



For Immediate Release

**UNESCO: Africans Urge Cancellation of Obiang Prize**

***Prize is an Affront to Efforts to Promote Human Rights and Good Governance in the Continent***

(Paris., October 11, 2010) – Citizens of Equatorial Guinea and prominent African figures including Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, Graça Machel, Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka, and author Chinua Achebe wrote to UNESCO’s Executive Board today urging them to cancel definitively the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo Prize for Research in the Life Sciences.

The letter, signed by 125 African laureates, scholars, human rights defenders, and citizens of Equatorial Guinea, cited the record of serious abuses and mismanagement of the country’s wealth by the eponymous funder of the prize, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea.

“The continued existence of this prize is inimical to UNESCO’s mission and an affront to Africans everywhere who work for the betterment of our countries,” the letter said.

Equatorial Guinea has the highest GDP per capita on the continent, yet 3 out of 4 Equatoguineans live in poverty. There are no research centers in Equatorial Guinea that would enable a citizen of the country to qualify for the UNESCO-Obiang award, and even basic education and health care remain unattainable for the vast majority. Civil liberties are heavily curtailed: in August, four Equatoguinean refugees were abducted from neighboring Benin, tortured for months and then summarily tried and executed.

“While Equatorial Guinea’s government has tried to characterize opposition to this prize as racist and colonialist, in fact many Africans have been vocal opponents of the prize,” said Tutu Alicante, an Equatoguinean and Executive Director of the human rights organization EG Justice. “Not all Africans believe that a dictator should be able to purchase legitimacy through a prize created in Paris. Many recognize that this prize harms Africans.”

UNESCO’s Executive Board has a responsibility to protect the organization’s integrity, which this prize places in jeopardy. “[T]he diversion of wealth that should benefit Equatoguineans to finance a prize honoring President Obiang runs counter to the objective of improving human dignity that underpins the mission of UNESCO,” the letter said.

**For more information, please contact:** Tutu Alicante: + 689 655 968 (Spanish mobile) /+1 615 479 0207 (U.S. mobile); or [tutu@egjustice.org](mailto:tutu@egjustice.org)

EG Justice is a non-governmental organization that promotes human rights and the rule of law, transparency and civil society participation to build a just Equatorial Guinea.