



**global witness**

6th Floor, Buchanan House  
30 Holborn, London EC1N 2HS  
Tel +44 (0)20 7492 5820  
Fax +44 (0)20 7492 5821  
Email [mail@globalwitness.org](mailto:mail@globalwitness.org)  
[www.globalwitness.org](http://www.globalwitness.org)

Ms Eleonora Mitrofanova,  
Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Résidence de la Délégation permanente  
de la Fédération de Russie auprès de l'UNESCO,  
8, rue de Prony,  
75017 PARIS,  
France

cc.

Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO,  
The Executive Board of UNESCO

22<sup>nd</sup> December 2009

Dear Ms Mitrofanova,

**The UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasongo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences will destroy the reputation of UNESCO – and should be cancelled without delay:**

At the 180<sup>th</sup> meeting of the UNESCO Executive Board on the 17<sup>th</sup> November 2008, it was agreed to establish the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasongo Award in recognition of “scientific achievements that improve the quality of human life.” Whilst Global Witness agrees with the sentiment of such an award, the involvement of President Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, ruler for life and head of one of the world’s most corrupt and venal dictatorships, debases the standing of UNESCO – and of course, the award itself.

Under past leadership, the credibility and reputation of UNESCO has repeatedly been called into question through association of the organisation and its name in attempts to protect and launder the reputation of numerous individuals of nefarious character. Recent examples include the acceptance of the diplomatic status of Pierre Falcone, the infamous arms dealer, jailed for his involvement in the illegal supply of arms to Angola. He used his “diplomatic” status to seek to avoid prosecution for his crimes, and most recently his defence team attempted to claim that this status should allow for his release, pending appeal of his conviction in the Angolagate trials which just concluded. Another example came when UNESCO gave several awards in both 2006 and 2007, to the Uzbek dictator Islam Karimov.

Given the recent UNESCO leadership change, there is now an opportunity to re-establish the integrity and reputation of the organisation and to move on from these shameful practices. This should mean ensuring that UNESCO places concern for human rights at the centre of its mission on education and culture – rather than, as currently, offering its services as the “blue rinse reputation launderers of choice” for the world’s despots.

As such, there are only two credible options that UNESCO must now take:

1. The UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasongo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences should be cancelled immediately.
2. The US\$3 million of financing for this award should immediately be placed in a trust fund and deployed for the betterment of human life in Equatorial Guinea. Such work could include, for example, an immunisation programme, or alternative much-needed health care provision in-country.

In closing, we would like to draw your attention to the fact that in the absence of the award having thus far been cancelled, Global Witness hereby nominates the son of President Obiang - Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue (aka Teodorin) - to be the first recipient of the UNESCO-Obiang award. After careful consideration, it is clear that Teodorin has spectacularly “improved the quality” of his own life. This extraordinary achievement is all the more remarkable, given that over 60% of the population of Equatorial Guinea live on less than US\$1 per day. Please note the included supporting evidence.

Given the short period of time until the intended date for the presentation of the award, Global Witness hopes that the board will conclude this issue must be addressed as a matter of highest priority. The choice for the board going forward is clear: Either seize this opportunity and repair the reputation of UNESCO, or go down in history as apologists for kleptocrats and dictators.

I look forward to hearing of your decision at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Taylor', written in a cursive style.

Simon Taylor  
Director