



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

cc. The Executive Board of UNESCO

June 13, 2010

RE: UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasongo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences

Dear Director-General Bokova,

In anticipation of Tuesday's meeting of UNESCO's Executive Board, we write to share with you the attached petition, which includes the signatures of many African critics of the UNESCO-Obiang Prize. Particularly in light of the [recent statement](#) made by the Equatoguinean government – which falsely labels organizations opposed to the creation of the prize as “racist” and “colonialist” – we feel it is very important that the Board be aware of the views of many Africans who are deeply concerned about the UNESCO-Obiang prize. We hope you will convey the concerns raised in this petition to the Executive Board, so that the relevant delegates can reflect on a possible way forward.

As the attached documents make clear, the nearly 250 of individual scholars, professional, and citizens who signed the petition, among which are many of my fellow Equatoguineans as well as citizens of fifteen other African countries, are deeply disappointed about the creation of the UNESCO-Obiang prize. We feel strongly that the funds used for the creation of this award can have a more significant impact inside Equatorial Guinea. Many other Africans also have added their voice to the chorus opposing this prize. Protest letters to UNESCO, which have been sent to your delegation and those of all other Executive Board members, have been signed by Africans from a total of 34 countries across the continent. In particular, we hope you will recall the letter that EG Justice shared with you in March of 2010 (also attached here), which was signed by dozens of Equatoguinean academics both inside the country and living in exile.

All of us feel that UNESCO, as an international body charged with promoting education and upholding UN principles, faces a critical choice. It should not let itself be used to advance the greed or self-aggrandizement of the political elite at the expense of the human rights and dignity of the people of Equatorial Guinea and their ability to benefit from their nation's vast oil wealth.

In addition, we are concerned about the lack of due diligence shown by UNESCO in accepting suspect funds that rightly belong to the people of Equatorial Guinea. We find it further disconcerting that UNESCO has shown a willingness to accept funds to create an award recognizing scientific research from a ruler who fails to support such initiatives inside his own country, where funding for scientific education, for example, is dismally low. Finally, we are concerned that the UNESCO-Obiang prize is simply a ploy by President Obiang to polish his image with the international community. We genuinely hope that UNESCO will decline to participate in such an image-laundering endeavor.

As Africans, we wholeheartedly understand the value and impetus for solidarity among African nations. However, we also believe that we would all be diminished if we closed our eyes and washed our hands of the problems that other African brothers and sisters are facing. We understand the apprehension of some member states of UNESCO to publicly oppose this prize, in view of how their position might be mischaracterized by some as "anti-African." In that regard, we wish to unequivocally state that standing up for the people of Equatorial Guinea and their right to live free from oppression and needless poverty—and thereby opposing the UNESCO-Obiang prize—is the truly pro-African position.

Again, we deeply appreciate your consideration and urge you to convey these concerns to UNESCO's Executive Board on Tuesday.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tutu Alicante' with a stylized flourish above the name.

Tutu Alicante,
Executive Director