



global witness

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## **UNESCO: ‘Dictator Prize’ Suspension Only a Temporary Fix Award Honoring Equatorial Guinea Leader Should be Cancelled**

London, June 15, 2010 – UNESCO’s decision today to delay awarding a controversial prize named after and funded by the dictator of Equatorial Guinea is a positive initial step, civil society groups said. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) announced June 15, 2010, that its executive board, consisting of 58 countries, approved Director-General Irina Bokova’s proposal to postpone the award and instead engage in consultations to consider the prize’s future.

Some 270 organizations around the world have been involved in the [campaign](#) against the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences. They have called for the award to be cancelled completely. The next meeting of the governing board is scheduled for October.

“UNESCO’s director-general and member states have done the right thing by postponing this award, given concerns about President Obiang’s notorious record of human rights abuse and corruption,” said Tutu Alicante, an exile from Equatorial Guinea who heads the group EG Justice. “The real test, however, will be whether they ultimately cancel the prize.”

The coalition reiterated its calls for the funds behind the prize to be used to promote basic education and address other needs of Equatorial Guinea’s people. Such spending should be done in a clear and transparent way, they stressed, to address high levels of official corruption in the country.

“The UNESCO-Obiang prize’s \$3 million endowment should be used to benefit the people of Equatorial Guinea – from whom these funds have been taken – rather than to glorify their president,” the Most Rev. Desmond Tutu, archbishop emeritus of Capetown, said in a June 11, 2010 [statement](#) released before the executive board meeting.

During the board meeting, governments from various regions spoke out against the award and in support of further dialogue. In her opening remarks, Bokova called on member states to “be courageous and recognize our responsibilities for it is our organization that is at stake.”

The prize has been [criticized](#) by numerous governments, [UNESCO prize laureates](#), [scientists and public health advocates](#), [press freedom organizations](#), [anticorruption groups](#), and many other concerned [organizations and individuals](#) around the world.

Since the discovery of oil in the 1990s, Equatorial Guinea has become the richest country in sub-Saharan Africa on a per capita basis, but the vast majority of its people still live in extreme poverty and are unable to achieve an adequate standard of living.

The statement was issued by the following six groups that have spoken out against the prize: Association Sherpa, Center for Economic and Social Rights, EG Justice, Global Witness, Human Rights Watch, and the Open Society Institute.

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For more information, please contact: Amy Barry on +44 (0)207 4925858 or Robert Palmer on +44 (0)207 4925860