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Excellency,

I write to inform you that in the course of its 79th Session, the Committee considered information on allegations to the threat to the existence of the South Omo indigenous peoples in Southern Ethiopia due to the construction of the Gibe III dam and the Kuraz Sugar Project, as well as the authorization for a fifty year lease granted to an Indian company called Verdanta Harvests (VH) on traditional forests belonging to Mazenger indigenous and other indigenous peoples of Gambella, on preliminary basis, under its early warning and urgent action procedure, in light of information submitted by a non-governmental organization.

The Committee is concerned about information according to which the ongoing construction of the Gibe III dam and the Kuraz Sugar Project will undermine the enjoyment of rights by the South Omo peoples whose means of subsistence depend mainly on the cultivation of sorghum, corn and the production of milk, meat and blood of their cattle.

The Committee is particularly concerned that the Gibe III dam will reportedly end the annual flood of the Omo river; silts rich in nutrients will no longer be carried out to the lower basin, and families will reportedly no longer be able to plant their crops in the river banks. It is reported that according to an independent review of the European Investment Bank of 2010, the controlled flood recommended by an Environmental and Social Impact Assessment to mitigate all adverse effects, is a temporary measure and may be withdrawn at any moment by Ethiopian authorities. It is also alleged that other studies proposed have never been commissioned; and that South Omo indigenous peoples have not been informed or consulted before the Gibe III dam project started. The Committee notes that the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples has raised similar concerns (See A/HRC/12/34/Add. 1, 18 September 2009, paras. 113-122) to the State party but has not received replies to its letters.

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In relation to the Kuraz Sugar Project, the Committee expresses its concern about information, according to which lands used by South Omo indigenous peoples for their agriculture or livestock will be used for a large-scale irrigation project in the lower Omo in order to grow sugar cane. It is reported that this will force the South Omo indigenous peoples to abandon their traditional ways of life and face displacement. In addition, it is also reported that they have not been consulted.

The Committee would like to inform the State party that it also received information about the authorization by the Minister of Agriculture, in 2010, of a fifty year lease to an Indian Company (Verdanta Harvests) on ancient forests in Godere District that reportedly belong to the Mazenger and other indigenous peoples of Gambella, for cultivation of tea and spice destined to export. It is alleged that despite claims by indigenous peoples and the intervention by the President of Ethiopia to stop the process of lease, the project is still ongoing. It is also reported that this project would have negative effects on the livelihood of Mazenger and other indigenous peoples, who allegedly have not been consulted in an appropriate manner; and that short or long-term environmental risks were not considered.

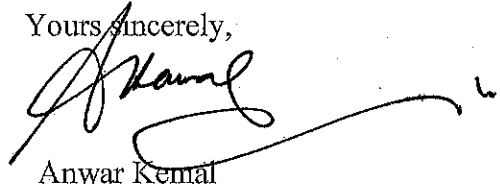
The Committee requests the State party to provide information on measures taken to conduct an independent assessment of the negative effects of the construction of the Gibe III dam and the Kuraz Sugar project on the livelihood of the South Omo peoples; as well as details on measures taken to consult them or to seek their prior, free and informed consent before carry out such projects.

The Committee also requests the State party to provide information on the situation of Mazenger and other indigenous peoples of Gambella and on measures taken to consult them in effective and appropriate manner.

In accordance with Article 9 (1) of the Convention and article 65 of its Rules of Procedure, the Committee would be grateful to urgently receive information on all of the issues and concerns as outlined above, before **31 January 2012**.

Allow me, Excellency, to express the wish of the Committee to continue to engage in a constructive dialogue with the Government of Ethiopia, with a view to provide it with assistance in the effective implementation of the Convention.

Yours sincerely,



Anwar Kemal

Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial
Discrimination