



## **EPRDF MUST STOP DESTRUCTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND SYSTEMATIC DISPLACEMENT OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF GAMBELA FROM THEIR LAND**

### **STATEMENT FROM GAMBELA PEOPLE'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT/FORCE**

**March 18, 2010  
Gambela**

Since it coming to power in 1991, TPLF/EPRDF oppression, subjugation, dispossession, displacement, discrimination and disenfranchise against the people of Gambela and other Ethiopian is escalating from time to time. Gambela is the most backward region in the country. The current tyrannical regime of Ethiopia had leased one million hectares of land in Godere, Gambela, Abwobo, Gog, Dimma, Jikaw and Jor districts to the Asia, Europe and Middle East international farming companies for one century. The region is rich with many natural resources and the only area with dense forest and with significant water and forest compared to other part of the country. More than 90% of indigenous populations living in rural areas sustain their livelihood on these fertile lands along the major rivers and near the dense forests through out the year.

The recent land lease deal signed between the Ethiopian government and the international farming companies has raised great concern by the indigenous people of Gambela. Gambela is home endowed with a variety of wild animals and fishes. In the last few decades, with the arrival of the, settlers from highlands of Ethiopia and a great number of refugees from across the international border, the nation's wildlife has been migrating and forests cleared for their daily livelihood. Many remaining animals live in the remaining dense forests across the region migrate to neighboring countries. The cutting down of dense forests will result in dry of land and reduces the level of water of the major rivers through out the region. The land leased to the international companies by EPRDF is the home of wild animals and sources of food for the people. The government's plan is expected to drive the remaining wildlife from the region dense forests. Fish species on which the indigenous people are dependent would be threatened with extinction after the implementation of the large-scale agricultural activities. The specific areas targeted for farming contain major fishing rivers used by local people as primary sources of food.

As stated by the current government of Ethiopian, the land lease deal is expected to improve the agricultural sector of the economy, alleviate poverty and increase economic growth in the country. In addition it is intended by the TPLF/EPRDF to lease the farmlands to foreign governments and multinational corporations are expected to decrease the shortage of food through out Ethiopia. But according to GPLM/F due to lack proper feasibility study it is going to creates drought in the area disastrous situation: poverty and destitution to the life of local communities because of eviction of people from tier land, destruction of natural resources. The current government land policy is the same as that of dictator socialist government in which the land was owned by state. In reality the land lease agreement was implemented without proper discussion and consultation with the local community and the products from the lands will be exported to the international markets where the investors will earn profit at the expenses of local people cheap labour. The cheap labour of local communities is a designed by EPRDF to allow the companies earn much profit to be allocated into the pockets of corrupt Meles Zenawi and his corrupt officials in Addis Ababa compare to payment made in other parts of the country. Coupled with current climate change throughout the world, the cutting down of dense forests of Gambela, the environmental degradation will be devastating to the life of local community and reducing alternative food sources due to low agricultural productivity and food shortages in Gambela region. The local communities who sustain their livelihood from agricultural activities earn less than a dollar a day when employed in these multinational agricultural companies. The land grabbing by TPLF/EPRDF and its wages (cheap labour) has created serious grievances by the indigenous people. The grievances against the policy of land lease deals between the international companies the corrupt Meles Zenawi and his followers is expected to bring conflict on land ownership. Failure of EPRDF to control the grievances of the people results in fear of government to deploy additional ENDF soldiers to Gambela and all districts of the region to threatened the life of the local communities.

The 1984/85 famine and war in northern part of the country, the socialist government had sponsored resettlement programme in Gambela region for more than 100,000 settlers from Tigray, Wollo and Shewa province. The influx of these settlers to Gambela region brought significant impacts by creating conflicts between the indigenous and the settlers, economical favoritism to the settlers while the indigenous people paid tax to the government, conscription, assimilation/humiliation and serious environmental impacts on the indigenous people. We would like to thanks the efforts made by the international community, European Commission (EC) and Anti-Slavery Society campaigns to stop large scale resettlement programme. But the current Ethiopian government is attempting similar dangerous developments. Following the land lease between government of EPRDF and international companies, more than 230,000 highlanders were expected to be resettled in Abwobo and Gillo/Gog districts in which the populations of settler highlanders is twice as that of regional local community populations. These are the two districts where vast land is suitable for farming both along the rivers as well as for shifting cultivation. This is one systematic way of resettlement to assimilate the indigenous people and give more political power to highlanders to control all political institutions of the region to strengthen and enhance oppression against the people of Gambela. Through past experiences of negative impacts with such development projects, the people of Gambela will resist the current land lease deals between EPRDF and foreign investors. This development will highly create serious environmental destruction

and will not contribute to the social welfare and to the economic performance of Gambela state. Moreover, it will create conflict among the indigenous communities because the proportion of land for the farmers will diminish and conflict on scarce resources will arise. Conflict on among each other tribe will deter the development of the region. The deterrence of development in Gambela was one of the key policies of EPRDF plan of genocide against the indigenous communities and take over their land. The land grabbing policy of TPLF/EPRDF in Gambela will creates serious political insatiability in the region through the divide and rule policy.

Economically, from selling groundnuts along the roads of the towns through out Gambela up to international business is controlled by TPLF/EPRDF supporters and their political instruments and institutions. Local communities are not entitled to open business or any other economical means to support their region by importing productive resources. The commercial bank of Ethiopia is only there to please the highlanders instead of local communities. Until recently no indigenous businessman got loan front her banks. Lack of loan imitative by government to support local businessmen is the policy of neglecting the rights of people to be totally impoverished throughout the century. Establishment of business institutions by indigenous person in Gambela region is considered as crime by EPRDF government. Following the marginalization of indigenous by the past regimes, in 1990's the indigenous people established community based organizations: Anywaa Community Development Association, Anywaa Community Relief and Rehabilitation Association, Nuer Development Association, Mezenger Development Association and others. These organizations were very active to bring social changes among the indigenous people particularly in the rural areas. The corrupt one person rule TPLF/EPRDF government with their main intention to creates serious destitution in Gambela region, on May 23/2003 all the community based organization were banned by the government to weakened the local communities. They were banned suspecting them as root cause of conflict among indigenous ethnic groups. But the reality is to weaken the local institutions thereby makes them economically and socially poor people. This was the plan of EPRDF to consolidate the policy of genocide of past regimes against the people of Gambela. And it became apparent when the TPLF/EPRDF National Defense Forces (ENDF) carried out genocide campaigns against the Mezenger people in 1993 and 2001 in which more than 500 and 1800 innocent Mezenger were killed respectively. The same is true in 2003 when the Ethiopian National Defense forces killed more than 4000 Anywaa civilian through out the region. With out ending in Gambela region, the ENDF securities intelligent are after all Anywaa refugees in Sudan to hunt down the Anywaa refugee. Like other past regimes of Ethiopia, TPLF/EPRDF is much more attracted by: fertile lands and petroleum in Gambela region. Failure of Ethiopian government to explore oil and gas from Gambela region new trend policy of land grab, which expropriated the indigenous farmlands, is intensifying through out Gambela region. The land grabbing of Gambela farmland is worst compare to other land lease deals because of its confiscation and eviction, environmental degradation, drought and assimilation of indigenous people. Currently TPLF/EPRDF is implementing the 1884-1885 Berlin conference of petitions the African land for European countries to facilitate the process of colonization. The people of Gambela are now being colonized instead of being the citizens of the country. They lived as strangers or refugee in their own lands.

Considering the current impact and consequences of fertile farmland grabbing by TPLF/EPRDF in Gambela region, the leadership of GPLM/F declared the following:

To the people of Gambela

- You have been oppressed, assimilated, evicted, disenfranchised with in your nation. Following this inhumane activities by EPRDF you lost your freedom and dignity. The marginalization, oppression, eviction, confiscation and conscription of your people will not end by itself without your efforts to fight the corrupt Meles Zenawi one-person government.

To the international investors and their affiliated companies in Gambela region

- Terminate your land lease deal between you and the EPRDF corrupt officials in Addis Ababa and evacuate from Gambela region immediately. Continuation of farming in Gambela region and filature to accept the statement of GPLM/F will results in serious action against you.

To the people of Ethiopia

- Condemns the land grabbing policy of EPRDF and the land lease deals between EPRDF and international farming companies in all parts of the country. Accepting the land lease deals with EPRDF the money will be used as means of rigging the vote of election and continues to stay on power and your people will be the victim of EPRDF military atrocities.

To the international community

- Condemns the current land lease policy of evicting people from their ancestral land and stop donation and lending of money to the companies involved in the current farming of land in Ethiopia. United Nations Agencies and other Humanitarian Organizations offices in Ethiopia must monitors the policy of land lease and its deals and implementation through out Ethiopia

To GPLM/F freedom fighters, Members and supporters

- To stand firm where you are and fight all those parties involved in evicting of your people.
- Mobilizes your people to condemn the current land grabbing that are implemented out of your will and interest and the eviction of the indigenous people from their ancestral fertile farmlands.

Finally, GPLM/F is calling up on the TPLF/EPRDF corrupt one-man rule leadership to stop grabbing of lands for international investors for the benefits of their ruling classes. And to stop the indirect systematic resettlement programme which is based on investors to assimilate the indigenous people. Failure to accept the statement of GPLM/F, you will bear the full responsibilities across the region of Gambela.

The struggle for the people of Gambela shall continue until the corrupt EPRDF government is not in the land of Gambela and full freedom is fully maintained.

**Long live GPLM/F**