

**A Letter from Concerned Public Health and Science Professionals
Regarding the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo
International Prize for Research in the Life**

We, the undersigned professionals, scholars, advocates, and other members of the public health and science community write to you with the hope that UNESCO will reconsider its decision to establish the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences, and abolish this award named for and funded by President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea.

As professionals concerned with advancing the public's health and alleviating mass suffering that comes from poverty and the disregard for human rights, we are concerned about the message UNESCO conveys by linking such a prize with President Obiang's name. Thirty years after Mr. Obiang declared himself President of Equatorial Guinea and fifteen years since the discovery of oil, the country is Sub-Saharan Africa's fourth largest oil producer with the consequent highest GDP per capita on the continent. Yet health indicators reflect shockingly poor governance and widespread suffering.

Despite a per capita GDP comparable to that of Italy or Spain, life expectancy in Equatorial Guinea is a mere 49.9 years, putting the country at number 168 of the 182 countries ranked by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Only 43 percent of the population has access to clean drinking water, and only 51 percent has access to toilet facilities. More than one out of five live births fail to survive their fifth year, giving Equatorial Guinea the fourth worst infant mortality ranking in the world, according to UNICEF. Equatorial Guinea spends only seven percent of its total government expenditure on health (ranking it at 153 of the 191 states measured by UNDP).

Compounding these problems, President Obiang's government tolerates virtually no opposition or dissent. Although, technically, the law provides for human rights NGOs to exist, none focusing on abuse of civil or political rights by the government or on official corruption seem to have been able to register or make public reports. UN human rights experts and other respected human rights monitors have repeatedly criticized the government for its use of unfair trials, arbitrary arrests, incommunicado detentions, and systematic torture.

We believe that the most perfunctory examination of President Obiang's record on human rights and meeting the needs of the people makes it clear that he is cynically attempting to use UNESCO as a vehicle to legitimize his abusive regime.

We are aware of and applaud UNESCO's decision to review all the international prizes that carry your organization's name and seal. We believe that if UNESCO is to stay true to its mission and advance its commitment to human dignity for all, your review must lead to the abolition of the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo Prize.

We look forward to further communication and invite you to remain in contact with the undersigned via Ken Hurwitz, Senior Legal Officer, Open Society Justice Initiative.

Yours,