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Statement

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United Nations

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Item 1: Indigenous Women

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“The Suffering of the Anuak Women”

Mr. Chairman:

I speak to you as the representative of the forgotten people, the Anuak (or Anywaa) of the Gambella region southwest Ethiopia and southeastern Sudan. They are indigenous people numbering about 100,000. Since December 2003, the level of violence against the Anuak has increased dramatically. They have been oppressed and marginalized by both countries for a long time, but on December 13, 2003 a well-planned genocide of the Anuaks was initiated by the defense forces of Ethiopia. Some informal militias from the highland part of Ethiopia joined them.

Between December 13 and 16, over 424 Anuak were massacred in Gambella town by Government troops and local militias. Human rights organizations, Genocide Watch and Survival Rights' International noted the overwhelming evidence of genocide, arbitrary detentions, torture, rape, sexual assault, forced displacement, destruction of properties, and extrajudicial killings are being used to control the Anuak people by Ethiopian government defense forces. It is feared that a large-scale humanitarian crisis is underway.

The educated men and leaders were systematically targeted and murdered in front of their families. Women and girls were raped as soldiers in military uniform chanted, “Today is the day of killing Anuak men.” They taunted, “The next generation of Anuak children will be produced by highlanders.” The raping and killing is continuing today, especially in the rural areas.

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Recent accounts are that the men are tied up while the defense forces rape the women and girls. Some of these men are infected with HIV/Aids. After they are raped, they kill the men in front of them. Many innocent women and children have been killed as well.

The majority of the men were married, now leaving many widows and children with no adequate means of support. Most houses have been burned, leaving no shelter. Food storage bins and crops have been burned leaving no food. Many people are hiding in the bush as the rainy season starts. With the rains, any food sources diminish further. A lack of proper sanitation contaminates the water. Mosquito born diseases increase at the same time people are without shelter and mosquito nets.

Women and children have been psychologically traumatized by the violence and the loss of their loved ones. They live in constant fear as rape, torture and killings have become a way of life for them. Over 10,000 men, boys and some women and children have fled to Pochalla, Sudan for safety, but the situation there is also very dire. In the last four months these refugees have received very little food. Many women have to sell their clothes or gather fruits and roots for food.

Many women, as well as men, have been imprisoned without charges or trail. My two sisters and brother-in-law are examples. They fled southern Sudan because of the civil war only to be arrested by the Ethiopian government simply because they were Anuak and educated. This is a crime against international law. They are now victims of the Ethiopian government! They have been detained in the Gambella prison since December, 2002! Their children have been left behind with no caregiver.

The situation in Gambella is grave, and in urgent need of international attention. The Government of Ethiopia cannot be allowed to carry out genocide against the Anuak minority with impunity. Please hear the cries of the Anuak women and children!

Therefore, we are urging the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and international communities:

- To give attention to suffering Anuak women and children and all forms of human rights abuse
 - To stop the killing carried out by defense forces and militias in Gambella
 - To make the Ethiopian defense forces withdraw from Gambella and all Anuak villages and re- instate the regional police force
 - To form an independent investigation committee under the UN Security Council
 - To provide humanitarian assistance to the refugees and displaced Anuaks in Gambella and Pochalla
- To stop burning houses and crops.
To release all the detainees.

Thank you Mr. Chairman