



global witness

For immediate release: 12th August 2010

UNESCO executive should cancel Obiang Prize at October Meeting

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization should cancel the Obiang Prize at its next session in October 2010, Global Witness and 95 partner groups said in a [letter](#) sent to UNESCO Executive Board members today.

At its last meeting, on June 15, UNESCO agreed to [delay the prize](#) to allow for further consultation, following a public outcry from a diverse group of scientists, health professionals, press freedom advocates, and rights groups around the world.

A total of 96 nongovernmental organizations from 6 continents—including 25 from Africa—signed the August 12 letter.

The groups thanked UNESCO's director-general, [Irina Bokova](#), and the Executive Board for recognizing their concerns, but reiterated [their call](#) for the prize to be cancelled definitively, rather than simply postponed.

“A prize in President Obiang's name or supported by money provided by him offends the very standards and goals UNESCO promotes,” the organizations said in their letter.

President Obiang's government is known to be highly repressive. For example, it tramples on the right to freedom of expression that is at the core of UNESCO's mandate.

Despite Equatorial Guinea's vast wealth from natural resources—which gives it the highest per-capita GDP in sub-Saharan Africa—it has shockingly low health and development indicators, on par with some of the poorest countries in the world. [Obiang and his associates](#) are under investigation for [corruption](#) in several countries, and [findings so far](#) raise serious concerns about the source of the funding he pledged for the UNESCO prize.

“We strongly encourage you to use this time of consultation to reform the prize establishment process generally, so that any prize inconsistent with UNESCO's mission—including its work to promote human rights—cannot go forward,” the groups said in the letter.

The groups urged UNESCO to ensure that the \$3 million offered by Obiang is instead used to support the education, health, and other basic rights of the people of Equatorial Guinea.

“By rejecting this ‘dictator prize’ and making sure that the funds are better used, UNESCO can uphold the principles in its mandate and help the people of Equatorial Guinea at the same time,” said Tutu Alicante, the Equatoguinean director of EG Justice who signed the joint letter. “The country's oil wealth should be used for essential social services that benefit the poor, not fancy award ceremonies for the president.”

The letter is available in [English](#), [French](#), [Japanese](#), [Portuguese](#), and [Spanish](#).

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Global Witness investigates and campaigns to prevent natural resource-related conflict and corruption and associated environmental and human rights abuses