

Ms Alissandra Cummins
Chairperson of the Executive Board
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

cc: Members of the Executive Board
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

07 March 2012

Opposing the UNESCO-Obiang International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences

Honourable Ms. Cummins,

The UNCAC Coalition, composed of more than 300 civil society organisations committed to fighting corruption and promoting human rights worldwide, has learned that UNESCO's Executive Board, will take a decision this week at its 189th session, regarding the UNESCO – Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences. The prize was created in 2008 but suspended twice by the Executive Board following a public outcry. Now the Executive Board is considering the matter again.

The UNCAC Coalition strongly opposes the establishment of this award, funded from the public treasury of Equatorial Guinea and yet named after its long-term head of state. As we already communicated in 2010, we believe that the award and its endorsement of Mr. Obiang are fundamentally contrary to the spirit and principles of the United Nations, as well as to UNESCO's constitutional goals. President Obiang heads a country that has been ranked by Transparency International as among the most corrupt in the world, whose government is known for well-documented brutality and whose citizens live in poverty despite the country's oil riches. In more than 30 years of government, Mr. Obiang has missed the opportunity to use oil revenues, and other sources of government income, to improve the life of the people in Equatorial Guinea or even to make transparent what those revenues are.

With the assistance of civil society groups, law enforcement proceedings have been initiated in France, Spain and the USA to investigate President Obiang and other senior Equatoguinean officials including his son Teodorin Obiang for alleged illicit enrichment and embezzlement of public funds. These proceedings have so far resulted in the seizure of millions of dollars-worth of luxury automobiles, goods and furniture. While the international community has committed to fighting corruption and impunity worldwide within the framework of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), President Teodoro Obiang is attempting to use and abuse UNESCO to burnish his regime's image through the Obiang prize. .

The UNCAC Coalition believes that by allowing this prize, UNESCO would send the wrong message, providing positive publicity to an individual and a regime about which there are grave concerns on many counts. Therefore, we respectfully call upon the United Nations and UNESCO to take the necessary steps to:

1. Make a final decision to cancel the UNESCO-Obiang Prize at the 189th session of UNESCO's Executive Board and to reject any other Obiang-endowed prize.
2. Set up clear, transparent guidelines for the creation of awards by the UN and UN agencies, in order to guarantee that all awards and their funding sources are in full accord with UN essential values, international commitments and standards regarding the promotion of human rights, the Millennium Development Goals and the global fight against corruption.

We would be very grateful for your support on this matter and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Slagjana Taseva
Chair, UNCAC Coalition