

22nd May 2010

Your Excellency,

As we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, we wish to draw to your attention the plight of Mr. Anselme Noumbiwa, a rich young man who did give up everything to follow the teachings of Christ and who, as a result, continues to be persecuted for his faith. Anselme applied for sanctuary in the UK in 2006. He was forcibly removed to Cameroon on 28th April 2010, during the UK election campaign.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society in Yaounde confirmed to the Home Office on the 27th April 2010 that the choice of a successor to a Bamileke Paramount Chief is shrouded in the utmost secrecy and a plea was made to the Minister to protect Anselme's life. Nobody but the Kingmaker and notables would be aware of what the initiation ceremony entailed. Anselme was chosen to succeed his father as Paramount Chief but rejected the animist practices he would have been forced to observe and the practice of polygamy, as they were contrary to his Christian faith. Anselme had been baptised by Fr. Agapitus Ffon, the Head of the Major Seminary and had attended church with his mother. He had not lived in the village and being chosen as successor at his father's funeral was a shock to him. Anselme was held captive and was severely tortured to force him to comply with tradition. Close family helped him escape and secured him safe passage to the UK, where he asked for sanctuary at Heathrow airport. Archbishop Joseph Atanga has confirmed that Anselme must face self exile or face possible death. There can be no new Paramount Chief until Anselme is dead.

Anselme was removed back to great danger on a charter flight with at least two members of the Bamileke tribe. Anselme cannot risk meeting Cameroonians, as he does not know who will betray him. He is unable to practise his religion freely in his own country. He cannot earn a living and cannot leave his hiding place, unless he is willing to assume his role and follow animist practices which include the worship of the skulls of the ancestors. We refer you to the statement of Lord Justice Pill (2009)

"It would have been no defence to a claim that Anne Frank faced well-founded fear of persecution in 1942 to say that she was safe in a comfortable attic," Lord Justice Pill agreed in the court of appeal last year. "Refugee status cannot be denied by expecting a person to conceal aspects of identity or suppress behaviour the person should be allowed to express," he added.

We ask that this man's right to practise his religion in accordance with the Geneva Convention, his right to reject animist and occult practices and his true right to sanctuary in the UK be defended. He is fearful and anxious, having found himself in the same life threatening position he escaped from in 2006. He spends his time alone, in prayer and studying his Bible.

We ask you to join the hundreds of congregations throughout the UK, the members of the House of Lords and Anglican and Catholic Bishops who are crying out against this miscarriage of justice and we ask that Anselme Noumbiwa be returned to safety in the United Kingdom. Bishop Tom Wright and Rev. Malcolm MacNaughton, at the Archbishop of York's office, had been in contact with the Home Office but were 'outmanoevred'. We, Anselme's fellow Christians and men and women of other faiths and none, who respect him for his courage, integrity and principles, are all in agreement that cases should be considered on individual merit and not be a question of being 'outmanoevred'. We ask you to ascertain

who made this decision, described as a miscarriage of justice by UK missionaries who have worked in Cameroon for many years and who are well acquainted with tradition there. Each day the risk of a slow and painful death at the hands of those who wish to punish him is a reality for Anselme. A couple of friends here in the UK keep in touch on an almost daily basis to ensure he is still alive and has not become a 21st Century martyr for his Christian beliefs.

According to the UKBA’s own policy that **“We do not return anyone back to countries where they will be at risk of persecution, torture or death,”** and in the light of the Independent Asylum Commission’s recommendation that **“Where there has been persecution on return, knowledge of such persecution would contribute towards better decision-making for the future. It could also contribute to ensuring that country of information is kept as up-to-date as possible”**, there are grounds here for a review of this case.

Indeed, the former Home Secretary, Alan Johnson, during a visit to Stockton – on – Tees on the 22nd April made a personal commitment to look at Anselme’s case. He and those acting on his behalf were misinformed about the possibility of safe relocation. All pleas for protection for Anselme from members of the Catholic church in Cameroon since 2007 and their reiteration that Anselme could not relocate have been ignored.

In the light of these arguments we urgently ask that, in view of evidence that will be available about what happened to Anselme on his return, he be given sanctuary in European Embassies in Cameroon and then returned to safety.

We, respectfully, request your intercession for this exemplary Christian who places his trust in God. We ask that all our leaders, both religious and political, work together to protect his life and we hope that you, as the representative of Pope Benedict in the UK, and whose office we approached on the 27th April 2010, coordinate the response of our faith leaders. It is within your power to protect Anselme and we pray that you will exercise that power and, also, ask the Home Secretary to show compassion and exercise her discretion.

Parish/Organisation

Signed

Address

Number of signatures:

Cc Theresa May, Home Secretary

Archbishop Vincent Nichols

Archbishop Rowan Williams

Chief Rabbi, Lord Sacks

Rev. Dr. Martyn Atkins

Rev. Jonathan Edwards, The General Secretary, The Baptist Union of Great Britain

We, the undersigned, ask that Anselme Noubiwa's life be protected and that he be accorded sanctuary in a European Embassy in Cameroon, so that he can then be returned to safety in the UK, to live his life in accordance with the Christian beliefs he adheres to and where he can, once again, exercise his right to freely practise his religion. We ask that this miscarriage of justice be righted and that the impossibility of relocation within his country, be acknowledged.

Parish/Organisation

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