

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC STATEMENT

15 February 2012
Index: AFR 24/002/2012

Equatorial Guinea: Opposition Figure Held *Concern That Activism, Not Medical Case, May Be Real Reason*

The detention without charge of Dr. Wenceslao Mansogo Alo, a medical doctor who is also a prominent human rights defender and opposition member in Equatorial Guinea, for more than five days following the death of a patient during surgery is a source of serious concern, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International said today. Both organizations are calling for his immediate release.

“Dr. Mansogo has already been held for several days without justification of the necessity for his detention,” said Daniel Bekele, Africa director at Human Rights Watch. “The authorities should immediately release him unless they have compelling evidence linking him to a crime, and they can continue to investigate the patient’s death without holding him behind bars.”

Dr. Mansogo is a member of the leadership of the opposition Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS) party and serves as its secretary for international relations and human rights. He is a medical doctor and owns and runs a private clinic in the city of Bata. He is also a member of the local city council.

The CPDS is the main political opposition party and also conducts human rights education and the systematic monitoring, investigation and denunciation of human rights violations. Members of this party are regularly harassed, intimidated and arrested.

On February 1, 2012, Isilda Mangué Engó, a 36-year-old patient, died during a hysterectomy operation that Dr. Mansogo and colleagues performed at his clinic.

Police detained Dr. Mansogo on February 9 without a warrant, a violation of Equatorial Guinea’s law, after he voluntarily recorded a statement at the central police station in Bata. It appears that he was detained following an accusation by members of the deceased’s family, who initially alleged that organs, specifically part of the external genitalia, had been removed from the body.

This allegation appears to be wholly unfounded. An autopsy carried out at Bata Regional Hospital on February 9 and a subsequent inquiry by Equatorial Guinea’s minister of health and social welfare, Dr. Salomón Nguema Owono,

on February 10 both concluded that the immediate cause of death was a heart attack and confirmed that the external genitals were intact.

Dr. Mansogo was brought before a judge the afternoon of February 10, after more than 20 hours in detention. The judge did not charge him but ordered that he be kept in custody pending further investigation. In a court filing dated February 10 and made available to his lawyers on February 13, the instructing judge indicated that he was investigating two possible crimes involving professional negligence and desecration of a corpse.

Dr. Mansogo is being held in the Bata central prison. According to sources close to him, he has not been ill-treated and has had access to his family and his lawyers. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International called on Equatorial Guinea authorities to ensure that the due process rights of Dr. Mansogo are scrupulously respected.

The two organizations also expressed concern that his continued detention could be motivated by his profile as a human rights activist and opposition politician, rather than any credible evidence that he committed a crime.

Without evidence linking Wenceslao Masongo to a crime, and given his political activities, Amnesty International considers him a prisoner of conscience and calls for his immediate and unconditional release.

“It is understandable that the family of the deceased are upset and that they are pushing for an investigation into the cause of her death. However, judicial authorities are required to make fair and prompt determinations based on actual evidence,” added Aster van Kregten, deputy Africa program director at Amnesty International.

His lawyers have filed an appeal on February 14 calling for Dr. Mansogo’s release for lack of evidence of any wrongdoing.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International are also concerned by threats against Elias Nzo Ondo, a lawyer for Dr. Mansogo. On February 13, while he was waiting to get a copy of the judge’s order, Nzo was threatened by the father of the deceased patient. A witness to the incident confirmed the lawyer’s allegation.

The father of the deceased, who is chief of the archives in the Bata central police station, allegedly said that the Nzo might find himself in jail next or could come to physical harm unless he stopped defending Dr. Mansogo. Family members of the deceased patient made similar statements on the evening of February 10, the lawyer alleged.

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