

Beata Yaboisembut Akim: The woman who accompanies the 'President'

Suara Perempuan Papua, 25 March – 7 April 2012

[Translation by TAPOL]

Surrendering their lives to God, they remain calm when they face trouble

It was during the week of Christ's sufferings that Forkorus Yaboisembut was found guilty of treason and sentenced to three years imprisonment. His wife, Beata Yaboisembut was at his side throughout the trial. Dressed in dark brown trousers and a blouse, she sat in the courtroom, calmly following the proceedings. She accepted the result with a feeling of relief.

'Bapak was always telling us to keep calm. We should not feel troubled and feel grateful that our children are already grown up and can understand what is going on. And please remember that this is the week of suffering and we must all think about the sufferings of our Lord. Lord Jesus suffered much more than this for our sins. And you must be willing to accept my sentence, said Forkorus'. As a mother and as his wife, she expressed her belief in him.

She first met her husband when they were studying together at the Taruna Bakhti Waene College. They were among the first generation of students at the college and graduated in 1975. After graduating, they were both sent to isolated places in West Papua. Mama Beata was sent to Wamena and Forkorus was sent to Sarmi. In 1976, they decided to get married in Jayapura and after getting married, they each returned to their jobs. Mama Beata was given a job at the Oksibil YPPK primary school and worked there for three years. She was then sent to Sobron, after the kampung where she was working was attacked.

After her husband became active in the Papuan Customary Council (DAP), Mama Beata saw this as a huge responsibility that was to be borne by him. 'Bapak is an Ondoafi, part of our tradition and enjoying the trust of the people. He is greatly respected and loved by the people, just like us, his wife and our children.'

He was the third of six siblings. His two brothers are not with him in Sobron. Forkorus also has two younger brothers and a sister who all live in Nabire.

After being elected as the Chairman of DAP, Beata realised that he no longer belonged just to her but belonged to all the Papuan people. 'This is why Bapak has always told his children to stand on their own feet.'

As his wife, she realised that his election as the chairman of DAP would have many consequences for herself and for their children which is why he has always stressed the importance of their living their own lives independently.

Fortunately, only two of their children are still studying at Cenderawasih University while their oldest daughter is an expert in civil technology, and the sons have completed their studies in architecture. 'The youngest is now at sixth grade while his older brother should have graduated last month on 15 March. But never mind, as Bapak is now on trial, his needs are our priority.' Her daughter's husband has to rely on the wage he earns as a teacher. As for her own husband, he has not been earning anything since last year.

'I was not there to see Bapak when he was arrested because I had just returned from Sobron.' She was preparing food for the [Third Papuan People's] Congress but before anyone could start eating, the security forces destroyed everything that they had prepared.

When she and the other women heard gunshots and saw tear gas bombs exploding, they ran to the mountains around the Zakeus Field. 'People can be arrested at any time and I was told never to get worried. On that day,' she said 'I tried to keep calm and to find my way home to Bapak so that I could be together with him at all of the court hearings while keeping calm.'

'Forkorus has always told our children to focus on their education and not to follow him on his chosen path. But the children are always deeply concerned about what is happening to him and they always accompany me when I visit him in prison. I know that they readily accept what is happening to their father. Maybe this is the path chosen by our Lord for this country of ours,' she said.

During the trial, Bapak stayed overnight at the lodgings of their daughter who lives in Waena. It is a small room, 3 x 4 meters, where the three of them slept. Their home in the kampung is being looked after by Mama. The youngest daughter frequently goes back and forth to visit their grandmother. Because their home in Sobron is 80 kilometres from Abepura, Mama decided to stay with her daughter so that it would be easier for her to visit her husband.

She said that during the time she has been attending the court hearings, neither she nor the children have experienced any terror or intimidation. 'And Bapak is always telling us to keep calm.'

She visits her husband three times a week, on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. 'We are only given 15 minutes to sit together, side by side. That is quite enough for me,' she says, 'because I know that the Lord is there with him.'

She is still busy teaching grade 1 and 2 children at the primary school in Sobron. When she visits her husband, she takes him food and clean clothes. 'As he is not alone in the prison, I always take food for the other prisoners as well.'

She says that her husband is not fussy about the food she brings, as long as she cooks it. She takes him porridge, vegetables and fish and on special occasions, she cooks him some meat. Ever since he has been in prison, Forkorus has never asked her to bring anything. 'In fact, when I meet him, he always has a present for me, as well as giving me his dirty clothes to be washed,' she said, with a laugh.

She can also visit him on Sundays but only to take part in a service together. She is not allowed to take anything except a Bible. They have services twice a day, once in the morning at 8am for the Protestants and once in the evening for the Catholics.

Mama always arrives at 7am to say prayers together with her husband. Sometimes he asks her to stay for another prayer, after her visit to him has ended. so that she too can receive the body and blood of the Lord, Jesus Christ during the Holy Eucharist as she has continued to be a Catholic.

Mama Beata is the third of six brothers and sisters from Kampung Yuruf Keerom where the majority of the people are Catholics. In December, she will be 59 years old. Because of

unsatisfactory conditions in the kampung, the people have been forced to move frequently. Only one of her sisters is still living in Yuruf while one of her brothers died in Vanimo. The two other brothers are living in Vanimo.

'Prayer is the source of our strength. Everything we achieve, all our happiness and sadness are part of our lives and my family leaves everything to the one who gives life, to the Lord God Creator of all,' she said, when she was asked what her future plans for her family were.

This is the first in a series of articles by Suara Perempuan Papua commissioned by TAPOL on the impact of the Papua conflict on women