

# Dobbses say IMB response 'inaccurate'

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DALLAS (ABP)—Wyman and Michelle Dobbs, the Southern Baptist missionaries recently threatened with termination by the International Mission Board and then reinstated, say the IMB's description of their reinstatement is "inaccurate and inappropriate."

The Dobbses, missionaries for eight years to the Fulbe Fouta people in Guinea, West Africa, were cited for dismissal in mid-April because IMB leaders said the couple had failed adequately to follow guidelines for planting churches with non-Southern Baptist missionaries.

"If you read the IMB response to our reinstatement, you are led to believe that (we) were out of alignment but now agree to do better," the Dobbses wrote in a letter posted May 6 on [www.friesville.blogspot.com](http://www.friesville.blogspot.com), the weblog of seminary student Micah Fries.

"This is inaccurate and inappropriate and does not address the real problem of not holding leaders and trustees accountable for misrepresenting policy," they wrote.

An IMB news release May 2 said: “West Africa mission leadership came to an impasse with the Dobbsses in determining their commitment to the appropriate level of partnership and a clear commitment to planting indigenous Baptist churches. They recommended the couple resign or be terminated after the Dobbsses refused to follow the guidelines.”

The release said Gordon Fort, the IMB vice president for overseas operations, agreed to reinstate the Dobbsses after meeting with the couple April 29. The news release added: “The Dobbsses told Fort they are committed to partnering appropriately within IMB guidelines for levels of mission partnership. In addition, they agreed to plant indigenous Baptist churches and said they would work under the authority of IMB leadership in West Africa and in harmony with leaders’ policy decisions.”

But the Dobbsses, in their May 6 letter, said they believe their termination was rescinded not because they recanted their beliefs but because it was determined that they had followed IMB policy all along.

“What was not reported is that we have always been committed to following policy,” the letter said. “Returning to Guinea means we would work with the same (non-Southern Baptist missionaries) and continue what we were doing before all this occurred.”

Jason Helmbacher, the couple’s stateside pastor in Oklahoma, said the meeting with Fort ended in an agreement for a “win-win” situation in which each party could save face by sharing the blame for a misunderstanding and then leaving the issue alone. But the IMB news release published by Baptist Press, Helmbacher said, made it sound like the Dobbsses had violated policy by planting a church that was not Baptist enough and had needed to repent in order to save their jobs.

“That’s not it at all,” he said. “They’re not going to go back and change anything.”

For their part, IMB officials stuck by their initial release. Wendy Norvelle, an IMB spokesperson, said she could speak only to the fact that at the April 29 meeting, the Dobbsses “did agree” with IMB leaders about the resolution of their conflict.

“Our understanding from our conversation with the Dobbsses is that they understood the terms,” Norvelle said. “We came to an agreement.”

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