

**English Translation of the Farewell Speech of
Ambassador John E. Bennett
At a Public Reception at the Residence
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
July 28, 1994**

Mr. Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Don Angel Seriche Dougan, representing the Government of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea.

Ladies and Gentlemen, friends all.

It is a great honor for my wife Nickie, our sons Seth and Ian, and me to have you in what has been our home for the past three years as we take leave from you.

I would like to begin by publicly expressing my appreciation to President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo for having received me for a farewell call last week in Bata. It was an interesting and useful discussion. I would also like to thank the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation for inviting me to a farewell dinner tomorrow evening. We look forward to it.

How does one sum up three years as the American Ambassador in Equatorial Guinea? What was the agenda? What were the results? Perhaps it is best to begin at the beginning, with a few observations that I made at the swearing-in ceremony of 16 Peace Corps Volunteers on October 19, 1991, one month after my arrival:

I noted, “The promotion and consolidation of democratic values are pre-eminent challenges to United States foreign policy... We are supporting a structure of changes, which would provide the foundations of democracy:

“ – respect for human rights;

“ – constitutional development and free, fair, and competitive elections;

“ – popular participation and good government;

“ – independent judiciaries and the rule of law;

“ – a free press;

“ – open debate in which all citizens of the country, no matter where they reside, may participate with equal access to the media.

“Equally important, we are making a clear link between political and economic liberalization and outside foreign assistance. We will help countries pursue a democratic course. In an era of scarce resources, we cannot waste humanitarian assistance on governments which themselves refuse the path to democracy, and we will not do so.

“The United States believes that multiparty democracy has proven to be the most resilient and productive form of democratic pluralism. We also realize that each nation has its own range of viable political options. We will try not to indulge in cultural arrogance by claiming that only the American system is appropriate for other countries. But we do insist that all citizens of a country have the right to participate, the right to speak out, the right to associate freely without fear of governmental or other interference; these human rights are essential, we believe, in any democratic system, regardless of the country.”

How did this agenda stand up over three years? Well, despite a change in the party in the White House, the foreign policy of the United States has remained rooted in the rule of law, human rights, and democratization. And believe me, my friends, this shall remain so under my successors.

How do I judge the progress made in Equatorial Guinea toward these goals? While the government claims significant progress, I am afraid history will judge otherwise:

Sadly, I do not believe that any balanced observer could conclude that the rule of law exists today in Equatorial Guinea – at least as understood by the world community. It is a rule of men and not of laws. Each of us here in this room can cite numerous examples where law in Equatorial Guinea is what those in power say it is, where the written law is used when useful and ignored when inconvenient. And in my

three years, I have not seen documented one case where political violence has come from any quarter except agents of the government.

The absence of the rule of law has a devastating effect on both human rights and democratization.

- **The constitution of 1991, for example, has been judged by competent international legal experts as more restrictive on human rights than that of 1982.**
- **Yes, multi-party democracy was promised in the 1991 constitution, but the implementing laws are patently anti-democratic. For example, an electoral law which does not provide for an independent election commission or a transparent electoral process is neither democratic nor a measure of progress. The recently announced voter registration regulation may in itself be acceptable but without a profound change in the electoral and other laws, it means little, and its revision was promised by the government when concluding the National Pact 18 months ago.**
- **Yes, while there is now a multi-party parliament, the congressional elections held in November 1993 were not free, fair, or transparent, and they were boycotted by a large majority of potential voters. In addition, there is no meaningful separation of powers, which leaves the “multi color” congress subservient to the executive.**

In the democratization process, some claim that progress is justifiably slow because it is new to the country, that Guineans do not know what democracy is. However, I would say that this is certainly not so for those who are responsible for drafting the laws of the country. As an example, I would say that any person or persons who take a democratic law from abroad – as was done with the [contemporary] Spanish electoral law – and adapt it to become anti-democratic certainly know what democracy is. In a similar manner, the current press law is adapted from the Franco dictatorship, when the post-Franco law would have reflected the real press freedom such as exists in Spain today.

On the positive side, there has been an opening of press activities in Equatorial Guinea, despite an undemocratic press law and government

harassment. In my opinion, this has been due primarily to the bravery and tenacity of those who write and publish independent, party, or interest-group newspapers such as “El Sol”, “La Verdad”, “Tu Gala”, “El Progreso”, and “Bojuelo”. The news agency EFE has also played a great role in fomenting press freedom, as has Spain’s external radio service.

I realize that the Government of Equatorial Guinea and some international observers have noted positive steps in both human rights and democratization. In human rights, for example, by complimenting the President for pardoning political prisoners such as those released for the President’s birthday or Independence Day. I recall in particular the pardons of Placido Miko, Jose Luis Nfumba, Celestino Bakale, and four others in June 1992; the pardons of Orlando Cartegena Lagar, Francisco Medina Catalan, and six other Annoboneses in October 1993; and the pardons of Jacinto Nkulu Abaga and seven other military members in June 1994. However, in all of these cases, the arrests and trials of these persons were, according to competent legal opinion, outside the laws of the country, and most of the victims had been tortured as well.

While no one would want to see a prisoner of conscience’s period of extra-legal confinement extended, I remember a statement made by Uganda’s Yoweri Museveni shortly after he came to power in 1986: He said that a government should never be thanked for undoing what it should not have done in the first place.

Even more concerning has been the inaction by the Government of Equatorial Guinea to investigate in a meaningful manner and to publish the findings of what appear to be political or extra-judicial killings by members of the national security forces – even when so requested by the Special Reporter of the United Nations’ Human Rights Commission and other accredited authorities. I am thinking of the 1993 cases of Damaso Abaga Nve of Ebebiyin, Gaspar Mba Oyono of Nsok Nsomo, Simplicio Llorente Yaye and Manuel Villarrubia of Annobon, Pedro Motu of Ebebiyin, and Romualdo Rafael Nsogo of Bata. In 1994, it would also appear that former Sergeant Antonio Ndong Abena might have been killed extra-legally in late March in Kogo District.

It is also not possible to speak of human and political rights in Equatorial Guinea and cite as progress the decrease in political arrests since March of this year [1994]. Yes, there have been fewer arrests, but this would imply that many, if not most, of the arrests in previous periods were directed by “superior authority.” I am thinking of the sacking of the headquarters of the Party of Progress in September 1992; the round-up and torture of some 120 students, teachers, politicians, and two priests in December 1992; the detention and torture of Benjamin Ballingha Balinga Alene, Estanislau Don Malavo, and Antonio Mbale Abang in January 1992; plus the extra-judicial killings mentioned previously. And we must remember that in 1994, at least 200 persons have been detained as perceived political enemies; these round-ups may not have been as spectacular as those in past years, but they continue – including 10 members of the Party of Progress during this July.

Unfortunately, unless the government takes seriously what is for me the key recommendation in Special Reporter Alejandro Artucio’s 1994 report, the world will not witness a meaningful improvement in the human rights situation in Equatorial Guinea. And that is the recommendation calling for the government “to bring to court process and sanction penally and administratively those culpable of human rights violations and indemnify the victims of the abuses of power.”

I say this because after three years of studying the situation here, the same names keep coming forward as alleged violators of human rights through physical mistreatment, intimidation, or monetary sanctions – names such as Teniente [Lieutenant] Victoriano Ela Nzang (“Comandante X”), “Tenso Tenso”, “Ajinana”, Alferez [Officer Cadet] Juan Ngonga, Teniente Francisco Ondo (“Pule”), “Abosikara”, Senior Chief Commissioner of Police “Cayo” Nguema, Soldado de Segundo [Private First Class] Mauricio Monsuy, and others – including senior members of government.

It may seem impolite – not to say undiplomatic – to mention such names in public. But if the Government and people of Equatorial Guinea as well as the international community honestly desire to see a positive change in human rights in this country, steps must be taken along the line recommended by the Special Reporter. There are no state secrets when it comes to human rights.

I would note in this context that two persons invited to this event were unable to attend: Don Jose Abuy Bokung of the Party of Progress is in Blackbeach Prison and Don Deogracias Nguema Ntutumu (*), President of the League to Protect Human Rights, is lodged in the cells of the National Security Headquarters. Fortunately, Don Jose is represented by his wife, Doña Anita Maria Maye Bakale, and Don Deogracias by his mother, Doña Felisa Asongono Bikuy. They, as well as others present here today such as Weja Chicampo, Santos De Dios Ono Mba, Margarita Biban Eyene, etc., could give those interested a much better insight into the human rights situation than I possibly can.

[(*) Deogracias Nguema Ntutumu was released thirty minutes prior to the reception and arrived from jail directly to the residence, unbathed and in soiled clothes but to the joy of his mother and friends.]

One phenomenon that entered into the political life of Equatorial Guinea in 1993 and remains a difficult matter today is ethnic politics. I am speaking of the Self-Determination Movement for Bioko Island (“MAIB”). My advice has been sought on this by both President Obiang, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Miguel Oyono Ndong Mifumu, and Secretary of State for National Security Manuel Nguema Mba, and I have suggested to begin by engaging in a dialogue – perhaps with those interlocutors identified in the organization’s November 12, 1993, open letter to the President. In any case, the arrests of several alleged members and supporters since November; the public interrogation on television of Martin Puye Topepe, Weja Chicampo Puye, and Juan Balboa Boneke; and the treatment of village elders from Rebola do not seem to be a wise course of action, and I have expressed that opinion to the Government.

In speaking to many people both on this wonderful island of Bioko and in the rolling hills of Rio Muni, I keenly realize the economic plight of the country. People report that they are not eating as well as they were a year ago, and there is strong evidence from medical professionals that there is a decline in health as well. But I continue to believe that the primary causes of the economic situation are not world prices for Guinean exports or the currency devaluation, but rather unresolved political questions centering on the promised opening towards multi-party democracy made by President Obiang at the August 3-6, 1991,

meeting in Bata of the Government Party [“PDGE” – Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea].

If I may offer the advice of a friend, it is for the Government to fulfill its promises – perhaps beginning with the National Pact [with the opposition] of March 1993 – and enter into real dialogue with all sectors of society in order to reform the laws that prevent democracy – starting perhaps with the electoral law. While political parties will by their very nature have ideological differences, this should not affect the unity that persons of a genuine democratic persuasion can achieve through meaningful dialogue among themselves as well as with government. For those not involved in politics, I would suggest that your contributions would be attempting to see how you can be part of the solution to the political, economic, and social problems, rather than being part of the problem itself through selfish short-term gains.

As for my friends in the diplomatic corps, if we do not ask, if we do not question, if we do not witness, if we do not remember, and if we do not speak out when so-called “quiet diplomacy” goes unanswered, then we shall become part of the conspiracy of silence that only leads to greater tragedy.

Once again, may I express on behalf of my family and myself our deep appreciation to all of you – government, opposition, private sector, church, fellow diplomats, etc. – for being our teachers for these past three years. We shall never forget you.

Long live the Republic of Equatorial Guinea!

Long live the United States of America!