

January 21, 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: UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences

Dear Ms. Bokova,

We write to you regarding the future of the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences. As you are aware, the prize was established in 2008 and is named for President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, who provided a US\$3 million grant to fund the prize. During his thirty-year rule, President Obiang has become notorious for his corruption and contempt for human rights.

Following upon expressions of concern about the creation of the UNESCO-Obiang Prize, we welcome the decision by UNESCO to take some initial steps to address the controversies raised. We very much appreciate the public statement by UNESCO's spokesperson on January 7, 2010, that the organization will carry out a review of all UNESCO prizes. We are also pleased to note that the UNESCO-Obiang Prize is on hold pending this review.

While recognizing this recent progress, we want to make clear that more must be done if UNESCO is to fully address the very serious issues raised in this case and past controversies of a similar nature. It is essential that the planned review process lead to a genuine change in the way UNESCO prizes are created and awarded, such that prizes that are inconsistent with UNESCO's mission—including its work to promote human rights—cannot be considered in the future.

Moreover, forward-looking reforms, by themselves, will not be enough to fully remedy the problem. There remains the pressing issue of the future of the UNESCO-Obiang prize itself. UNESCO's reputation and ability to fulfill its mission will continue to be compromised unless the review includes a thorough examination of the UNESCO-Obiang prize and an appropriate decision to cancel this prize. We urge UNESCO to address this situation without delay.

Finally, we call on UNESCO to ensure that the planned review be carried out transparently and that it incorporate dialogue with relevant civil society organizations. We look forward to further communications and invite you to remain in contact with the undersigned via Tutu Alicante, executive director of EG Justice, at tutu@egjustice.org.

Yours,

Renji George Joseph, Director
Alliance for Holistic and Sustainable Development of Communities (India)

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

William Bourdon, President
Association Sherpa (France)

Oliveri Thimonier, Secretary General
Association Survie (France)

Isabella Nyangule Dolphine Wandati, Director
Butere Focused Women in Development (Kenya)

Guy Aurenche, President
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Ignacio Saiz, Executive Director
Center for Economic and Social Rights (International)

Bubelwa Kaiza, Executive Director
Concern for Development Initiatives in Africa (Tanzania)

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

Tutu Alicante, Executive Director
EG Justice (United States)

Emira Woods, Co-Director
Foreign Policy In Focus (United States)

Jennifer Windsor, Executive Director
Freedom House (International)

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

Simon Taylor, Director

Global Witness (International)

Kenneth Roth, Executive Director
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Laura Livoti, Founder
Justice in Nigeria Now (United States)

Abu A. Brima, Executive Director
Network Movement for Justice and Development (Sierra Leone)

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

Bernard Taylor, Executive Director
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Richard Mugisha , Director
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Rencontre pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme (Congo Republic)

Karin Lissakers, Director
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Maya Sharma, Program Director
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