



P E T I T I O N

To: Ms. Irina Bokova

Director-General of UNESCO
7, place de Fontenoy - 75352 Paris 07 SP - France

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

We the undersigned write to you with the hope that UNESCO will reconsider its decision to establish the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema 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.

If ever there was a moment for UNESCO to advance its mission and help to promote education for all and communication in Equatorial Guinea, this is that moment. Thirty years after Mr. Obiang declared himself President of Equatorial Guinea and fifteen years since the discovery of oil in this small nation, which today stands as Sub-Saharan Africa's fourth largest oil producer with the consequent highest GDP per capita on the continent, the level of education in the country remains significantly below the standards achieved by countries in the region with considerably fewer resources at their disposal. According to a 2009 UNDP report, spending on education by Equatorial Guinea was the lowest of all countries listed during the period from 2000-2007.

Attendance at primary and secondary schools remains disturbingly low. Meanwhile, gross underfunding has led to the decrepit condition of Equatorial Guinea's education infrastructure. Less than 60% of Equatoguinean pupils finish primary school, and the latest UNESCO "Education for All Global Monitoring Report" report cites that while a long time gender gap in education has lessened somewhat, it is due to an overall decline in enrollment from 1999-2007, as fewer boys are enrolling in school, rather than any progress affecting girls. The single and recently established university that exists in the country is a sham: it lacks basic materials, a library, qualified personnel, and academic

independence. Students at all levels must do without books and basic educational resources essential for their advancement. Additionally, they complain of chronic teacher absenteeism because there is neither a sufficiently funded nor a coherent national education program.

National leaders who genuinely seek to advance research in the life sciences start by building education systems in their countries capable of producing future recipients of international awards. In contrast others, simply eager to have their public image polished, pretend to be global philanthropists by creating international awards that carry their names. We believe that the most perfunctory examination of President Obiang's record on human rights, including education, would make it clear that he is cynically attempting to use UNESCO as a vehicle for such manipulation. This makes a mockery of the noble values of your organization.

If UNESCO is to stay true to its mission and advance its commitment to education and human dignity for all, the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo prize must be abolished and that the \$3 million endowment from President Obiang be dedicated to schools inside the country that sorely need funding for the purchase of books, benches, and other such rudimentary educational materials for their students. We believe that such an allocation would be a more appropriate use of funds that could be of tangible benefit to young learners in Equatorial Guinea, who, like students throughout much of Africa, struggle and yearn for decent educational opportunities.

Petition available at: <http://www.gopetition.com/online/34452.html>

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