

Equatorial Guinea: Reverend Bienvenido Samba Momesori (m)

Concern: Prisoner of conscience

Reverend Bienvenido Samba Momesori, the protestant pastor of the Church of Cherubs and Seraphs, is in his mid-50s and married with four daughters and one son. At around 7.30 pm on Sunday 26 October 2003 he was arrested at his church in Malabo, capital of Equatorial Guinea, on Bioko Island, and has been held without charge or trial ever since.

On 26 October 2003 about eight police officers wearing civilian clothes went to Reverend Samba's house. His wife told them that he was in the church and asked one of her daughters to go to fetch him. The police followed the daughter in cars, and waited outside the church. When the pastor and his daughter came out the police took them to the police station. Reverend Samba was taken into one of the offices while his daughter waited outside. After one and a half hours, she became worried and went to look for her father inside the offices, but he was not there. An officer told her he had gone home, but when she arrived home he was not there.

While the authorities denied detaining Reverend Samba, the family tried to find out what had happened to him. After two weeks they discovered he was being held in Black Beach prison and were able to take him food for a week, clandestinely. He was removed from Black Beach prison and again the authorities refused to disclose his whereabouts.

In early December 2003, they learned Reverend Samba was imprisoned in Evinayong on the mainland. Reverend Samba has since told his family that he had never been interrogated, and that the authorities transferred him to Evinayong when they learned a Red Cross delegation was looking for him. He continues to be held there without charge or trial. He had been held in incommunicado detention, but now shares a cell with fellow prisoner of conscience Felipe Ondó Obiang.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) are now able to visit regularly. Family visits are now allowed but Reverend Samba's family are only able to visit approximately every three months, due to the distance from their home. When his family do visit they bring food, or money to buy food, as provision of food remains inadequate in all prisons in Equatorial Guinea. They and the ICRC also provide medicines for his chronic ailments, as the prison does not provide medicines.

This is the second time that Reverend Samba has been arrested. He was first arrested in 1998, following attacks on military barracks by a small group of armed Bubis calling for independence for Bioko Island. About 500 Bubis were arrested, most of them solely because of their ethnic origin. Most were severely tortured and at least 10 died in custody as a result. Reverend Samba was convicted following a grossly unfair trial and sentenced to death, but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. He was released in October 2002 under a presidential pardon on the anniversary of Equatorial Guinea's independence.

Please write to the authorities:

- Calling for the immediately and unconditionally release of Reverend Bienvenido Samba Momesori, as he is a prisoner of conscience, arrested solely on account of his ethnic origin and his peaceful political opinions;
- Asking the authorities to ensure that, for as long as Reverend Samba remains in detention, he is treated humanely and provided with adequate food and medical treatment;
- Calling for Reverend Samba to continue to be granted regular and unrestricted access to his family and lawyer;
- Calling for his family to be provided with free means of transport from Malabo to Evinayong so that they can visit him;
- Calling on the authorities to demonstrate respect for the right to freedom of opinion and association, by immediately releasing all prisoners of conscience and taking steps to end the practice of arbitrary arrest of peaceful political opponents;
- Asking them to take steps to ensure that all prisoners in Equatorial Guinea are treated humanely and kept in conditions that conform to international standards, including the provision of adequate food, necessary medical attention and access to family and lawyers.

Please send appeals to:

Minister of Justice
Sr Don Mauricio Bokung Asumu

Ministro de Justicia y Culto
Ministerio de Justicia y Culto
Malabo
Equatorial Guinea