



## Open Letter to Beyoncé Knowles:

**"Beyoncé, your performance at the Ethiopian Millennium Celebration is part of a larger performance put on by the Ethiopian government. Do you really want to be part of it?"**

*The real title of this celebration is, "Creating an Illusionary Ethiopia!" The people in Ethiopia called this Millennium Celebration: "ምንም የለም" meaning 'there is nothing' to celebrate for the average Ethiopian. The part of the performance you, Beyoncé, will not see is represented by such actions as the government's covert rounding up of thousands of innocent starving homeless children and women from the streets of Addis Ababa in order to present a clean image to outsiders like yourself and use your artistic talent to disguise their cruel oppression and documented genocide against the Ethiopian people.*

August 29, 2007

Ms. Beyoncé Knowles,  
Music World Entertainment,  
1505 Hadley Street  
Houston, TX 77002

**Dear Beyoncé,**

I am aware that you have been invited to perform at the Ethiopian Millennium celebration that will occur in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on September 12<sup>th</sup>. Undoubtedly, you have been selected for this special occasion due to the fact that you are such a popular and talented performer. Many Ethiopians would love to have your participation in this most significant day which gives unique recognition to Ethiopia's ancient history dating back thousands of years, even marked by its own calendar which is now about to enter the third millennium.

As a young, top-performing celebrity, you are an inspiring role model for many young Ethiopian girls, for black women and for women throughout the world of any background. Because of that and your potential influence, I am contacting you to make you more fully aware of the grave situation in Ethiopia, which is consuming the minds, hearts, bodies and souls of the Ethiopian people.

It may help you to better understand the conditions under which you will be performing so you are able to better choose your next steps. Most of those outside of Ethiopia are not familiar with what is happening inside the country, and you may be among them. As you consider the information I am providing to you, I ask you to seriously think about the message you will give to the Ethiopian people and how your voice might be raised up in song for those whose voices have been silenced by oppression and fear.

First of all, I am not writing to you as a member of a political party, but instead as a human rights defender who cares about the well being of the Ethiopian, the African, the African-American and of all humankind. Because of the injustice I first witnessed towards my own ethnic group, the Anuak, at the hands of the current Ethiopian government, I have had no choice but to act as an agent of change on behalf of them and the other oppressed people of Ethiopia and beyond.

You can get in touch with Obang O. Metho by email at: [advocacy@anuakjustice.org](mailto:advocacy@anuakjustice.org)

I am an Ethiopian man myself, but I have made a choice not to celebrate the Ethiopian millennium in Ethiopia because I am unwilling to celebrate when just below the surface of such gaiety, Ethiopian people are suffering under a tyrannical dictatorship that is killing, raping, torturing and imprisoning their loved ones. There is no time to celebrate for those under the tents of mourning for the tragedies caused by those elite in the government, the same elite who will soon be celebrating the Ethiopian Millennium in the ballrooms of the Addis Ababa Sheraton.

I am one of those grieving for my family members and friends who were targeted by the Ethiopian government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, the government that is still in place. Before the loss of my loved ones, the development agency I headed, attempted to work within the system to bring development to the Gambella region of southwestern Ethiopia; however, on December 13, 2003, the Ethiopian military went door to door, pulling out the leaders from my particular ethnic group, the Anuak, and massacred them in front of their wives and children. They raped the women, telling them they would not have more Anuak children and burned down their homes, crops and granaries. They destroyed their wells, schools and health clinics causing an exodus of thousands of Anuak across the border to Sudan or Kenya. Many are still refugees in these camps.

I testified before the United Nations, the US Congress, the Canadian government and at the European Parliament. I worked with major human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch. In their investigation, they documented what they called, *crimes against humanity*, directed against the Anuak people during the massacre and following, but to date, no one has been held accountable for these crimes. Instead, the situation in Ethiopia has worsened and there are massive numbers of human rights crimes going on all over the country.

This terrorization of Ethiopians by its own government was finally exposed to outsiders at the time of the 2005 Ethiopian National Election. Six months before the election, an opposition party, the Coalition of United Democratic Party (CUDP) was formed to challenge the current government, which had been in power for the last 16 years. Seven days before the election, the government went to extreme means to bring supporters to the streets to rally for them. Many Ethiopians were given transportation and time off from work if they would come out in support for the current government. Fifty thousand people participated in this “staged rally” in Meskel Square.

A couple days later, the new opposition party, the CUDP, called supporters to come out. No incentives or assistance were given, but two million Ethiopians showed up, even walking or coming on the backs of donkeys. No one expected this outpouring of support for the newly created CUDP, which demonstrated how much people wanted a change in the government.

It was seen as one of the most peaceful rallies that ever took place in Africa and some described it as so incredible that it felt like God was coming close to them. But, before the leaders could address the crowd, the government turned off the electrical power so the leaders would not have a way to magnify their voices. Despite this frustration, the rally went on until the crowd went home peacefully without committing any aggressive acts towards people or property.

On Election Day, May 15, 2005, at the crack of dawn, many Ethiopians went out to vote. Instead of choosing the typical African way to change an unpopular government by picking up guns to fight and kill each other like was done by this current government in 1991, they chose the ballot box, hoping that their vote would give their sons and daughters a chance to go to school, to obtain clean water, to gain access to health care and to obtain greater economic opportunity. Some walked four hours or more before then standing in line for another four hours in order to vote. Twenty-six million Ethiopians cast their ballots.

The next day, western observers in the capital city of Addis Ababa monitored the counting of the ballots. The results were shocking! In the capital city alone, the voters chose the opposition party for 23 out of 24 seats. The 24<sup>th</sup> did not have a challenger to the seat. The ruling government quickly realized that they would lose if the counting continued properly so they simply declared themselves the winners.

Prime Minister Meles Zenawi then prohibited any demonstrations or public gatherings. The people went out to peacefully protest anyway as they knew it was permitted in the Ethiopian Constitution. In response, government Agazi soldiers, an elite and very well-trained group of sharp-shooters, went on the street and killed over 46 innocent civilians.

In early November, the people again went out to rally against massive arrests and detentions going on in the country. Members of the Ethiopian National Defense Forces killed many more people. These deaths for both incidents now totaled 193, most dying from shots to the head. Shortly after that, the CUDP leaders, human rights activists and journalists, along with more than 30,000 to 40,000 other Ethiopians, were rounded up and locked in prison.

When the international community called for an investigation into these deaths, the government set up a Commission of Inquiry; however, the results of this Commission found that the government was responsible for the deaths, one of the reasons was because the people protesting, had not had any weapons. When the Commission of Inquiry first came out with these conclusions, the government pressured the commission to change their findings. When they would not, they were threatened and had to flee the country to Europe and the United States of America. They remain in exile.

The people responsible for these deaths, just like those responsible for the Gambella massacre, have never been brought to justice. However, this crisis has not been well-covered in the western media for many reasons. One reason is that the present government of Ethiopia claims to be fighting with the United States in their War on Terror, so the media did not want to jeopardize that relationship.

The CUDP leaders were charged with treason and genocide even though they had no guns; yet, these leaders were detained for 18 months in prison. Some of them are journalists, including a journalist that is about your age who delivered a premature baby while in prison. This woman was not guilty of anything but wanting to tell others the truth about what was going on.

On July 20, 2007, 38 opposition leaders and journalists were pardoned and released, probably due to pressure from the West. Three weeks later, 37 more journalists were released without any charges. What most people do not realize is that there are some 30,000 to 40,000 other people who remain detained across the country.

You might ask why I am telling you this. It is because you have been called to entertain a select group of Ethiopians, many of whom bear responsibility for these actions. These are people who do not demonstrate any sympathy or care for their own people, some of whom are responsible for the continuing gross human rights abuses going on across the country. Yet, they will want you to support them in presenting a good image of Ethiopia as they celebrate. It will be a false Ethiopia.

In preparation for presenting such a false picture of the country, the slums around the Sheraton will be “cleaned up” of the beggars on the streets, who are considered by the government as being discardable. The streets of Addis Ababa are home to some 90,000 innocent starving homeless children, women and beggars who will have to be kept out of public view by staying outside the area or even the city so that they will not bring shame or embarrassment to a government by being in view to outsiders like you.

Additionally, such a celebration should be for all Ethiopians like when all who wanted to were welcome to celebrate our American millennium in Times Square in New York city or other major cities around the country. However, in Ethiopia, this will not be allowed.

The main celebration that would have been for the people in Meskel Square, has been cancelled, reportedly because the government is afraid that due to the unrest among the people, it could quickly change from a celebration to a demonstration. No other gatherings are permitted throughout the country except for those that take place inside peoples' homes.

The Sheraton, Hilton and the Stadium, which will be heavily controlled by security forces, are the only places Ethiopians are allowed to celebrate. However, the reported cost to enter the stadium will start at \$250 and go upwards from that. Reportedly, the Sheraton and Hilton will be charging participants \$500 and above. What is wrong with this picture?

If you look more closely, you are actually being called to prop up a picture of an Ethiopia that does not really exist. Instead, it is propaganda. Unfortunately, it is typical of African celebrations by the dictators and the privileged who have no sympathy for those not just dying, but being purposely killed by their own military throughout the country.

Beyond the human rights crimes, the humanitarian need in this country is horrendous. Ethiopians are trying to survive on a per capita income of less than a dollar a day, one of the lowest in the world. Much of this hardship and misery can be related to the inaction or carelessness of this government. This is a country where the children, especially the young girls, have no future. A report that came out, just last week from UNICEF, stated that 344,000 children under the age of five will die this year because of preventable diseases such as malaria.

Please consider whether you want to be linked with such a government and with such a celebration. If you do, I urge you to be an ambassador to them for the people. However, I want you to be aware that when you hear of the suffering of the African people, it is the leadership that is most always responsible for their suffering. Ethiopians consider the whole country to be in a prison and you may see the city filled with defense forces who are there to suppress the people and to punish those who speak or act on their consciences.

The Internet is blocked and the media can only report the government's propaganda, of which you will be a highlight. As they celebrate, Ethiopian National Defense Forces will be continuing to commit horrendous atrocities to the civilian population in the Ogaden region of southeastern Ethiopia. Directly across that border into Somalia, they are committing the same kinds of crimes.

As someone who is such a highly recognized public celebrity, the actions you take can speak more loudly than you can imagine! This government invited you because of your celebrity status and fame. If you take action and speak up, it can have a great impact. One person with conviction and moral courage can make a tremendous difference.

For example, as a person who is African American, you are a member of a minority, which has benefited from the sacrifices of many others who have suffered greatly. The world is a better place now than it was fifty years ago for African Americans, as well as for Africans such as me.

Why? It started with Rosa Parks! You can see how her action of refusing to give up her seat, triggered a boycott on the city buses that led to the civil rights movement, later led by Martin Luther King. We all know that through his courage, he became the prophet of justice, equality, self-respect and love—standing firmly, until even his life was taken from him for what he believed.

If Dr. Martin Luther King were here today and knew what was going on in Ethiopia, he might tell you definitely not to go to Ethiopia to participate in this event. He might tell you to protest it because the injustice going on in Ethiopia is the same kind of injustice for which he died. He might again say, “Injustice anywhere, is a threat to justice everywhere!”

When you look at all of this more deeply, you may understand why so many Ethiopians are boycotting the event in Ethiopia. Please confer with others who I believe will support this position—those in such groups as the NAACP, the Rainbow Coalition, the Black Caucus and those individuals such as Reverend Joseph E. Lowery, the head of the People’s Agenda in Atlanta and Donald Payne, the Chairman of the House Congressional Sub-Committee on Africa, Human Rights and International Operations.

I have worked closely with these people and they know very well how this shrewd and tyrannical government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi is terrorizing their own people while attempting to hide behind an illusionary Ethiopia that does not exist for the people, only for the privileged.

As you make your decision, you have a choice to go to Addis Ababa to celebrate—not with the majority of the Ethiopian public, but instead with an elite group of the powerful, many of whom are directly responsible for the misery of countless millions—or, you can join some 50,000 Ethiopian Americans in Washington D.C. who have chosen to celebrate the millennium outside of the country, without their families who still remain in the country, as a protest and boycott the likes of Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela.

These 50,000 Ethiopian Americans will be marching on September 12, 2007, with civil rights leaders who want to bring justice and freedom to the Ethiopian people like what we now enjoy in America. If you choose to join them, it would be greatly symbolic of your support for justice, equality and freedom for all the oppressed in the dark and silenced corners of the world! The word would get out everywhere of your support!

As an African American woman, a woman of African descent and as a woman of this world, you have a great opportunity to play a significant role. You are already a shining star in the world of music, but imagine if your music, voice and talent was an inspiration and catalyst in bringing greater justice to Ethiopia and to this world! Perhaps God has so incredibly gifted you for such a time as this. May God help you as you reflect on these words and on your decision.

It is obviously up to you to decide what to do, as I certainly am not aware of all of the details on your side that must enter into such a decision. However, I hope this information helps you to better understand the current human rights crisis in Ethiopia so you are more aware of what your participation in the Ethiopian Millennium celebration in Addis Ababa will mean.

If, for some reason, you decide not to participate in that celebration and would want to show your support in the people’s struggle for justice, peace, equality and freedom in Ethiopia by coming to Washington DC, you can contact me and I will help clear the way.

I leave you with these words, told to me by an Anuak woman whose husband was killed in the massacre of December 13-15, 2003:

I believe that one day God will give me the years to live to be able to tell what happened to me and to my people; when no one was there as a witness, when no international community was there to protect us and when no camera lens was there to bring this injustice to worldwide view. I, and those others who survived, will be able to be the missing lens that never before reached to Anuakland.

I am no longer concerned that my husband's body was never found or that he has never had a proper burial, instead I am looking forward to sharing the last minutes of his life as he was hacked to death by machetes as he struggled to breathe. I have an obligation to pass this on to the next generation; not only to Anuak, but to human kind who want to leave the world behind the lens of suffering, pain, death and sadness for a world more filled with hope, joy and happiness.

I hope that my voice from the darkness travels a distance to a far away land where I have never been. This voice of mine that I want them to hear is this, 'The world does not have to be this way. Take action. Every time you hear a voice of a desperate person in the darkness, do not ignore it. Please do something. Take the first step. Courage starts with one person, like a song that someone will start and others will join in to sing.'

Beyoncé, I ask you at this time to be this one person who starts off such a song—as others join in with you from Anuakland, Ethiopia, Africa and beyond, it will surely be a beautiful song!

Respectfully yours



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The Rev. James Orange and Mr. Obang Metho, left, pray after helping to lay a wreath at the tombs of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr and his wife Coretta Scott King at the King Center for non-violent Social Change Friday, Jan. 12, 2007, in Atlanta. Officials and civil rights leaders urged Americans to spend the King holiday, coming up Monday, making real his vision of racial equality. (AP Photo/John Bazemore)