two different law firms, one who submitted our case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and another who submitted our case to the African Union's Commission on Peoples' and Human Rights. I am very pleased to share these experiences with you today.

For most of you who do not know me, I am resident of Saskatchewan and graduated with a degree in political science from this university. I have lived in Saskatchewan for a long time since coming from Gambella, Ethiopia. It is interesting that when I was doing development work in Africa and was asked where I was from, I said I was from Saskatoon, Canada, but when I was here in Saskatoon, people would ask me the same question and I would answer, Africa. I guess I have one foot in both places and I call both, home!

It is good to be back at this great campus which has meant a lot to me, not only because I graduated from this university, but also because of the great support and friendships I have with so many wonderful faculty and staff in the University's Colleges and Departments such as in the Department of Political Science, the Department of Division of Media and Technology, Department of International Studies, Department of Sociology, the College of Arts & Science, the College of Medicine, the College of Education as well as with students!

It is no wonder why last month during the International Week Workshop at this University, there was a presentation on Ethiopia at the College of Agriculture and the Ethiopian Minister of Foreign Affairs Office made a big deal out of it. The government of Ethiopia wrote on their websites that they were working with the University of Saskatchewan and Canadian government on such things as good governance, democracy and development because the Ethiopian government knows it very well that this university is my home.

I and others knew that this was another campaign to fool the people, especially because of my link to this university. They may have thought they were invading “Obang’s territory!” However, we both know the truth of what is going on in Ethiopia and to the best of my ability, I will continue to speak publicly, whenever and wherever I can do so, about the broken government and gross human rights abuses in Ethiopia until real justice, democracy, good governance, the rule of law and development is established in Ethiopia.

What I am going to talk about tonight is the experience that I have gained since I became involved in human rights work in late 2003 following the three-day long massacre of 424 from my own ethnic group, the Anuak, by the Ethiopian military.

Some of what I have learned about human rights work has been very disillusioning. As I speak of my own experience, you may learn that I am very disappointed with many in the international community, despite the good intentions of the creators of our human rights laws. The reason for is that not far underneath this system that is supposed to uphold the human rights of all people, is a system that resists the carrying out of those laws at most every level.

It is a common struggle—between the higher and lower natures within every person—between what one knows is right and what one wants for one’s own reasons. Our problem is not about knowing the difference. It is about having the moral strength to choose the right way to live. In order to face this crisis affecting millions throughout the world, we must first have the courage to face the dark side of our own flawed humanity. The problem is not the law; it is within us, individually, especially with many of those who wield the power!

International Human Rights laws are, without question, laws based on noble, God-given principles, many of which were enshrined in the non-binding Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eleanor Roosevelt of United States of America chaired the committee responsible for formulating these principles and a renowned Canadian law professor, John Humphrey, heavily contributed to the content.

By declaring the inalienable rights and dignity of each human being, regardless of any differences, it also declared the need to protect each human being—particularly the vulnerable—from the worst actions of others. These universal values and principles were proclaimed and later ratified by the majority of countries around the world.

Other international human rights laws from the past, like the Geneva Convention, which basically set rules for the treatment of prisoners of war, were updated at this time as well. Other human rights laws also followed in an attempt to make binding, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with the purpose of protecting human kind from such crimes as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Continuing implementation of other human rights treaties, dealt with additional areas such as racial discrimination, torture, the rights of the child, among others. The most recent human rights laws, the Rome Statutes, established the International Criminal Court, the ICC.

The original intent of these laws was to intervene to protect the vulnerable and see to it that the worst violators would be held accountable. The impetus for most of the laws came out of the horrible atrocities of World War I and World War II. The shockwaves among people in the world to the barbaric acts of the Holocaust during which six million Jews, along with others, were exterminated, provided the rationale for a multi-lateral mechanism for intervening in the national affairs of another sovereign country.

It was in 1945 that the League of Nations formally was changed into the United Nations. The United Nations is the only organization in the international community with the mandate and worldwide legal jurisdiction to oversee and enforce these international human rights laws. The High Commissioner of Human Rights oversees the Human Rights Council who has the mandate to investigate violations of human rights.

The Human Rights Council has 47 members, elected by the full assembly by secret ballot. When I was there before the Council in 2004, a Sudanese representative sat on that council, despite the genocide going on in Darfur. This gives you an idea of who is hearing your case. Since that time, member states, who have committed gross human rights crimes, are excluded from membership.

The Council has the authority to appoint special investigators, *rapporteurs*, to do further investigation and report back to them. If force is to be used, including military intervention and sanctions, it is the United Nations Security Council who must authorize it. The current UN Security Council members are from the US, Russia, the UK, France and China.

However, regional organizations, such as the African Union, have been created to deal on a regional basis with many of these same issues and advise governments of their findings and recommendations. An African Judicial Court is in the development stage, but not yet operating. Cases from the African Union can be referred to the ICC.

The question is—have they achieved the well-intentioned objectives for which these laws were created? Have they made easier the path to justice or have they created their own barriers that have blocked the accomplishment of their intent?

I would contend that the problem is largely not with the content enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or in the numerous human rights laws and mandates, but is more about the lack of moral will to enforce them as well as due to the suppression of information that surrounds the commission of human rights violations.

These laws were meant to prevent another genocide like the Holocaust from ever happening again. However, the evidence of the failure of these laws to be enforced is tragically clear when one looks at the millions of lives lost in Cambodia, Chile, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Darfur, Yugoslavia and numerous others places around the globe, including the case of the Anuak.

Yet, because the law regarding genocide was written in such a way to demand intervention in cases of genocide, the superpowers are reluctant to call cases that meet that definition because it requires action. Instead, most cases are defined as “crimes against humanity” as a way to skirt the obligation to do something. For instance, the United States has called Darfur a genocide while the European Union has not.

There are several reasons for this. For one, inherent in the laws is a tension between international intervention and national sovereignty. The case must be strong to cross international borders, intervening in an independent sovereign state. However, when the government of one’s own country is committing atrocities against its own citizens, like what happened in Rwanda, the intent of the law is that the need to protect the vulnerable trumps the rights of that nation.

Yet, unfortunately, many different factors influence whether or not the United Nations and the international community will take any action. At the same time, many in the world are under the illusion that the United Nations will act when and where appropriate. Because of this, most feel that they can settle back and not get involved.

I was under this illusion when I presented the case of the Anuak to the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights in April of 2004 after Ethiopian Defense Forces massacred 424 people from my ethnic group in Gambella, Ethiopia. Let me start by explaining what happened. Oil exploration in the Gambella area in southwestern Ethiopia, on the border of Sudan, revealed promising oil reserves on indigenous Anuak land.

The Anuak leaders spoke out regarding wanting to be involved in the decision making, as spelled out in the Ethiopian Constitution, but they were seen as trouble-makers. When the killing of Anuak leaders began on December 13 through 15 of 2003, the Chinese were visiting the country and the oil rights had been given to Petronas of Malaysia and their subsidiary, the Zhongyuan Petroleum Exploration Bureau (ZPEB), of China to begin their work in the area immediately.

The Ethiopian military had a list of Anuak names, each allegedly picked due to their leadership, educational background or overall influence in the community. For instance, one of the first ones on the list was my sister-in-law's father who was a beloved pastor. Others included many of those I was working closely with in the development work.

A number of doctors from Saskatoon had accompanied me to Gambella and we had plans to develop a full-scale medical project between the two cities that had to be temporarily suspended for safety reasons. We had received a large CIDA grant for the project that instead, had to be returned due to continuing security concerns for Canadian students, who as part of the project, would have been spending time in Gambella.

The massacre began on December 13, 2003 when the Ethiopian military, accompanied by some local militia groups from a different ethnic background, went door to door, pulling out the Anuak from their homes. If they refused to come out, their homes were set on fire until they had to run for safety. The militias then hacked them with machetes and clubs. If they ran, they were shot by the defense troops in Ethiopian uniform.

They marched through the town chanting, "Today is the day for killing Anuak." As they raped the women and young girls, they chanted, "Now you will have no more Anuak babies!" The Ethiopian National Defense troops did not stop there, but destroyed homes, water wells, granaries, crops, health clinics and schools. They continued to wreak havoc in the rural areas in the following weeks and months, killing, injuring, raping, torturing and detaining many more Anuak. About 10,000 fled the country for refuge in south Sudan. It is unknown today how many Anuak were killed as many were buried in mass graves and in remote areas, but some believe over 1500 were killed.

The tragedy was a tremendous loss for the Anuak who were already considered an endangered people group, totaling only about .01% of the total population of 80 million Ethiopians. Additionally, most of those killed were the leaders and most educated in the community of a very marginalized people.

These human rights abuses are all well-documented in a co-sponsored investigation by two US-based organizations, Genocide Watch and Survivors' Rights, organizations created to prevent genocide. That report, "Today Is the Day for Killing Anuak," and a subsequent one, "Operation Sunny Mountain," are available on their websites as well as on ours. Another report by Human Rights Watch, which came out on March 24, 2005, "Targeting the Anuak," is also available on their website.

The question is—does the Anuak massacre meet the definition of genocide? To answer it, we need to review the law itself. Genocide was addressed at the Genocide Convention and the laws regarding it were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948. More than 130 nations have ratified the Genocide Convention since that time. Ethiopia is one of these.

Now, according to the definition of genocide in Article II of the Convention, what happened to the Anuak does meet the criteria for being classified as a genocide as it meets the overall definition as well as it meets one or more of the criteria. In fact, it meets all but the last—forcibly transferring children of the group to another.

In the definition, genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, **in whole or in part**, a national, **ethnic**, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;

(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (including inflicting trauma on members of the group through widespread torture, rape, sexual violence, forced or coerced use of drugs, and mutilation rape)

(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; includes the deliberate deprivation of resources needed for the group's physical survival, such as clean water, food, clothing, shelter or medical services. Deprivation of the means to sustain life can be imposed through confiscation of harvests, blockade of foodstuffs, detention in camps, forcible relocation or expulsion into deserts.

(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; includes the deliberate deprivation of resources needed for the group's physical survival, such as clean water, food, clothing, shelter or medical services. Deprivation of the means to sustain life can be imposed through confiscation of harvests, blockade of foodstuffs, detention in camps, forcible relocation or expulsion into deserts.

(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Article III strongly states that the acts of (a) Genocide; (b) Conspiracy to commit genocide; (c) Direct and public incitement to commit genocide; (d) Attempt to commit genocide and (e) Complicity in genocide **shall be punished**.

The Anuak case meets the stringent criteria of **genocide** under the law as the intent to destroy part of a specific ethnic group could be proven. The Anuak was the only ethnic group targeted in a region of at least eight other ethnic groups. The presence of the list, the slogans, the recruiting, arming and incitement of the militias all proved the intent to destroy the Anuak, in this case the educated leaders, and the intent to incite others to do so as well.

The maiming, injury, burning down of homes with inhabitants in them and the widespread raping of the women and girls accompanied by the slogan that the result would be to prevent or limit the birth of "Anuak" babies met another definition. The only definition that was not met was the forcible transfer of children from one group to another. However, one does not need to meet all these criteria to meet the overall definition.

Additionally, information was later documented in another investigation by Genocide Watch and Survivors' Rights that gave evidence that the plan had an actual name, "Operation Sunny Mountain," which alleged that those in the highest offices in the country had knowledge of the plan, if not direct involvement. No one still has been found accountable for the crimes despite the mandate in Article III to punish perpetrators. What went wrong?

Most of us in the world live under a number of illusions that are propped up by false beliefs about the international community, the United Nations and the presence of international human rights laws.

We in the Anuak Justice Council were no different. I will use our own experience, along with others, where relevant, to further explain the obstacles to securing justice through the international community.

**Obstacle 1) Access to the UN Human Rights Council is difficult**

First of all, gaining access to the United Nations Human Rights Council is complicated. In the case of the Anuak, they are a small, marginalized and oppressed ethnic group, without much voice and access to the outside world. Without Anuak in the Diaspora, who have some financial support, in our case from churches and friends in Minnesota and Washington State and Anuak spokespeople with education in key places throughout the world, it would have been extremely difficult for them to present their case in either Geneva or New York.

**Obstacle 2) There is really no such thing as the “international community” – it is more of a concept than an entity.**

When the genocide of the Anuak began on December 13, 2003, I immediately began calling Canadian and United States government officials. I reached someone in the US State Department and I told the person that Ethiopian military are killing innocent Ethiopian people in southwestern Ethiopia. I asked the person to help and she said, “I am sorry, there is nothing we can do, people are being killed in Africa all the time.” However, when I told the representative that American citizens, of Anuak Ethiopian backgrounds, were caught in the fray, there was a totally different reaction. She then asked for their names, social security numbers, the US addresses, their passport numbers and their current locations so that US troops could be sent on a rescue mission.

They did follow through to rescue them while ignoring the ensuing massacre going on around them. However, the report of that rescue was suppressed until over two years later when it was declassified, although most of the report had been redacted.

This goes to prove that many wrongly believe there is such a thing as the “international community”—best represented by the United Nations or western superpowers—that acts as a fire station which we can call in an emergency to quickly rescue us from the blazing fires of genocide and other human rights crimes.

In truth, due to differing political agendas, national agendas, economic interests and political alignments, interest in any one case of genocide or gross human rights violations will vary. In the majority of cases which are presented to the Human Rights Council, no subsequent actions are taken. Where and when some action is taken, it frequently does not effectively stop the human rights violations.

When they do intervene, it most often has taken many months or even years to do so, such as in the case of Darfur. We are in the fifth year of this horror in Darfur and it appears that internationally coordinated actions from the UN have mostly resulted from public pressure, human rights organizations, religious organizations, Hollywood stars and other special interest groups.

**Obstacle 3) Information about human rights abuses is often suppressed, not only by the perpetrators, but also by those with a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Within the UN, even with adequate and convincing documentation of violations of international law, reports frequently never go to the next level or conversely, there is indication that top officials can sometimes even suppress reports generated at lower levels of the organization.**

When the genocide of the Anuak occurred, it was carried out in a remote area of Ethiopia where few reporters were present to interview witnesses and few cameras were ready to catch it unfolding. Where attempts are made by news organizations to get the stories, access to the area is often blocked or limited and informants are fearful of speaking out.

Therefore, when the little news on the Anuak massacre came out through a few major news sources, it appeared to be the “government spin” on the incident. For example, the issue was first conveyed to be killing resulting from an ethnic conflict regarding land and power disputes between the Anuak and the Nuer, another local ethnic group. A later press statement from the Ethiopian government, regarding their alleged involvement, was called “fiction” by Ethiopian Prime Minister, Meles Zenawi.

No major news sources refuted the stories; however, locally, people knew that it was neither “fiction” nor was it ethnic conflict where there are usually two-sided casualties. In actuality, no Nuer were reportedly killed, except for one who was believed to have been mistaken for an Anuak. This one-sided killing defies the explanation one of ethnic conflict. Instead, Nuer, as well as people from other ethnic groups, protected the Anuak, hiding them in their homes and under their beds after realizing that just the Anuak were being targeted.

With the results of the first investigation (“Today is the Day for Killing Anuak”) in hand, along with numerous pictures, the AJC presented the case of the Anuak to the United Nations’ High Commission on Human Rights, now called the Human Rights Council, in April 8, 2004 in Geneva, Switzerland and again at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in May 11, 2004 in New York City.

What we soon realized was there was no known automatic referral to a higher authority, nor the appointment of a special rapporteur for further investigation or access to other forms of intervention in response to any testimony, regardless of the seriousness or documentation. The system is complex and not geared to prevention or early intervention regardless of the “never again” rhetoric on that 2004 tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide.

It was through an informal connection while at the UN that we made contact with OMCT (World Organization Against Torture), a human rights organization that immediately worked with us in sending out three separate UN press releases that went to most all of the UN offices as well as others, documenting the details of the Anuak genocide.

**Obstacle 4) The mandates of human rights law, particularly in regards to genocide, creates enormous resistance to classifying any human rights cases as a genocide.**

As previously mentioned, what happened to the Anuak in 2003 meets the criteria of genocide, as described in the law, and that is why we call it a genocide. However, most officials in the UN and in nation states are extremely reluctant to do so because by law, a genocide requires a response.

For instance, when we went to the United Nations in 2004 to present this case before the High Commission for Human Rights, we were advised early on by more seasoned participants in the process, that it was not “politically correct” or well-accepted by decision-makers there to refer to any human rights violations as “genocide” as it created the mandate under international law, for the UN to intervene. It was suggested that we could classify these crimes as crimes against humanity or gross human rights violations, but not genocide, regardless of whether it met the definition.

The same reluctance was seen in declaring Darfur a genocide. When Colin Powell did so for the US in 2005, it caused a great stir in the international community. It still has not been acknowledged to be a genocide by most others in the world. Countries also are usually resistant to having their own current or historical human rights crimes, which meet the definition, classified as such. Even recently, the Turkish government became adamant when it was suggested that the United States should officially recognize the Armenian massacre of 1915 under the Ottoman Empire as genocide, not because of any necessary action, but for other political and possibly economic reasons.

**Obstacle 5) The International Criminal Court (ICC) has been created to provide teeth to the law and to punish the worst violators, but many, like the US, are fearful of signing and ratifying the Rome Statute due to fears of vulnerability at the hands of outside states.**

Many think the judicial authority of the International Criminal Court, (ICC) would be the best enforcer of human rights crimes and act as a serious deterrent to new crimes in cases where governments are the perpetrators of those crimes. However, in practice, it has rarely shown its clout, especially considering the widespread incidence of human rights crimes throughout the world.

For one thing, many countries, especially those who have been involved in war efforts, like the US, are not signatories to it, reportedly, because they are fearful of the way it could be used against those in the US military who have been involved in US sanctioned military combat, believing they may be susceptible to outside interpretations of the law, based on the national and political interests of others, to which they may not agree.

President Clinton's administration signed, but did not ratify it. For instance, when President Bush came into office, he withdrew the signature and obviously, was opposed to ratification. The US and other western countries, also believe they have an internal process to deal with infractions in the event of human rights violations, fearing that an international criminal court could open them up to unnecessary vulnerability at the political whim of outsiders.

The ongoing tension between national interests and international interests necessarily competing with each other can both be positive in preventing meddling in the affairs of other countries, but more negatively, in many cases, it has essentially prevented the execution of the law.

Every country has their national interests and naturally, these interests are their primary concern; however, we have no one organization that puts international interests of the people as of primary interest, including the United Nations whose most effective action relies on the consensus of the five superpowers within the UN Security Council. Because of this, most human rights laws are not enforced and as a result, the most vulnerable and weak of people all over the world continue to suffer.

### **Summary:**

Slobodan Milosevic of Yugoslavia has been the only head of state who has been convicted by the ICC, yet the cases of how many others have not been heard. Charles Taylor of Liberia may be the second head of state to be charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Our case is still pending, something that is not unusual since charging defendants, regardless of the seriousness and scope of their crimes, usually only occurs after the person leaves power and when the superpower countries are no longer supporting that leader or are lending their influence to having them charged.

In the case we have before the African Commission on Peoples' and Human Rights in Gambia, again, we are waiting for action to be taken. However, it again is unlikely until more pressure is brought to bear on this case. Regardless, in Ethiopia, the human rights crisis continues while the international community, for the most part, has remained silent.

Despite the belief that the Opposition Party won the election, the current government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi declared themselves winners, very similarly to what happened recently in Kenya. When Ethiopians protested in the streets of the capital city of Addis Ababa, government security forces killed almost 200 people and wounded many more. Until today, justice has not been served.

Additionally, the Ethiopian government arrested the elected opposition leaders and detained them in prison for twenty months until they were released in July of 2007. Many more prisoners of conscience remain in detention centers and prisons throughout the country. Human rights crimes are being reported in every area of the country by many organizations, including the U.S. State Department. Many media outlets are blocked or government controlled, causing the public to have little access to information.

In the Ogaden region, in southeastern Ethiopia and in Somalia, the Ethiopian government troops are committing many more human rights crimes against civilians and destroying their infra-structure, even killing their cattle. Hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced, causing great humanitarian crisis where many more will die. Human Rights Watch and humanitarian organizations like the International Red Cross and Doctors Without Borders have documented some of this, but as a result, they were kicked out of the country when the reports came out.

Some humanitarian and human rights organizations have declared it to be the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, compared in seriousness and scope to Darfur, but yet, the international community has not effectively intervened and little news of it has reached to the homes of Canadians and others in the west.

Currently, there is a bill that passed unanimously in the US House of Congress that is now pending in the Senate to advance human rights, democracy and good governance in Ethiopia, but many do not think it will pass because it is so opposed by some of the Senators and by the US State Department because they are partnering with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi in the War on Terror. However, many Ethiopians feel that their "War on Terror" is being perpetrated against them by no one other than their own prime minister who they believe is terrorizing them daily!

As concerned citizens of the world hear of these human catastrophes and the lack of moral resolve to follow the truth and the law, how can they respond?

What is needed is a public outrage in developed, democratic countries as well as in undeveloped, undemocratic countries at this failure to uphold these laws. A grass roots public response may be the only way to exert the needed pressure on politicians and international organizations, including the United Nations, to take action in most cases.

The public must not sit back, assuming that justice is being done because in reality, vulnerable people all over the world are still suffering from genocide, crimes against humanity, other serious human rights crimes as well as the humanitarian catastrophes that accompany these violations such as displacement, disease and starvation.

Citizens of countries like Canada, the US, European countries, Australia and other democratic governments can push within their own systems so that more is done and so that there are more actual repercussions to the violation of these international crimes.

We in Canada enjoy the benefits of a well-developed and largely equitable justice system. Under the Canadian justice system, when a crime is committed, an investigation is done and it is referred to the prosecutor's office to determine if the demands for evidence of a crime being committed meet the threshold for charging. If so, the case goes to court.

However, under the current international justice system, the documentation of a crime being committed that meets the full requirements for prosecution under the established law is usually not sufficient to take action, mostly due to the lack of moral resolve. In other words, overwhelming evidence of human rights crimes is not enough to ensure any action, especially any immediate intervention.

Instead, the information can end up at a dead end at most every level of the process, especially in the beginning stages. These international human rights laws look good on paper, the rhetoric of resolve is inspirational and the huge organizational structure of the United Nations is impressive, but the lack of moral will to act to do the job can totally negate the rest in the majority of cases.

**To conclude, what have we learned?** The international community or body devoted to ensuring action, especially in the worst cases of human rights crimes, is needed today even more than ever before due to the world becoming a global village of interconnectedness. This is further enhanced now through more and more emerging technologies. Right now, the graphic images from those in the most remote parts of our world can come to us through our television screen, our computer monitors or even via our phones.

When we see and hear about horrific human rights crimes in the world that cause so much suffering to others, most often we ask, "Why did this happen and why is no one doing anything about it?" Most of those who see these images, would want those who committed these crimes to be brought to justice, but people oftentimes do not know who has the authority to bring such perpetrators to justice. Most are puzzled as to who should do it. We see it and hope someone will solve the problem, but as I have already said, most often, it is never addressed in the "international community."

Look at Pinochet of Chile, Suharto of Indonesia, Omar al Bashir of Sudan and Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia. The list can go on and on. The truth is, most get away with their crimes because of national interests—theirs, ours and others'. National interests have dictated whether or not action will be taken. Whether or not the perpetrator is an ally in some other partnership, such as being a partner in the War on Terror like in the case of Ethiopia, will govern the response, frequently giving a free pass to some and not to others.

To answer your initial question, which is the title of this lecture, "**International Law: Does it Create Barriers in Access to Justice?**" **YES. ABSOLUTELY IT DOES.** International law was formulated with good intentions, but it is not working in many places like Ethiopia—at least yet.

As our world gets smaller, the impact of what goes on in the world—even to a group as small as the Anuak—can have an impact on the rest of the world, otherwise, I would not be standing before you tonight. Yet, unless we take action, the incidence of future human rights crimes are certain to increase as these crimes are so closely associated with the "fever" for natural resources as they become more scarce or more expensive.

What has been happening is the increased exploration in the more remote and undeveloped areas of the world, like in Africa where many vulnerable people live. The case of the Anuak was associated with finding oil reserves. In this world, thirsty for untapped natural resources, **finding oil in indigenous ancestral land is the last thing that the people would wish for—it is like finding a tumor in the brain.**

What kind of world do we want in the next century? This is not only for our leaders to decide, but we must impact our governments with our own values, morality and integrity. This is the only world we will ever have. If we are to survive with any quality of life, we need to consider how we can best live amongst each other. Will we live by the values of being the Good Samaritans and good neighbors or will we become bystanders who turn away when we hear the cries of others?

One person can do a lot to bring attention to the oppressed, yet we also, as a society, should press for moral leaders. In fact, we need such moral leaders, not only in western countries, but in third-world countries. If you have good moral leaders here and the same in Africa, you will strengthen those partnerships; not just between the leaders, but between the leaders and their people on both sides.

The western countries must stand up for their declared moral ideals and values, carrying them with them to Third-World countries, making them accountable and not rewarding them regardless of inhumane actions or just because it is in our own national interests because eventually the people will rise up and hold these western partners accountable.

I strongly believe there is great hope if grass-roots people rise up for these higher values. It is already happening across Africa and we need to acknowledge and support it. Again I want to emphasize, anyone can make a difference for good or for bad. If we ignore it, one angry, immoral person in Africa or in some other Third World country has more power and means than ever before, to destroy life. Our efforts to stand up for the right cannot prevent all negative outcomes, but it can go a long way in preventing people who have little respect for God and for human life from gaining momentum and widespread support.

Some people say that human rights is a part of western thought, but my view of human rights is totally different today than four years ago when I thought of it almost simply as definition of respecting other human beings. Now, I would say it is the right of any human being to live for the purpose that God has provided to each human being. Because of this reason, it is really not a western concept.

All of us are human beings. There is no 99.9% human being. Being that we are all created in the image of God, none of us are left out. This is not animal rights or rights based on any other characteristics. The key word is HUMAN—HUMAN RIGHTS. All human beings have the right to be treated with dignity, respect and love and have the moral obligation to do the same towards others.

For all of you who are here, university students, faculty and others, we can help repair some of this and to do it, each of us must take responsibility. We have to be the ones to run next door to our neighbor when they cry out. That neighbor may be in our neighborhood, city, nation or world. We have to be the ones to help someone when that help is needed, regardless of who they are because all of us are human beings and one of our purposes God has given to us in this world is to protect one another. We can be advocates for those near and far from us and others need to do the same.

You have a human responsibility to reach out to other people. We have a responsibility to make this world a much better world than it is now and we must do our share! If there is one thing I would want you to learn from this message it is this--you are not only the child of your family—you are a child of the world and a child of humanity! To the extent that we do this, there is hope! Will you do your part to create a more humane world? That is the world of which I want to be a part. How about you?

Thank you.

-----  
*Although I, (Obang Metho) am the primary author of this lecture, it is written with the collaboration of other members of the Anuak Justice Council (AJC) team. For more information please contact me by email at: [Obang@anuakjustice.org](mailto:Obang@anuakjustice.org)*  
-----