



Republika ng Pilipinas
Komisyon ng Karapatang Pantao ng Pilipinas
(Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines)

11 June 2010

HON. ALBERTO G. ROMULO

Secretary of Foreign Affairs
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Dear Secretary Romulo:

I write to respectfully ask you to take urgent steps to urge UNESCO to halt a highly controversial prize that contradicts the organization's professed human rights principles. The Philippine government has the important distinction of serving on the Executive Board of UNESCO. Dozens of civil society groups from around the world have contacted the Director-General of UNESCO, Mrs. Irina Bokova, and the full membership of the Executive Board, including the Permanent Delegation of the Philippines to UNESCO in Paris, to express their serious concerns regarding a UNESCO prize named after and financed by the highly corrupt and abusive president of Equatorial Guinea, the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences.

In light of the major controversy surrounding the UNESCO-Obiang prize, UNESCO's Director General, Irina Bokova, is currently seeking the views of member states before deciding whether and how to proceed. Some emergency meetings already took place earlier this month in Paris. The full Executive Board is expected to have the opportunity to discuss the matter at an upcoming informational meeting, scheduled to take place in Paris on June 15. It is thus essential that the Philippines take this opportunity to contact Mrs. Bokova before June 15. The results of that meeting could be decisive. If the Philippines makes clear its opposition to the prize, that could allow her to continue consultations with member states to find a solution to the matter. If governments fail to take a stand, however, there is a risk that UNESCO will issue this scandalous award and irreparably harm its reputation.

The Philippines should act without delay to block the UNESCO-Obiang prize and therefore defend key human rights principles. The continued existence of the UNESCO-Obiang prize and the international endorsement of President Obiang that

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it implies stands in sharp contrast to the requirement, stated in Article 1 of UNESCO's constitution, that UNESCO "further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations."

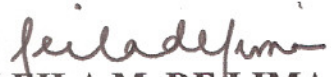
In the 30 years that President Obiang has led Equatorial Guinea, since taking power in a bloody coup d'etat, he has done little to promote education, science, culture, and human rights. To the contrary, his leadership has been characterized by numerous serious problems, such as:

- The willful neglect of Equatorial Guinea's international obligations with respect to the right to education and other essential economic and social rights.
- Needless, avoidable poverty attributable to extensive corruption and mismanagement.
- Longstanding violations of freedom of opinion and expression, as well as the right to information.
- Deeply entrenched political repression.
- Severe deficits in the rule of law, including rampant torture in detention and impunity for those responsible.
- Widespread discrimination.

I would be very grateful if you would send a strong message, in writing, to Mrs. Bokova before June 15. I also sincerely hope that you will encourage the Philippine Ambassador to France and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, H. E. Mrs. Rora Navarro-Tolentino, to attend the crucial June 15 meeting in order to personally convey the Philippines government's opposition to the UNESCO-Obiang prize to Mrs. Bokova and the other member states that constitute the Executive Board. By exercising leadership in this way, the Philippines can help defend basic human rights principles and salvage UNESCO's reputation and ability to carry out its important work.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,


LEILA M. DE LIMA
Chairperson