

## An African Missionary's Prison Testimony: Arrest, Interrogation and Release

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July 1989

Reprinted by FFWPU International Headquarters February 18, 2020



*Photo date and location unknown*

The presence and control of the military was obvious everywhere. The streets were constantly patrolled by armed soldiers. Anyone entering the post office was searched by armed soldiers and questioned as to what business they had in the post office, which was the building that also housed the telecommunication system.

All the public buildings and particularly the government ministries were guarded heavily by tanks and artillery, as though they were expecting an invasion. The atmosphere was almost always serious. People wanted to be lively and happy, yet their external surroundings forbade such expressions. Life was very difficult for the people.

We often felt we were being watched. Men in parked cars would sit outside our apartment complex for hours, watching. Several times I felt someone observing me as I walked along the streets in the afternoon. Since there was a curfew from 8:00 pm, we seldom went out in the evening.

On July 27, 1975, our apprehensions were proven correct. The morning began quite like most Sunday mornings. The town was silent. The street vendors do not come out on Sundays, so the noise from their clanging carts was absent. The dawn was shedding golden rays over the rolling hills of town. The silence was broken by the calls of the rooster as the morning awoke.

We had offered our Pledge service as usual at 5:00 am. After pledge I entered the kitchen to light a fire to make some tea. I did so and sat down to plan the day. "Whom should I visit?" "Whom should I write to?" I was thinking. Little did I know that after the next few minutes I would not be able to write or see any of my friends or contacts for the next fifteen days.

A knock on the door ended our meditation. Who could it be at 5:45 am.? Our German brother went to the door to see who our unexpected visitor might be. "Unexpected" is a mild understatement. I heard several voices so I left the kitchen to see who our German brother was talking to. There standing in the entryway were fifteen men. The man doing most of the talking was dressed in a police uniform. The others were all dressed in regular street clothes. They barged in and told us to sit down and not to move. Then they ransacked the apartment looking for our books, journals, notes and contact listings.

It seemed more of a show than a serious investigation. But we had nothing to hide, and fearing nothing incriminating would be found, we sat calmly and watched the bizarre morning unfold. They collected our reports and writings as well as our Principle books. Most everything else was left scattered on the floor. A few of the intruders gathered up an article or two of clothing, but nothing more. Finally after the search was over they led us out of our apartment into the street. Cars were waiting to drive us to the national security building to begin an odyssey we would never forget.

The morning went relatively fast as they moved us from room to room as though they didn't know where



to keep us. We continued our silence, not knowing whether or not the rooms had been bugged. The entire morning passed before we met the inspector. Then about 1:00 p.m. we were told that we had been arrested for stealing government documents. They never said what government documents or from what government agency the papers were taken, so I knew the charge was just an excuse to keep us there. The real purpose for our detention came to light much later, after several days of intensive interrogation. Like a chapter out of *The Gulag Archipelago* come to life, we were held as puppets to be directed as they wished. We had absolutely no voice of our own. No rights, no choices.



*Photo date and location unknown*

On Monday, July 28, the interrogation began. It continued day after day for eleven days. The same questions were asked over and over. "What are you doing here?" "Why is Reverend Moon interested in this country?" "Where is the CIA here?" "What is your purpose?" "What are the Japanese and German doing here?" "Why do you live together?" "What do you think of socialism?" "What do you think of communism?" "What is Reverend Moon doing in Korea?" "Who sent you here?"

They asked us questions about groups and organizations related to the Church in Japan and Korea that I knew nothing about or even knew existed. Day after day the same questions were asked. Every few days we would have a new interrogator, but his questions were the same as the preceding one. All testimonies and questions were recorded and transcribed with six copies made. At the end of each day all testimonies had to be signed.



*Photo date and location unknown*

At night we would be driven back to the jail. There we were searched, and shoes and belts removed. Our bedding consisted of what we had on. Placed in cells measuring eight feet wide, twelve feet long and ten feet high, our physical existence took on new limitations. Nonetheless, our spirits were determined and strong.

The cells were filthy. We were separated from each other but were not alone in our cubicles. Each cell contained at least ten other prisoners, mostly common thieves, drug peddlers, and drunks. Often one of the cell companions would be cut or beaten so badly by the jailers that his moans would cut the night air through what turned out to be quite sleepless nights. One night I returned to my cell to find one man with a three inch cut in his forehead. Blood was trickling down his face. His clothes were soaked in the blood he had lost earlier. We tried to comfort him and bandage his cut. We were successful, but it was a very uneasy night.

Most of the men could not speak any English, and some could not speak French either. The evening food ration consisted of only rice. If a prisoner had family or friends who knew he was in jail they could bring him food. The three of us were given more food and some fruit during the day at the national security building. At times there were some rebellious youths in the cells who would take their portion of rice and in defiance throw it against the wall or at the jailer.



*Photo date and location unknown*

The cell was decorated in an early dungeon motif, complete with graffiti, dirt, dead insects, old rice, and blood. The cells were never cleaned out the entire fifteen days we were there. At night prisoners would bang on the cell door hoping the jailer would come to let them out so they could use the toilet (a hole outside the cell). Many times the jailer would not come so the prisoner would urinate inside the cell, adding to the unbelievable smells and unsanitary conditions that already existed. During the night we would sleep together closely to keep warm. The only thing separating the cold concrete floor and us was a wood pallet normally used in warehouse storage. This time the stored "goods" was eleven men.

On the night of August 5, 1975, I had an incredibly vivid dream that we would be executed by a firing squad the next day. And on August 6, we were actually sentenced without trial. The decision was that we were an internal and external threat to the security of the country and that we stood to endanger the relationship between our own countries and that of this nation. This was exactly the opposite of our real purpose. Nonetheless, we were given written notice to leave the country within a period of 48 hours. What exactly the next step would be no one knew. And our interrogators and jailer would tell us nothing. After the decree was handed to us they returned us to jail. There they kept us for the next 48 hours in total suspense. Then the 48 hours expired.

They then informed us that by staying over the requested time we had disobeyed their command! It did not matter that they held us in custody for that period.

On August 11 they finally took us to the apartment to gather our belongings. The police guards first took what they wanted, and then we were allowed to pack.

Everything in our mission ended so abruptly, like a knife cutting through an umbilical cord. The once warm feelings received from the surroundings and the people were now gone. The memory of the people and the beautiful countryside remained, but now from a distance.