



global witness

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Global Witness welcomes UNESCO's suspension of Dictator prize

Today's decision by the UN Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) to suspend awarding the "UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences," is a welcome – but long overdue – recognition of the serious reputational threat posed by associating the Organisation with one of the world's most venal dictators.

Simon Taylor, Director of Global Witness, said: "We're pleased the board has seen sense and decided not to award the prize. But we still believe they should definitively cancel it for good – and while they are at it, ensure that this shameful period is never repeated again. A dictator who has impoverished his citizens and enriched himself and his family by plundering the country's oil wealth has no place sponsoring a UN prize."

The decision, announced today following the conclusion of a meeting of UNESCO's Executive Board, follows concerted campaigning by Global Witness, other international civil society organisations, and leading African scholars and human rights activists, including Nobel Laureates.

President Obiang's regime has an appalling record of human rights violations and corruption. His reign has been marked by political repression, summary arrest and judicial abuse, poverty and increased inequality, and the blatant use of public funds for personal gain. In November 2009, Global Witness published evidence showing that President Obiang's son, Teodorin, purchased a \$33 million private jet, a \$35 million Malibu mansion, speedboats and a fleet of fast cars using corruptly acquired funds.

"Following years of bad publicity about his regime, President Obiang has been on a concerted make-over. This has included spending millions of dollars hiring PR agents in Washington in an effort to launder his reputation," said Taylor. "What Mr Obiang does not seem to realise is that his reputation precedes him. His country now has a per capita income approximately that of Denmark or Italy, but roughly 60% of the population continues to live on less than one US dollar per day."

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Notes:

1. Prominent [African leaders](#), [Latin American literary figures](#), [Nobel laureates](#), [scientists and public health professionals](#), [press freedom groups](#), [Cano prize winners](#), and rights [organizations](#), including OSI, Human Rights Watch, Sherpa, and EG Justice, from around the world came together in an unprecedented effort to challenge the prize, citing serious concerns about President Obiang's record of corruption and abuse. Public figures involved in the campaign included: Nobel laureates Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Wole Soyinka, John Githongo, Mario Vargas Llosa, Claude Cohen-Tannoudji, and John Polanyi; author Chinua Achebe; human rights advocate Graça Machel; and over sixty professionals from Equatorial Guinea.
2. Global Witness' report, [The Secret Life of a Shopaholic](#) exposed how the son of the President had funnelled \$75 million into the United States, using the funds to sustain a luxury lifestyle.