



## Armed Conflicts Report

### Ethiopia (2002– first combat deaths)

Update: January 2009

#### Summary

#### Type of Conflict

#### Parties to the Conflict

#### Status of the Fighting

#### Number of Deaths

#### Political Developments

#### Background

#### Arms Sources

#### Economic Factors

#### Summary:

**2008** Ethiopia and Eritrea failed to demarcate their joint border in 2008, and the border has since been demarcated by the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary commission (EEBC). Eritrea has accepted this demarcation, Ethiopia has yet to comment. There was a total of 50 deaths in Ethiopia throughout 2008. Some of these deaths occurred as a result of clashes between Eritrean and Ethiopian armed forces. Additional attacks were carried out by the Islamic Guerrillas over Ethiopia's continued involvement in Somalia. Tribal Clashes in Southern Ethiopia added to the death toll, as the Konso and Borena tribes continued to engage in conflict over territory, water resources and cattle grazing land ownership. The UN Security Council officially withdrew the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) mission after Eritrea forced its withdrawal in February, and the mission was terminated on 31 July. The Ethiopian government was accused by Human Rights Watch of abusing its own people in Ogaden during their counter-insurgency campaign in the Somali region throughout June of 2008.

**2007** While inter-ethnic tensions in the Gambella region have declined and the armed conflict in that area has ended, the Ogaden region experienced a dramatic increase in armed conflict after an April 2007 attack on a Chinese-run oil field by the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). Since then, the government of Ethiopia has launched a counterinsurgency attack on rebels in the region, with the ONLF claiming that brutal force was being used against Ogaden civilians. Old conflicts between Ethiopia and Eritrea have also emerged as the deadline to demarcate their joint border loomed at the end of November 2007. Both sides have begun to remilitarize border areas.

**2006** Inter-ethnic tensions and fighting persisted in the Gambella region of western Ethiopia but only 14 deaths were reported during the year. Fighting between clans was more severe in other areas of Ethiopia with Addis Ababa being hit by a series of unclaimed bombings resulting in civilian deaths. In addition, Ethiopia clashed with Somali Islamic forces, with fighting spilling over the Ethiopia-Somalia border.

**2005** Low-level inter-ethnic and state violence continued in Gambella. The government announced plans to prosecute six members of the armed forces for mass killings in December 2003.

**2004** Following violence early in the year, relative calm returned to Gambella. The repatriation of refugees began although a large number from the area remain displaced. The Government of Ethiopia acknowledged its failure to respond effectively to December 2003 killings while a Commission of Inquiry into the incident implicated unidentified members of the Ministry of Defence.

**2003** December clashes between the Anuak and Nuer communities in Gambella resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians. Ethnic Nuers, reportedly in collaboration with the Ethiopian military, targeted the Anuak

civilian population in response to an Anuak attack days earlier.

## Type of Conflict:

Failed state

## Parties to the Conflict:

1) 1) Government of Ethiopia, led by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) which won a third consecutive five-year term in 2005. In 2007 and 2008, the Ethiopian armed forces have been engaged in counter-insurgency operations in the Ogaden region against the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in an effort to gain control of the region and its natural resources. [2008 Human Rights Reports: Ethiopia, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, U.S. Department of State, 2009.]

"In tactics reminiscent of Sudan's counter-insurgency campaign in Darfur, witnesses told HRW's investigators that Ethiopian troops have burned homes and property, including the recent harvest and other food stocks, confiscated livestock and, in a few cases, fired on and killed fleeing civilians. In addition, they have arrested dozens of people in the larger towns, particularly family members of suspected ONLF members. Bombing by Ethiopian warplanes has also been reported." [AllAfrica, 2 July, 2007]

"Ethiopia's prime minister says his troops are fighting against a separatist movement in the region know as the Ogaden, and he denies that soldiers have committed such atrocities." [Associated Press, 29 November, 2007]

2) The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), claim they are fighting for the autonomy of the Somali population in the Ogaden region, and for the protection of their lands from international corporations performing resource extraction.

"Formed in 1984, the ONLF is fighting for the independence of ethnic Somalis in Ogaden, saying they have been marginalized by Addis Ababa." [Agence France Presse, 5 September, 2007]

"The Ethiopian military is not destructive force in the region. The ONLF launched its most daring assault in April. The group attacked a Chinese oil installation in Abole, killing nine Chinese and 65 Ethiopians." [The Independent, 17 October, 2007]

3) Also worth noting are the rising tensions between the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments over the border dispute that led to the 1998-2000 war. The deadline for the countries to agree on a joint border passed, and the Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission decided on a border for the countries in late 2008. Although the border was without an international supervisory presence for the first time in 8 years, no significant conflict emerged between the two countries after the withdrawal of UN forces on July 31, 2008.

## Status of Fighting:

**2008 Fighting in 2008 was limited in comparison to previous years. Independent media reports peg the death toll at between 40 and 60 individuals. Clashes between Eritrean and Ethiopian forces occurred in early 2008, causing approximately 20 deaths. During the year there was ongoing fighting between government forces and the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) in the Somali Region as well as additional tribal clashes between the Konso and Borena tribes.**

**2007** The Ethiopian military began counterinsurgency operations in the Ogaden region in May 2007 and many locals have accused soldiers of atrocities, including rape, murder and forced disappearances. These operations, along with rebel attacks have led to a disruption in food supplies in the region. The Ogaden National Liberation front (ONLF) has accused the government army of operating a food blockade and producing a man-made famine. Conflict between the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments has also resurfaced due to a stalemate in efforts to demarcate their joint border. Eritrea charges that a 2002 frontier ruling by a United Nations commission has been ignored by Ethiopia, while the latter claims the Eritrean government has refused their attempts at negotiation. Although no casualties have been reported, both countries have remilitarized their

joint border.

"The Ethiopian army has been accused by Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) separatists of operating a food blockade and causing a man-made famine." [BBC, 30 October, 2007]

"The ONLF said on Sunday its forces had killed 140 soldiers in a battle near the eastern town of Wardheer. The Ethiopian government initially denied its forces were attacked...However, an international aid worker in the region told BBC correspondent Elizabeth Blunt that there was confirmation an attack had taken place near Wardheer and that more than 100 people had been killed. The aid worker added however that the government was increasingly relying on locally raised militias rather than the army in the region, and that it was possible that these militias rather than regular troops had been involved." [BBC, 22 October, 2007]

"According to accounts from refugees, Ethiopian troops are burning villages, raping women and killing civilians as part of a systematic campaign to drive them from their homes. They reported dozens of villages destroyed and accused the Ethiopian government of forcibly starving its own people by preventing food convoys reaching villages and destroying crops and livestock." [The Independent, 17 October, 2007]

"The stand-off between the two neighbours has worsened – with much flexing of military muscle – ahead of the expiration this week of the commission's mandate to fix the border. Earlier this month UN Chief Ban Ki-moon expressed concern about the military build-up along the border and urged the two countries to break the stalemate in efforts to demarcate the disputed frontier. A 1998 to 2000 border war between the two countries left 70,000 people dead." [Mail & Guardian, 27 November, 2007]

**2006** Inter-clan fighting continued throughout 2006 in the Gambella region, particularly between the region's three largest indigenous groups, the Anuck, Nuer, and Mazinger. Large numbers of people were reported to have been displaced and some deaths reported. There were also ethnic clashes in other area of Ethiopia, specifically the towns of Yabello and Finchewa, some 400 km south of Addis Ababa, involving the Guji and Borena communities, and in eastern Ethiopia where the Habar Yonis and Idagaale communities fought over a water reservoir. In addition, a series of over a dozen reported bombings around the capital region of Addis Ababa have claimed a number of lives. Ethiopia has also been involved in numerous clashes with Islamic insurgents along the Somali border.

"There were continued incidents of ethnic conflict during the year, particularly in the western, southern, and eastern areas. The OLF [Oromo Liberation Front] and the government engaged in many clashes. There were also clashes among ethnic groups in the Gambella, Somali, and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples regions." ... "In September media reported that approximately 45,000 persons had been displaced from their homes in the Gambella region due to continued fighting between the region's three largest indigenous groups, the Anuak, Nuer, and Mazinger." ... "On June 11, a group of armed men attacked a bus en route from Addis Ababa to Gambella, near the town of Bonga, Gambella region. At least 14 personas were killed and several others injured. Reports are that the assailants may have been ethnic Anuak dissidents." [Ethiopia, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices-2006, US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Washington, March 2007 (available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm> )]

"More than 23,000 people have fled their homes in southern Ethiopia following clashes triggered by disputes over land ownership between neighbouring ethnic groups in the area last week, according to Oxfam. The fighting, which pits the Guji community against the Borena erupted about two weeks ago in the territory between the towns of Yabello and Finchewa, some 400 km south of the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa." [IRIN, June 19, 2006]

"At least 39 people have been killed in four days of inter-clan fighting in Daroor, a remote township in the Somali Zone Five region of Ethiopia, local sources said. The region is near the border with Somalia's self-declared northeastern republic of Somaliland. The clashes pitted the Habar Yonis against the Idagaale after the two sub-clans disagreed over the construction of a water reservoir in the area. Both are from the Garhaajis clan, whose members are mostly found in

Salahle district of Somalia's Togdheer region." [IRIN, June 02, 2006]

"Addis Ababa has been hit by at least 11 explosions, some attributed to grenades, others to landmines, since January, including a series of five on one day in March that killed one person on a bus and wounded 15. No one has claimed responsibility but Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has claimed the material for the explosives has come from arch-rival neighbour, Eritrea, a charge denied by Eritrean authorities. Other officials have blamed separatist rebels, Somali Muslim extremists and opposition groups, which the government has accused of trying to foment a coup after disputed elections last year." [Agence France Presse, May 12, 2006]

"Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said he was waging war against Somalia's Islamists to protect his country's sovereignty, intensifying a conflict that threatens to engulf the Horn of Africa. It was Ethiopia's first public admission of military involvement in Somalia, where for the first time it sent warplanes to pound the Islamist fighters now encircling the weak interim government." [Reuters, December 26, 2006]

**2005** Low-level inter-ethnic fighting flared up during the first half of the year among ethnic groups in Gambella. Clashes between rebels and the Ethiopian armed forces and allied militias were also reported while the Ethiopian armed forces continued to carry out systematic human rights abuses including extra-judicial killings.

"Since [our] establishment, [the] Gambella Peoples Liberation Movement/Force (GPLM/F) have carried out several attacks on government military institutions and instruments." [GPLM/F Press Release, Ethioindex.com, October 30, 2005]

"Ethnic conflict between Gabras and Gujis which erupted in April 2005 in the Oromia region of Borena zone continues in the area, UN agency said on Monday." [Dagnachev Teklu, *The Daily Monitor*, July 19, 2005]

"Ethiopian troops have committed widespread killings, rapes and torture of the tribal Anuak population in the southwestern corner of the country since late 2003, a Human Rights investigator said Thursday." [Chris Tomlinson, *Washington Post*, March 24, 2005]

**2004** The early months of the year were marked by continued fighting in Gambella. Later, violent incidences became less frequent, and the military presence was increased to assist local law enforcement. Refugees who had fled to neighbouring Sudan began to return to the region with the assistance of humanitarian agencies. However, significant numbers remain displaced.

"Oxfam has helped with the establishment of the Gambella Peace and Development Council that works with families hoping to return back to the remote region ...Relief workers estimate that about 9,000 people have returned to their homes while a further 6,000 are said to have remained at the town of Pochalla in southern Sudan." [IRIN, September 7, 2004]

"Tens of thousands of people remain displaced following violent clashes in western Ethiopia's Gambela State, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) said on Wednesday. In a newly launched profile on internal displacement in Ethiopia, it said 51,000 people had not returned to their homes." [IRIN, 14 July, 2004]

"Ten thousand people have fled ethnic fighting in western Ethiopia that has claimed more than 250 lives, according to government officials. Clashes had erupted at a gold mine, in which 196 people were killed in a single day." [IRIN 12 February, 2004]

**2003** A December attack on UN and Ethiopian government officials in Gambella, reportedly undertaken by ethnic Anuaks dissatisfied with the proposed construction of a refugee camp that would house Dinka and Nuer refugees on traditional Anuak territory, resulted in the deaths of seven officials and triggered intense retaliatory attacks against the Anuak population. Within a week, approximately 400 Anuak civilians were killed by "local people from highland areas" (including the Nuer), with the assistance of the Ethiopian military.

"Reports indicate that during the period between the 13th and 15th of December, 2003, 424

Anuak were killed by Ethiopian Government troops in uniform along with local people from highland areas, in Abobo, Itang, Gog and Gambella town in the Gambella region. The pretext for these massacres is reported to have been an attack on a van carrying eight UN and Ethiopian Government refugee officials on December 13th, 2003, which was blamed, without conclusive evidence, on members of the Anuak ethnic group." [*World Organisation of Torture*, April 13, 2004]

"Defence ministry spokesman Major Harnet Yohhanes told AFP that the army was working with the police to restore order and had nothing to do with the (December) killings." [*Agence France Presse*, January 16, 2004]

"The (December) massacres were led by Ethiopian government troops in uniform, but 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." [*Genocide Watch*, January 8, 2004]

"Humanitarian sources say that the construction of a US \$1.8 million refugee camp - which will house Dinka and Nuer refugees - has provoked anger among Anuaks." [*IRIN*, December 16, 2003]

## 2002

"In March between 600 and 800 persons were killed during clashes between the Sheko-Mejjangar and Manja and the Sheka and Bench-Majjii in and around the town of Tepi, capital of the Yeki district, in the Southern Region... The clashes involved local officials and members of each of these communities, and resulted from the dissatisfaction of many Sheko-Mejjangar who had wanted autonomy following an unsuccessful attempt in 1993 to move the Shekicho zone from the Southern Region to the Gambella Region." [US State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2002*, March 31, 2003]

"Late last year (2002) 41, mainly Dinka refugees from war-torn Sudan, were murdered in a refugee camp where some 28,000 people had sought protection. The killings were blamed on armed Anuak refugees who indiscriminately opened fire. Four months earlier, 60 people were killed after gunmen from the Nuer ethnic groups attacked Anuaks, forcing some 8,000 people to flee their homes." [*IRIN*, December 16, 2003]

## Number of Deaths:

**Total:** Over 2000. Between 1,000 and 1,700 people have been killed in inter-ethnic conflict in the south-western region of Ethiopia since 2002. In the eastern Ogaden region in 2007 alone, there have been close to 1,000 deaths reported by both the government and the ONLF. The ONLF also reports thousands of killings, rapes and forced disappearances by the government since it came to power in 1991.

"Citing victims' accounts, the group said it had documented 2,395 extrajudicial killings, 1, 945 rapes and 3,091 forced disappearances in the region since 1991 when the current government came to power." [*Mail & Guardian*, 8 August, 2007]

"In March between 600 and 800 persons were killed during clashes between the Sheko-Mejjangar and Manja and the Sheka and Bench-Majjii in and around the town of Tepi, capital of the Yeki district, in the Southern Region. Government officials reported 128 deaths; however, the (Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Coalition political opposition) SEPDC reported more than 1,700 deaths." [US State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2002*, March 31, 2003]

**2008 The death toll was reduced significantly in 2008 with independent media reports pegging the death toll at between 40 and 60 individuals. Rapes, forced disappearances and other abuses continued throughout the year in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia.**

**2007** Casualties in the Ogaden region are reported to be as high as 1,000 persons for the year 2007. This number includes both military and civilian casualties as neither the Ethiopian government nor the ONLF

distinguishes between the two when reporting casualties. The most notable casualties for the year were the 65 Ethiopians and 9 Chinese men who were killed when the ONLF attacked a Chinese-based oil exploration site in April.

"The ONLF – who last month raided a Chinese-run oil exploration field in the area killing 74 people, denies government claims it was behind at least one of the blasts that state media say killed 11 people and wounded a regional leader." [*Reuters*, 30 May, 2007]

"Aid workers say an estimated 1,500 Ogaden refugees crossed into Kenya to escape renewed fighting in the past month. Ethiopia has not commented but last week, the army said it had killed some 100 rebels in the past month." [*BBC*, 19 November, 2007]

"Ethiopia said on Wednesday it had killed more than 500 rebels and captured 170 in the past two months during an offensive in the volatile but energy-rich Ogaden region bordering Somalia." [*Mail & Guardian*, 8 August, 2007]

"The government has also imposed a trade and food blockade on the region in an apparent effort to force thousands of people in rural areas to move to larger towns and thus deny the ONLF a support base, according to HRW, which also criticized abuses by the ONLF, including the attack on the Chinese installation and the killing of at least 28 civilians on a nearby farm." [*AllAfrica*, 2 July, 2007]

"Dozens of people were killed in both cities in northern Ogaden when TPLF (government) troops shot indiscriminately into crowds of civilians forced to attend a TPLF-sponsored political rally." [*Reuters*, 30 May, 2007]

**2006** Casualties in the Gambella region were reported to number only 14 during the year. Ethnic clashes from other areas have resulted in 150- 200 civilians being killed with thousands displaced. Reports of the bombings in Addis Ababa have stated that between 10 and 27 were killed.

"On June 11, a group of armed men attacked a bus en route from Addis Ababa to Gambella, near the town of Bonga, Gambella region. At least 14 persons were killed and several others injured. Reports are that the assailants may have been ethnic Anuak dissidents." [*Ethiopia, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices-2006*, US Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, Washington, March 2007 (available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78734.htm> )]

"Humanitarian organizations last week reported that between 100 and 150 people had been killed in [ethnic] clashes that started when land formerly belonging to Borenas was awarded to Gujis by the government." [*IRIN*, June 19, 2006]

"At least 39 people have been killed in four days of inter-clan fighting in Daroor, a remote township in the Somali Zone Five region of Ethiopia, local sources said." [*IRIN*, June 02, 2006]

"At least four people were killed and 41 injured as a wave of apparently coordinated blasts rocked the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa, spewing blood and shattered glass. Police described the nine blasts, the latest in a series of unclaimed mystery explosions to have hit the country during heightened political tensions this year, as 'criminal acts' but could not say who was behind them." [*Agence France Presse*, May 12, 2006]

"In early April at least six were killed and dozens wounded when grenades exploded in bars and a market in towns in eastern and western Ethiopia." [*Agence France Presse*, May 12, 2006]

**2005** There was little independent reporting of events in Gambella this year. As a result it is difficult to estimate the number of violent deaths. However, it is likely that hundreds were killed during the course of inter-ethnic clashes and from attacks by rebels and by Ethiopian armed forces and allied militias who continued to carry out systematic human rights abuses including extra-judicial killings and disappearances.

"Rebels in southwestern Ethiopia killed four policemen including a regional police chief in an attack on a police station, the pro-government Walta Information Centre news agency said on Monday."

[*Reuters*, October 31, 2005]

"The on-going conflict between Gabras and Gujis in Borena zone, Oromiya region that displaced 43,700 people has not been resolved. It is becoming a humanitarian problem in the area,' UNOCHA said...The number of people who died due to the conflict is yet to be confirmed, but there have been casualties in the area." [Dagnachev Teklu, *The Daily Monitor*, July 19, 2005]

"New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) said the army had launched a systematic campaign against the Anuak beginning in late 2003 and that a recent announcement that six soldiers would be tried for their involvement fell far short of addressing the matter. 'The Ethiopian military has committed widespread murder, rape and torture against the Anuak population in the remote southwestern region of Gambella since December 2003,' the group said. 'The abuses ... could amount to crimes against humanity,' it said in a 64-page report entitled 'Targeting the Anuak: Human Rights Violations and Crimes against Humanity in Ethiopia's Gambella Region' released here." [*Sudan Tribune*, March 24, 2005]

"The latest round of violence began after Anuak gunmen allegedly ambushed a government vehicle, killing seven people, he said. The military has carried out extensive human rights violations since then under the guise of combating Anuak bandits..." [Chris Tomlinson, *Associated Press*, March 24, 2005]

**2004** At least 200 people were reported killed in 2004.

"Ethiopian security forces have killed 20 'bandits' alleged to have been behind the recent violence that erupted in the west of the country..." [*IRIN*, 18 May, 2004]

"The security situation in the Gambella region of western Ethiopia is deteriorating and has resulted in fighting between ethnic Anuaks and the Ethiopian military and Anuaks and other ethnic groups. More than 200 people have died as a result." [*U.S. Department of State Press Release*, February 20, 2004]

"Renewed fighting has erupted in the western Gambella region bordering Sudan, claiming as many as 40 lives, according to UN and humanitarian sources." [*IRIN*, 9 February, 2004]

**2003** According to independent media reports more than 400 people, many of them civilians, were killed in Gambella region in 2003.

"An independent human rights group in Ethiopia said Friday that 93 people were killed last month during ethnic unrest in the western Gambella region ... Government officials still insist that the death toll in Gambella is 57 and denied any official involvement in the unrest." [*Agence France Presse*, January 16, 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*, January 8, 2004]

## Political Developments:

**2008** The U.N officially terminated its mission to Eritrea and Ethiopia July 31, 2008 after Eritrea forced its temporary withdrawal in February. Ethiopia continued to stress its intentions of promoting dialogue with Eritrea, and later in the year, accused Eritrea of broadcasting anti-Ethiopian media broadcasts in local languages. The peace between the two countries held to the end of 2008 however, with the Eritrea-Ethiopia boundary commission establishing a border demarcation for the two countries. The United States continues to depend on their alliance with the government of Ethiopia. Human Rights Watch issued a report this year on Ethiopia's human rights abuses in the region of Ogaden. Finally, Ethiopian participation in Somalia has escalated tensions between Somali militia groups and the Ethiopian government, and tensions could escalate in 2009.

**2007** The U.S. depends on their alliance with the government of Ethiopia to monitor the war on terror in the Horn of Africa by tracking al Qaeda's movements within the area. This caused issues for some human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch which openly accused the Ethiopian government of blocking aid,

burning homes, and displacing thousands of civilians in the Ogaden region. The government has also been accused of expelling non-governmental organizations from the region in an effort to keep their illegal activities quiet. The government defends itself by claiming to have banned these organizations on the basis that they are spreading hateful propaganda through the region. The United Nations sent a 14-person team to investigate claims of human rights abuses in August of 2007. There was also increased hostility between Ethiopia and Eritrea as a deadline for both countries to physically demarcate their disputed border approached.

"The U.S. looks to Ethiopia to help fight the war on terror in East Africa, where al-Qaeda has claimed responsibility for several attacks, including the 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania that killed 225 people. But working with Ethiopia against terror means an alliance with a country accused of violating human and political rights. Last year, the Ethiopian government acknowledged its security forces killed 193 civilians protesting a disputed election but insisted excessive force was not used." [Associated Press, 29 November, 2007]

"Earlier this year, New York-based Human Rights Watch accused the Ethiopian army of blocking aid, burning homes and displacing thousands of civilians in the Ogaden region." [Associated Press, 29 November, 2007]

"The United Nations plans to send a fact-finding mission to Ethiopia's Ogaden region where separatist rebels...say they are facing the toughest government crackdown in years. The mission, due to start on Aug. 30, will assess the allegations by the rebels and rights groups of human rights abuses as well as the food, water and health needs of Ogaden's ethnic Somalis. [Reuters, 29 August, 2007]

"Tensions between the Horn of African neighbours have ratcheted up in recent weeks with the approach of the Nov. 30 deadline set by an independent border commission to physically mark their disputed frontier." [Reuters, 27 November, 2007]

**2006** The World Bank and Great Britain decided to lift the suspension on direct budgetary aid to Ethiopia, after it had been suspended for six months over governance concerns. The government also released thousands who had been arrested without charge following unrest and violence after 2005 elections. With tensions continuing to rise with neighbouring Eritrea and the defection of Ethiopian army general Kemal Geltu to the Eritrean cause, the political climate remained tense. Many believe the five year mandate won by Meles Zenawi in 2005 to be illegitimate, creating a fear of political instability. Former Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam was found guilty in absentia of genocide after a 12-year trial and sentenced to life in prison.

"Former Ethiopian leader Mengistu Haile Mariam was found guilty in absentia of genocide after the 12-year trial of one of Africa's bloodiest governments. Mengistu, who now lives in Zimbabwe, was accused with top members of his military government of killing thousands during a 17-year rule which began with the toppling of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 and included war, purges and famine." [Reuters, December 12, 2006]

"Six months after suspending direct budgetary aid to Ethiopia over governance concerns, the World Bank and Great Britain decided on Friday to transfer US\$390 million of the funds to programmes to improve health, water and education for the country's poor during the next two years." [IRIN, May 29, 2006]

"Ethiopian authorities have freed more than 11,200 people seized following post-election political unrest in November that claimed the lives of at least 46 people. Over 2,000 prisoners were released without charge after prosecutors said they had played a minimal role in the violence." [IRIN, January 16, 2006]

**2005** A new rebel group, the Anuak-based Gambella People Liberation Movement/Front emerged and demanded self-determination for Gambella. The US Ambassador to Ethiopia met in Gambella with representatives of the Anuak, Nuer and other ethnic groups, and called on the Ethiopian government to prosecute officials and soldiers responsible for the mass killings of Anuak in December 2003. The Ethiopian government responded by announcing plans to prosecute several soldiers. Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his party, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) won a disputed May election giving Zenawi a third five-year term in office.

"On March 18 [2005], the government announced plans to prosecute six soldiers for their role in the December 2003 massacre." [Chris Tomlinson, *Washington Post*, March 24, 2005]

"A significant event occurred on January 28 when the US Ambassador, Aurelia Brazeal, held a special meeting in Gambella with some Anuak, Nuer and highlanders...where she called on the Ethiopian government to bring the perpetrators of the crimes against the Anuak to justice...and called the resource rich area of Gambella, 'the conscience of Ethiopia.'" [*Anuak Justice Council, Memorandum*, March 20, 2005]

**2004** The president of Gambella state disappeared, believed to be kidnapped by members of the Anuak community. A commission of inquiry set up by the Ethiopian Government to investigate the killings in December 2003 established that members of the Ministry of Defense had been involved. The Government of Ethiopia apologized for its failure to react swiftly at the onset of the killings.

"Kemal Bedri, the chairman of the commission, said more than a dozen eyewitnesses had provided evidence of the involvement of defence ministry forces in the attacks." [*IRIN*, July 14, 2004]

"The Ethiopian government said on Friday that it had apologized to local tribes for its inadequate response to prevent a massacre in the troubled western region of Gambella. A statement released by the federal affairs ministry said the government had not performed 'proactively', but promised that the killers would be brought to justice." [*IRIN*, March 5, 2004]

**2003** The Ethiopian government implemented power-sharing measures aimed at neutralizing the inter-ethnic tensions underlying the armed conflict of the past two years in the south-western region of the country. An outbreak of violence in December demonstrated that these measures were largely ineffective and it was alleged that the violence was in part a result of government policy to emphasize ethnic differences.

"The (Ethiopian Human Rights) Council accused the state authorities of failing to take action to prevent the violence, despite clear indications of tension before the killings... 'The ethnic-based policy that the government is promoting is poisoning people's mentality by a negative tribal thinking,' (the council) added." [*Agence France Presse*, January 16, 2004]

"Earlier this year the ministry of federal affairs stepped in to quell the ethnic violence. The president of the region was arrested and is currently facing charges of inciting ethnic hatred. The entire local police force was disbanded. A local power-sharing administration was also set up representing the Anuak and the Nuer ethnic groups who inhabit the region." [*IRIN*, December 16, 2003]

## Background:

The inter-ethnic conflict in south-western Ethiopia, primarily but not exclusively between the Anuak and the Nuer, has existed for decades and can be attributed to competition for the region's scarce natural resources, especially land and water. This competition, and the resulting tensions, have been amplified over several decades by the influx of people to the region. In particular, the resettlement of highland peoples on traditional Anuak territory, a policy of the Derg regime in the 1970s and 1980s, and the arrival of tens of thousands of Nuer refugees from Sudan, have increased inter-ethnic tension. More recently, the Ethiopian government has become the main agent of violence in the region, engaging in systematic human rights abuses against the Nuer and Anuak including extra-judicial killings. In December 2003, over 400 Anuak were killed by government forces as a result of what several human rights groups have called a policy of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

While the conflicts in the Gambella region have subsided in 2007, other conflicts have arisen both internally and externally. Internally, there has been an immense rise in conflict and casualties in the Ogaden region as government forces participate in a counter-insurgency against the rebel group Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF). The ONLF hopes for autonomy for its largely Somali population and in April 2007 took violent action against a Chinese-based exploration company in an effort to protect the Ogaden's natural resources. This attack led to the current increased level of armed conflict between the parties, and many casualties have been

seen in 2007.

Ethiopia and Eritrea have solved their border dispute for the time being, and have managed to keep the peace for over six months although the disputed border is not currently monitored by any international peacekeeping force.

"Around 182,000 people live in the region. The Anuak make up some 27 percent with the Nuer representing the majority group with 40 percent of the population... Further antagonising an already volatile situation is the presence of five refugee camps, dotted along the Sudanese border, which are home to thousands of Nuer, and, say analysts, the cause of the latest attacks. According to observers, the plan to build the new Odier camp for 24,000 people - including thousands of Nuer - in territory traditionally held by the Anuak has fuelled resentment." [*IRIN*, January 8, 2004]

"The region - which is around 600 miles west of the capital Addis Ababa and borders Sudan - has witnessed an explosion in ethnic violence in the last two years. Much of the fighting has been between two ethnic groups - the Nuer ... and the Anuak tribe." [*IRIN*, December 16, 2003]

"Though insignificant in nature and causality, inter-group conflict between the Anyuua and Nuer can be traced as far back as the early 20th century... Four important factors are responsible for the escalating ethnic conflict in Gambella region. These include control over scarce natural resources such as water and grazing land, the question of majority population in the region and what language should be taught in school, and, a general feeling or apprehension among Anyuua that they are being dominated by the pastoralist Nuers ..." [United Nations Emergencies Unit for *Ethiopia, 'Breaking the Cycle of Conflict in Gambella Region*, January 3, 2003]

### Arms Sources:

Ethiopia receives conventional arms mainly from Russia and the Ukraine and to a lesser extent from other former USSR countries such as Kazakhstan and Belarus. In 2007, Ethiopia raised its defence budget by more than \$54 million in preparation for armed conflict with Eritrea.

[*The SIPRI Yearbook, 2005/2006*]

The Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) is said to receive training and arms from Eritrea and Somalia. Weapons flow from Sudan to other armed groups in Ethiopia through the porous shared border. Although the Ethiopian government has attempted to disarm the various groups, the pastoralist lifestyle of several of them has undermined these attempts.

"One motive for Ethiopia's ouster of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in December 2006 may have been to cut the links between the ONLF, the ruling Islamic Courts and Eritrea, including arms and logistical supply lines from Eritrea and Somalia to the ONLF in Ethiopia's eastern region." [*Human Rights Watch*, 4 April 2007]

"A ready supply of arms from the civil war in Sudan and arms dumps left over from the former Ethiopian regime have exacerbated the scale of the violence. Attempts have been made to try and disarm groups, but it has proved difficult with the Nuer as they are pastoralists." [*IRIN*, January 24, 2003]

### Economic Factors:

The conflict between the Anuak and the Nuer in Gambella, perhaps the most prominent conflict in the region, is in large part due to competition over scarce land and water resources. This competition is exacerbated by the divergent livelihoods pursued by the two groups; the Anuak are cultivators and the Nuers are pastoralists. Furthermore, some analysts have noted that the discovery of oil as well as the presence of other natural resources such as tungsten, platinum and gold, heightens the importance of this region for the Ethiopian government due to the interest of multinational corporations in their exploitation. Members of the indigenous ethnic groups have accused the Ethiopian government of wanting to remove them from the area and resettle the region with members of Ethiopian ethnic groups in order to ensure government control over the natural

resources.

Across the country, in the southeast Ogaden region, the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) has warned that natural gas exploration will not be tolerated. In April 2007, the ONLF acted on these warnings by attacking a Chinese-based exploration site which resulted in a major Ethiopian military operation against the rebels in this region. Despite this attack, the government continued to assure international companies that the Ogaden region is safe.

"Ethiopia dismissed rebel threats to foreign energy firms considering work in the country's restive south-east, saying the area was stable with no risk to potential investment. The information ministry said the warning from Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) that natural gas exploration in the Ogaden region "will not be tolerated" was hollow and nothing new." [*Canadian International Peace Project*, April 26, 2006]

"Multinational corporations have set their sights on the natural resources of the Gambella region. Central Ethiopian authorities thus have powerful economic incentives to seek control of these resources. Petroleum (oil & gas), water, tungsten, platinum and gold are the principal resources in the Gambella region that are of interest to international financial and extraction corporations ... On February 17, 2004, the Ethiopian Minister of Mines announced that the Malaysian company will launch a natural gas exploration project in the Gambella region. GW/SRI has received reports that the China National Petroleum Corporation may have also signed contracts with the EPRDF for a stake in Gambella's oil." [*Genocide Watch and Survivors' Rights International*, 25 February, 2004]

"Gambella is a fertile, but swampy, malaria-infested area, which borders war-torn Sudan. It is however also rich in natural resources like gold and oil, which, GW (Genocide Watch) and SRI (Survivors' Rights International) say, may be serving to fuel the three-month orgy of violence, inasmuch as the Anyuaks believe that much of the land in the area belongs to them." [*IRIN*, February 23, 2004]

"Complicating the recent violence is an ongoing dispute between the Nuer and the Anuak. Traditionally they have clashed as they compete for scarce lands. Anuaks fear they are losing their land to the nomadic Nuer ... Although oil deposits have been found in Gambella, it is unlikely that this is further provoking tensions ... (as) oil experts ... have played down the significance of any major oil finds." [*IRIN*, January 8, 2004]

"The situation (in Gambella) has grown worse since oil was discovered under Anuak lands ... Highland Ethiopians who now control the Ethiopian government now have strong economic motives to drive Anuak off of their land." [*Genocide Watch*, January 8, 2004]

Project Ploughshares  
57 Erb Street West  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 6C2  
tel (519) 888-6541 fax (519) 888-0018 Email: [plough@ploughshares.ca](mailto:plough@ploughshares.ca)