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Equatorial Guinea

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Equatorial Guinea is a mission field of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is one of the five missions that make up the Central African Union Mission, which in turn is part of the West-Central Africa Division. Statistics (2018) for Equatorial Guinea: Churches, 8; membership 1,565; population 1,314,000.¹ Equatorial Guinea is located within the “10/40 Window,”² which is an area of the world where sharing Christianity is difficult.³

Overview of the Country

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is located in Central Africa, with an area of 10,831 square miles (28,051 square kilometers). It consists of Río Muni (known also as Continental Equatorial Guinea) and five islands: Bioko (formerly Fernando Po), the largest of the islands, Corisco, Great Elobey (Elobey Grande), Little Elobey (Elobey Chico), and Annobon (Pagalu). The capital is Malabo, on Bioko Island. Formerly a colony of Spain, the country became independent on October 12, 1968. Official languages are Spanish and French. Equatorial Guinea is the only sovereign African state in which Spanish is an official language. As of 2017, the country had an estimated population of 1,532,000. Population projection for 2030 is an estimated 2,122,000.⁴

Arrival of Seventh-day Adventists and the Growth of the Church

In the 1950s and 1960s, Equatorial Guinea was one of the few countries in Central Africa to have an emerging economy. The economic and technological advantages of the time came from the fact that it had become a Spanish province, and Equatorial Guinea became the target of a large wave of immigrants from different parts of Africa. It is through these immigrants that the Adventist faith arrived in Equatorial Guinea, especially through those coming from Nigeria and São Tomé and Príncipe, who had accepted the Adventist message in their home country. As they met together to share their faith and testimonies under trees, the group grew enough to need organization.

In 1957 Domingo Segundo from São Tomé and Príncipe, and Jeremiah Anougwa from Nigeria, wrote to church leadership in their respective countries to ask for help and create awareness of the existence of Sabbath-keeping people in Equatorial Guinea. One month later, in April 1957, the São Tomé and Príncipe and Nigeria missions, wrote a letter to the Adventist church in Spain, urgently requesting for them to send a missionary to the country to help organize the existing group of 90 people into an official Seventh-day Adventist church.⁵

On August 9, 1960, José López Gutiérrez and his wife arrived from Spain to work as Adventist missionaries in Equatorial Guinea. They were nurses. The first thing the couple did was to establish a clinic in their house. During the day while José López Gutiérrez was working at the regional hospital, his wife attended the clinic and helped the needy who were later invited to study the Bible in the evening. The group was organized as an Adventist church in 1961. As a result of this missionary work, in May 1962, the group was organized into a local Adventist church and had its first baptism which included the first two local people. In 1963 the first Adventist church was built. In 1964 the first church building was completed and dedicated by Pastor Jesus Carlos Sangüesa in 1965.⁶

In 1966, under the leadership of Pastor Jesus Carlos Sangüesa, the first badge of people from Equatorial Guinea to be sent to the seminary was composed [of] Ángel García, Ricardo Bull (Equatorial Guinea) and Eliseo Gravis (Sao Tomé-et-Príncipe). Later, others will follow in 1967, Goufret Mubele (Cameroon), Fernando Garcia (Equatorial Guinea), Aloy Susuco (Nigeria), Manuel Mubele (Cameroon) and Maiquel Chata (Cameroon). They came back in 1972 from Cameroon to boost the missionary work in the country.⁷ The work was interrupted by the political situation in 1972, but resumed two years later.⁸ The mission was organized in 1986.⁹

Adventists have impacted the country through their schools. The Adventist Mission of Equatorial Guinea has 12 schools, teaching students from nursery to the secondary level, with a total of 4,587 students. The Adventist church has been recognized as contributing to the development of the country. The Adventist dental clinic provides health care to the community in Malabo.

In 2002 an important evangelistic effort was led by volunteers from Montemorelos, Mexico. According to Armando Miranda, in the Adventist News Network, “Equatorial Guinea, the only Spanish-speaking nation on the African continent, had less than 1,000 Adventist believers before the meetings began. As a result of the evangelistic outreach, 220 new Adventist believers have been baptized.”¹⁰

Challenges to Mission and What Remains to Be Done

After the country gained independence, there were brief hopes for religious liberty. However, there was severe persecution of Christians who were associated with colonialist history during the presidency of Nacia Nguema (1968 to 1979), who wanted to be recognized as a messiah. Many Christians fled the country to Gabon or Cameroon. After Nguema’s overthrow, efforts were made to reestablish Christianity in the country. Today there is religious freedom in the country, but missionaries still face challenges. One example is the experience of Pastor Manuel García-Cáceres, who served as president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Equatorial Guinea for over a year. He was falsely deemed a threat to national security, was arrested on May 22, 2013, and deported to Spain the next day.¹¹

The main challenge to mission is the language. Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish-speaking country in the West-Central Africa Division; hence, the Equatorial Guinea Mission has to get materials for evangelism from Spanish-speaking countries in South America.

Among the things that remain to be done are the establishment of radio and television stations. Though an attempt to establish a radio station was made in 2013, "Someone had informed authorities that legally-imported FM broadcasting equipment was the allegedly illegal 'satellite equipment.'"¹² This led to the deportation of Pastor Manuel García-Cáceres, who was then the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Equatorial Guinea, and the radio station was not established.

More Adventist schools need to be opened. The only major Adventist school is located in Malabo, leaving other parts of the country such as Batica and Nkue without an Adventist educational influence. Moreover, there is a need to have more pastors in order to establish more churches. Among the unreached areas in the country are places such as Akonibe, Akureman, Ayene, Corisco, Nkimi, Rio Campo, Nsang, Machinda, and Mongomoyen.¹³

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. "Equatorial Guinea Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2019), 389.?
2. The 10/40 Window stretches through Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa, encompassing approximately 60 percent of the world's population, but only one percent of the world's Christians.?
3. Armando Miranda, "Dramatic Church Growth in Equatorial Guinea," *Adventist News Network*, posted on April 29, 2002, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2002-04-29/dramatic-church-growth-in-equatorial-guinea/>
4. Rene Pelissier and Ronald James Harrison-Church, "Equatorial Guinea," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, updated January 18, 2019, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Equatorial-Guinea?>
5. Gervasio Codin Pelayo, retired pastor from Equatorial Guinea, interviewed by the author, Bangui, Central African Republic, November 23, 2017.?
6. Eutimio Osma Gerona, Executive Secretary of Equatorial Guinea Mission, interview by author, Libreville, Gabon, July 17, 2018.?
7. Gervasio Codin Pelayo, retired pastor from the Equatorial Guinea Mission, interview by author, Bangui, Central African Republic, March 23, 2017.?
8. "Leader of the Adventist Church in Equatorial Guinea Expelled by the National Government," *Adventist Today*, accessed May 24, 2018, <https://atoday.org/leader-of-the-adventist-church-in-equatorial-guinea-expelled-by-the-national-government/>
9. "Equatorial Guinea Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*.?
10. Armando Miranda, "Dramatic Church Growth in Equatorial Guinea," accessed March 13, 2019, <https://news.adventist.org/en/all-news/news/go/2002-04-29/dramatic-church-growth-in-equatorial-guinea/>
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12. Adventist Today News Team, "Leader of the Adventist Church in Equatorial Guinea Expelled by the National Government," *Adventist Today*, posted June 2013, accessed March 13, 2019, <https://atoday.org/leader-of-the-adventist-church-in-equatorial-guinea-expelled-by-the-national-government/>?
13. For example, in 2016 the Equatorial Guinea Mission had four ordained pastors for an Adventist population scattered across the country estimated in 2016 to be 1,467 and a general population of over 805,000. *2018 Annual Statistical Report*, General Conference Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, "General Statistics for 2016," 92, accessed June 17, 2019, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Statistics/ASR/ASR2018.pdf?>

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