

May 10, 2010

Ms. Irina Bokova  
Director-General of UNESCO  
UNESCO Headquarters  
7, Place de Fontenoy  
75352 Paris 07 SP  
France

Cc: The Executive Board of UNESCO

RE: Failure to Halt the UNESCO-Obiang International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences

Dear Ms. Bokova,

We are writing to you again regarding the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences, this time to convey our deep disappointment that UNESCO has not cancelled this award, which is named after and funded by the highly corrupt and abusive ruler of Equatorial Guinea, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo.

As you are aware, a number of countries represented on UNESCO's governing Executive Board objected to the prize when it was established at the 180<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board in October 2008. More recently, UNESCO received several communications from Equatoguinean human rights defenders, global civil society groups, scholars, and others that urged that it cancel the prize without delay.

Nevertheless, on April 22 UNESCO informed governments that it plans to award the UNESCO-Obiang prize for the first time at the end of June 2010. This announcement came shortly after the UNESCO Executive Board concluded its 184<sup>th</sup> session on April 15 without taking any action to end the long standing controversy over this prize.

We are troubled by the manner in which the decision to proceed with this prize was made and communicated. After several of our groups registered our concerns with you and the full Executive Board in a letter dated January 21, 2010, and others wrote to you and the Executive Board on March 4, 2010, we received a response from UNESCO indicating that the matter of the UNESCO-Obiang prize "is the prerogative of UNESCO's governing bodies," notably its Executive Board. However, at the recent meeting of the Executive Board you did not provide any indication that UNESCO was preparing to move ahead with the prize. To the contrary, you noted the controversy surrounding this prize in an April 6 speech and announced that it once again had been postponed. No timeline for the postponement was specified, nor at that time do you appear to have invited the Executive Board to decide how to proceed with this sensitive matter. It thus came as a shock and a major disappointment to learn that the UNESCO-Obiang prize is now set to be awarded in June 2010.

With this decision, UNESCO has squandered a critical opportunity to safeguard its reputation. UNESCO's credibility is irreparably harmed when it disregards the dire conditions faced by the people of Equatorial Guinea and permits an autocrat to use the organization to launder his image. The grim irony of awarding a prize recognizing "scientific achievements that improve the quality of human life," while naming it for a president whose thirty-year rule has been marked by the brutal poverty and fear of his people and a global reputation for governmental corruption, would bring shame on UNESCO.

Other UN agencies, by contrast, have been clear about the disastrous development and human rights record of Equatorial Guinea. Among other problems, they have documented rampant torture by the police, pervasive repression, the absence of media freedom, widespread discrimination, neglect and deterioration of economic and social rights, and needless poverty attributable to extensive official corruption and mismanagement. Many governments that are Member States of UNESCO likewise have been outspoken about the severe human rights problems in Equatorial Guinea, including during recent sessions of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. UNESCO's valuable work risks being overshadowed by this ill-conceived alliance with one of the world's most infamous dictators. We urge you to reverse course before it is too late.

Moreover, we would like to highlight the urgent need for UNESCO to investigate the source of the millions UNESCO accepted from an autocrat who enjoys fabulous wealth from his nation's petroleum riches while keeping his people mired in poverty. Equatorial Guinea's oil wealth gives the country a per capita GDP on a par with Italy, South Korea, and Israel, yet its own government acknowledges that over 75 percent of Equatorial Guinea's population lives in poverty, inevitably begging the question where the money has gone. Yet President Obiang's government has distinguished itself for its unwillingness to implement meaningful transparency regarding its oil revenues, as exemplified by its expulsion from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative just last month. According to evidence produced in 2004 and 2010 investigations by the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, President Obiang and close family members have diverted tens of millions of dollars of State resource earnings for their private benefit. Some of these charges are now under judicial investigation in Spain.

Under these circumstances, the blurred distinction between national wealth and the private holdings of Equatorial Guinea's elite may be seen in the financing of the UNESCO-Obiang prize itself. While UNESCO documents credit the \$3 million grant to what sounds to be a private philanthropic entity—the "Obiang Nguema Mbasogo Foundation for the Preservation of Life"—the Executive Board documentation also states that it is "the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea [that] proposed to establish and finance [the] prize." This matter merits careful scrutiny and public clarification.

Finally, we repeat our call for the \$3 million that UNESCO has accepted from President Obiang to be applied to the education and welfare of Equatoguineans, rather than the glorification of their president. We respectfully propose that these funds be used to provide rudimentary educational supplies for primary schools and to address other long neglected needs in Equatorial Guinea.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response, which you may direct to the undersigned via Tutu Alicante, executive director of EG Justice, at [tutu@egjustice.org](mailto:tutu@egjustice.org).

Yours,

Rev. Dr. James A. Kirkwood, Treasurer  
**AfricaFiles** (Canada)

Basil Fernando, Executive Director  
**Asian Legal Resource Center** (Hong Kong)

Alvaro Herrero, Executive Director  
**Asociación por los Derechos Civiles** (Argentina)

Manuel Ollé Sesé, President  
**Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de España** (Spain)

William Bourdon, President  
**Association Sherpa** (France)

Moataz El Fegiery, Executive Director  
**Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies** (Egypt)

Moses Mkandawire, Director, Church and Society Program  
**CCAP Synod of Livingstonia** (Malawi)

Ignacio Saiz, Executive Director  
**Center for Economic and Social Rights** (International)

Undule Mwakasungula, Executive Director  
**Center for Human Rights and Rehabilitation** (Malawi)

Gastón Chillier, Executive Director  
**Center for Legal and Social Studies** (Argentina)

Samuel Nguiffo, Secretary-General  
**Centre pour l'Environnement et le Développement** (Cameroon)

Gustavo Gallón, Director  
**Colombian Commission of Jurists** (Colombia)  
and former Special Representative on the situation of human rights in Equatorial Guinea  
**United Nations Commission on Human Rights** (replaced by the Human Rights Council)

Guy Aurenche, President  
**Comité Catholique Contre la Faim et pour le Développement-Terre Solidaire** (France)

Bubelwa Kaiza, Executive Director  
**Concern for Development Initiatives in Africa** (Tanzania)  
and Coordinator  
**Publish What You Pay – Tanzania** (Tanzania)

Giyani Dube, Acting CEO  
**Creative Writers and Arts Workshop** (South Africa)

Ka Hsaw Wa, Co-Founder and Executive Director  
**EarthRights International** (Thailand and United States)

Rev. Malcolm Damon, Executive Director  
**Economic Justice Network** (South Africa)

Tutu Alicante, Executive Director  
**EG Justice** (United States)

Léonie Kiangu, Coordinator  
**Femme et Justice Economique** (Democratic Republic of Congo)  
and Executive Secretary  
**Publish What You Pay – Democratic Republic of Congo** (Democratic Republic of Congo)

Andrew Feinstein, Chair  
**Friends of Treatment Action Campaign** (United Kingdom)

Hernán Charosky, Executive Director  
**Fundación Poder Ciudadano** (Argentina)

José Julio Martín-Sacristán Núñez, General Director  
**Fundación Sur** (Spain)

Maria Koulouris, Director of the Natural Resources and Human Rights Initiative  
**Global Rights** (International)

Simon Taylor, Director  
**Global Witness** (International)

Elizabeth Chyrum, Executive Director  
**Human Rights Concern** (Eritrea)

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director  
**Human Rights Watch** (International)

Phebe Mavungu Clement, Legal Officer, Africa Regional Program  
**International Commission of Jurists – Africa Regional Office** (South Africa)

Yves Tankwey Sapa, Coordinator  
**Jeunesse Unie pour le Développement Intégral** (Democratic Republic of Congo)

Liudmila Alexeeva, Chair  
**Moscow Helsinki Group** (Russian Federation)

James A. Goldston, Executive Director  
**Open Society Justice Initiative** (International)

Bernard Taylor, Executive Director  
**Partnership Africa Canada** (Canada)

Max M. de Mesa, Chairperson  
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**Publish What You Pay – Cameroon** (Cameroon)

Mamadou Taran Diallo, President  
**Publish What You Pay – Guinea** (Guinea)

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**Publish What You Pay – Norway** (Norway)

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**Ujamaa Center** (Kenya)

Daniel Owusu-Koranteng, Executive Director  
**Wacam** (Ghana)

Solange Fiaty, Secretariat Coordinator  
**West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network** (Togo)

Caroline Claire Yankep, President  
**World Dynamics of Young People** (Cameroon)

Gabriel Shumba, Executive Director  
**Zimbabwe Exiles Forum** (South Africa)