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COMMUNICATION FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE KOUTIME BRANCH OF THE "COMITE DE L'UNITE TOGOLAISE" CONCERNING TOGOLAND UNDER FRENCH ADMINISTRATION

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The Chairman of the Koutime Branch of the Comité de l'Unité togolaise (Anécho Cercel)

Vokoutime, 21 June 1957

To the Chairman of the United Nations Commission on Togoland

Sir,

On behalf of the people of Vokoutimé (Anécho cercle) and of the Comité de l'Unité Togolaise, whom, as Chairman of the Unité Togolaise, I represent, we welcome you and we hope that you will arrive safely in our midst.

I would very respectfully ask you to forgive me for addressing you. Here in Togoland, the French rule us in a way in which you would not rule a slave. The most striking case is that of the elections. In the first election everyone voted freely. That was when Dr. Martin Aku, the first deputy, was elected. Subsequent elections have all been conducted entirely by the Parti Togolais du Progrès. They are organized by the leaders and officials of that party.

We would most respectfully request that when there is another election the United Nations should send us a delegation to compile the electoral lists throughout Togoland and then we shall see which party is in the majority. Once again: we do not accept what France has given us as internal autonomy. We would die rather than accept what France has given us. We want complete independence. We are sending Mr. Sylvane OLYMPIO to the United Nations. We want immediate independence. We request you to reform our Legislative Assembly, since it is so worthless that it should not impose its laws on us. We are sure that you will reform it to the best of your ability. We should like to inform you of the poor

way in which the French are governing Togoland. French bad intentions towards us are shown by this fact: in the first place they give chiefdoms to outsiders who have never belonged to the royal family and who have not been elected under the customary system. But it is sufficient for such chiefs to issue a false report. It will be very difficult for you to understand what we have just told you, but, all the same we ask you to close your eyes when you read this passage. We are speaking of the chiefdom of a certain Mr. Akouété Akakpo. He comes from Amegnrakondji. When his father took flight, he followed him and came to Vokoutimé. As an adolescent, he began to counterfeit money. The French sent him to prison, where he spent two years. When he was discharged, the French decided that as he knew how to steal, they would appoint him village chief of Vokoutimé so that he could rob the village for them. Can such a man be a village chief? It is unpleasant to consider his case or to hear about it. He is still a thief, because he has the right to steal. In 1955, a miracle occurred. A certain Amédounou Avounato kept losing his sheep. One day he lost yet another sheep. He made inquiries and found his sheep in the house of Messanvi AMOUZOU, a sub-chief of Akouété AKAKPO, the chief of Vokoutimé. He complained to the village chief and was told that the chief himself had asked Messanvi AMOUZOU to catch a sheep and kill it for food. He had intended paying for it as soon as the owner appeared.

Amedounou Avounato decided that was theft and reported the case to the Commandant de cercle at Anécho. So far he has not rendered judgement. Has not chief Akakpo Akouété enjoyed complete freedom in robbing poor people? We are telling you this as an example of the way in which the French and their chiefs treat us. But this is not the worst of it. Why do the French refuse to punish such offences? Because if they did, they would no longer find people willing to be members of the Parti togolais du Progrès. But God will bless justice, not lies. We shall never cease to ask for independence, although they persecute us. My village has a large number of taxpayers, I should like to inform you. Since 1953, Vokoutime has had 1,640 taxpayers, but the French Administration has done nothing for the village. Only with great difficulty, under pressure from the Unité togolaise, was it persuaded to build us a school. Apart from that the village is

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practically abandoned, while a place like Vogan has a properly built hospital and several schools. It has a public fountain and other amenities. At Attitogon there are a dispensary, schools and other amenities. Why not at Vokoutimé? When there is a case of illness in the village, a lorry or some other vehicle has to be hired to take the patient to hospital at Vogan or at Anécho. In view of these complications, there is a very high mortality rate at Vokoutimé. We would ask you, for pity's sake, to see that the Administration looks after the village properly. Misfortune loosens the tongue. But the French Administration has forbidden us to speak. About 1952 we submitted a petition to the special Visiting Mission. After the Visiting Mission had left, we were driven from our village and forcibly kept away from our homes by the Administration for three months. We would therefore ask you to judge our situation and to save us before you leave. For pity's sake see that the administration in our village of Vokoutimé is reformed, for we, too, are God's creatures. In politics, we suffer great wrongs, especially those of us who belong to the CUT. I have a field which my father gave me when I was a child. I always cultivated this field. I had this field before I married and until I had children. My child too cultivated this same field from his childhood until he grew up and he, too, married and had children. The land has not been leased. It so happens that I planted coconut palms on it. Two years later the village chief asked one of my paternal cousins to pull up these trees because he belongs to the Parti togolais du Progrès whereas I belong to the UCT. I summoned him before the courts, but so far, judgement has not been rendered. This is how the French treat us in Togoland.

We remain in hope and have the honour to be, etc.

(Signed) (illegible)

Messanvi Segbena  
Chairman

For the people and the CUT

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