

**OXFAM NOVIB AWARD 2013
FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH IN THE HAGUE**

Acceptance speech

ENOH MEYOMESSE

The French Revolution took place in 1789. But it is only in 1901 that French people finally obtained their right to freedom of association. One hundred and twelve long years of a dreadful battle were therefore necessary for them to be able to create associations and meet as they do today.

At the dawn of the twenty first century, the African continent and my country, Cameroon, face a similar predicament.

In 1990, following the fall of the Berlin wall that marked the end of the Cold War and of the East/West conflict, Western countries, France and the US in particular, were joined by the IMF and the World Bank to force African countries to accept democratic change.

Since then, we, people and intellectuals from this part of the world called Africa, are struggling for democracy to become a reality in our lands. It is a difficult struggle, but a struggle in which we are fully engaged. In that struggle, we face intimidations of all sort, and among them, multiple incarcerations. Rulers use the most ideal and least threatening alibi for them, the accusation of having committed a common crime, to silence us, dissidents, a situation similar to what happened during the Cold War in Eastern European dictatorships, in the Greece of colonels, in Portugal under the dictatorship of Salazar, in Spain under Franco.

Luckily, you, people from the North, souls of good will from Western countries where democracy is truly established, stand resolutely on our side. In doing so you prove that people's freedom and solidarity does not know boundaries.

In presenting this award to the wretched writer that I am, captive in the depths of a Cameroonian jail, you have joined your powerful voice to mine and to that of the many anonymous men and women who are incarcerated in my country because their opinion has not pleased some high-ranking officials in the state apparatus who therefore used judges to unleash their vengeance against them.

As for me, I am now deprived of freedom for seven long years – the verdict was pronounced on Thursday, December 27, 2012 – without any proof of wrong-doing on my part, without any witnesses, without any complainants, and more than that, after having been tortured during thirty days by an officer of the military. I could have gone blind since my torturer locked me in a dark cell where I stayed without any light for thirty days. He asked and obtained approval from his superiors that I should not be fed, in other words, he had programmed my death by starvation. As if it was not enough, he also destroyed my belongings in my home which he entered after having destroyed my door in my absence, all this without a warrant, and by simply using the pretext of 'state reason'. He also took many of my books with him, including manuscripts I was planning to publish. And to top it all, the complaint I filed against him was simply dismissed by his superiors, precisely by the minister of

defense of my country who shamefully overtook the mantel of the minister of justice! How can I not consider him, the minister of defense, to be the one who gave orders to the colonel who tortured me in total disregard of the law? How can I not consider the minister of defense of my country to be the real protector of my torturer?

Thank you very much for presenting me this award that, and I am profoundly convinced of it, will help protect intellectuals in my country a little more, but also all those in Africa who are still threatened because of their ideas and writings.

It is my deepest conviction that nothing can stop the struggle of people of the world for more freedom.

Enoh Meyomesse, writer
Kondengui prison, Yaounde, January 3, 2012.

Translation: Patrice Nganang