

February 29, 2012

Members of the Executive Board
The United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO)
UNESCO Headquarters
7, Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

Cc: Director-General Irina Bokova

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

Dear Executive Board Delegates,

We, the undersigned Africa-based press freedom organizations and journalists, write to express our firm opposition to the UNESCO Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences and to call on you to revoke the prize at your upcoming session.

UNESCO, as an organization that champions freedom of expression and promotes press freedom in particular, should never have accepted the \$3 million donation that President Obiang of Equatorial Guinea made to fund a prize. President Obiang's regime, in power for 32 years, has routinely stifled press freedom and silenced critical voices. Although a small percentage of the local population is able to access foreign news via internet and satellite broadcasts, the government tightly controls most forms of media, limiting citizens' access to information. The government or members of President Obiang's family control the country's television and radio stations, and all regularly produced print media are controlled by the state or the president's close associates.

Both domestic and foreign journalists are routinely harassed, detained, and censored. In February 2011, the government banned local broadcasters from reporting on the Arab Spring uprisings. A presenter of the state-controlled radio station was subsequently suspended for mentioning Libya on air. In June 2011, a German television crew had their footage destroyed by authorities before being deported from the country, after filming in poor neighborhoods of the capital and interviewing a human rights lawyer and an opposition party member.

We understand that President Obiang has offered to remove his name from the prize, but that does not erase our serious concern that his \$3 million donation links him and the abuses of his government to UNESCO, thereby undercutting the organization's worthy mission. We also are aware of concerns that the funds may be tainted by the high-level corruption for which Equatorial Guinea is well-known. It is public record that ongoing corruption investigations in France and the U.S. have led to the seizure of assets belonging to President Obiang's son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue. Documents released as part of separate investigations by the U.S. Senate and the U.S. Department of Justice suggest a pattern of systematic corruption at the highest levels of President Obiang's regime. Unfortunately, journalists inside the country are not able to report on these developments, given the severe restrictions they face.

As an organization that advocates "access to information and knowledge," UNESCO should not accept money from a leader whose decades-long record represents an affront to those principles. We urge you to definitively abolish the UNESCO Obiang prize and implement new guidelines that will prevent in the

future the creation of prizes that directly or indirectly, through their association with individuals or governments, contradict UNESCO's core mandate.

Sincerely,

Donat Mbaya, President
Tshivis T. Tshivuadi, Secretary General
Journaliste en danger (JED)
(Democratic Republic of Congo)

West African Journalists Association
(International)

Trevor Ncube
Executive Deputy Chairman & C.E.O. of the Mail & Guardian newspaper
Chairman of Alpha Media Holdings
(Zimbabwe)

Gabriel Baglo
Director, International Federation of Journalists Africa Office
(International)

M. Omar Faruk Osman Nur
President, Federation of African Journalists
(International)

Cheriff Moumina Sy
Chairperson, African Editors' Forum
(International)

Makan Kone
President, Maison de la Presse du Mali
(Mali)

Stéphane Goué
Secretary General, Comité Ivoirien pour la Protection des Journalistes
(Cote d'Ivoire)

Alex Gustave Azébazé
Secretary General, Syndicat national des journalistes du Cameroun
(Cameroon)

Fatou Jagne Senghore
Regional Representative, ARTICLE 19 West Africa
(International)

Célestin Lingo

Secretary General, Réseau Médias pour les Elections
(Cameroon)

Kader Diop

Retired Journalist
(Senegal)

Kenneth Y. Best, Sr.

Managing Director, Liberian Observer Corporation
(Liberia)

Gwen Lister

Founding Editor of The Namibian
(Namibia)

William Saidi

Retired journalist
(Zimbabwe)

Boubacar Diallo

President, la Maison de la presse du Niger
President, l'Association nigérienne des éditeurs de la presse indépendant
(Niger)

Stanis Nkundiye Angalikiyana

President, L'Union des Syndicats des Professionnels de la Presse d'Afrique Centrale
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Peta Thornycroft

Freelance journalist
(Zimbabwe)

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Executive Director, Media Foundation of West Africa
(Ghana)

Andrew Mwenda

Managing Editor of The Independent
(Uganda)

Fred M'membe

Editor in Chief of The Post
(Zambia)

Raymond Louw

Veteran journalist

Former Editor of Rand Daily Mail and Southern Africa Report
(South Africa)

Rafael Marques de Morais

Award-winning investigative journalist and human rights activist
(Angola)