

Ahead of Pope Leo XIV visit, Equatorial Guinea President Receives Pilgrim of Hope Award

Victor Mooney of Goree Challenge who completed a transatlantic row to encourage HIV testing arrived last week in Equatorial Guinea for an award presentation.

NEW YORK CITY, NY, UNITED STATES, March 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Mr. Victor Mooney, [Goree Challenge rower](#) will present H.E. Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, the Pilgrim of Hope Award at the Presidential Palace.

In June 2025, Mr. Mooney, a devout Catholic of Queens, was received by Pope Leo XIV during Jubilee of Sports General Audience. Over the years, Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis welcomed him at the Vatican on World AIDS Day.



(L-R) Malabo, Equatorial Guinea - H.E. Mr. Anatolio Ndong Mba, Mr. Victor Mooney, H.E. Mr. Simeón Oyono Esono Angüe at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and the Diaspora.

This week in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, he was received by H.E. Mr. Simeón Oyono Esono Angüe, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and the Diaspora in the presence of H.E. Mr. Anatolio Ndong Mba, the Permanent Ambassador for the Equatorial Guinea Mission to United Nations in New York.

“

President Obiang is the epitome of hope”

Victor Mooney

The story of hope in Equatorial Guinea is a tapestry woven from threads of struggle, faith, and sudden fortune. On

August 3, 1979, led by the then young officer Teodoro Obiang, toppled a regime that had systematically suppressed religious expression. The new government declared a policy of “religious restoration,” opening spaces for religious expression that had been shuttered for years.

Several years later, Pope John Paul II visited the nation. Local legend still whispers about a private conversation between the Pontiff and the President, where Obiang asked, "Why are our neighbor's blessed with abundant natural resources while we remain humble?" The Pope's reply was simple, yet profound: a blessing for the country and a call to steward any gifts God would provide.

That blessing seemed to have found its material form in the 1990s, when multinational oil companies discovered vast offshore reserves in the Gulf of Guinea. The revenue surge enabled President Obiang to launch an ambitious national development plan: highways threading through the dense rainforest, social housing, schools, hospitals, and clinics in remote villages.

For President Obiang, the award is more than a decorative token; it is a reminder of the promise he made nearly five decades ago—a promise to his people and to God that the nation would rise from the shadows of persecution into the light of faith and prosperity.

[Episcopal Conference of Equatorial Guinea](#) recently unveiled their logo for Pope Leo's visit under the theme: "Christ, Light of Equatorial Guinea, Towards a Future of Hope". Equatorial Guinea is commemorating 170th anniversary of the beginning of evangelization in the country.

In the words of Psalm 91, which Mooney hopes to voice during the Pope's visit: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

May that shelter now extend over Equatorial Guinea, as hope—pilgrimage, faith, and perseverance—continues its unending march toward a brighter horizon. [Pope Leo XIV Apostolic Journey](#) to Africa's only Spanish speaking country is from April 21-23.

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