

EQUATORIAL GUINEA: CRITICAL ESSAYS

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La Caida has already published several books penned by Agustin, all of them in Spanish (see La Caida catalogue in www.lacaida.info).

During 2010 we have seen the birth and expansion of the e-reader.

As our books do not reach the English speaking people, we try to reach them through this e-book project.

We hope this effort takes the crucial essays of this book to a wider audience, and above all, we indeed hope it can be useful to foster and empower political attitudes against tyranny, dictatorship and oppression.

*Best regards,
La Caída staff.*

CONTENTS

Equatorial Guinea A Few Rich, Many Poor	7
From Cocoa Fields to Oil in Equatorial Guinea Where Trickle Down is Not Trickling	14
Recent Developments in Equatorial Guinea. So Close to the West, So Far From Democracy	22
Equatorial Guinea: A Local Point Of View On Assessments By International Experts.....	32
Spain and Equatorial Guinea: development cooperation as fraud.....	39
Equatorial Guinea: 40 Years Of independence	50

Fly Airbus A330-300 to Malabo: Why Everyone Is Heading to the Heart of Darkness.....	60
AIDS and the contradictions of Spanish development cooperation in.....	70
Waiting For Godot In Equatorial Guinea... The Rest Of The world Waits Too	76
US President-elect: the latest African saint	88
À l'abordage de la Guinée Equatoriale. À qui le tour?	97
Equatorial Guinea 2009: thirty years with Obiang and twenty with the opposition	106
Equatorial Guinea: The good, the bad and the ugly The UNESCO-Obiang prize	118

EQUATORIAL GUINEA A FEW RICH, MANY POOR

Last Wednesday, in fact pick any day, in the capital of a small country in Central Africa, a student was about to take a Latin exam, three young lawyers were talking in an office, a boy was drinking water from a public fountain and a public servant was answering the visitor's question by telling him that he had no data on what he wanted to know. What do such random actions have in common? For one, none of them was doing what he seemed to be doing; also, the cause of their actions was very far from where they were taking place; and finally, their consequences, just as their own acts and lives, were out of their control. Maybe by chance they also had in common that they took place in a small Central-African country where a lot of oil has recently been discovered.

The civil servant said that he had no data to answer a simply formulated question: is the income obtained from oil extraction reflected in the national public budget? His response, delivered with an expression of fear while he was making sure that nobody around was listening to this conversation, was first that he did not know, and later that the person who would know was not available. This took place in the Public Relations and Information Department Office of this country's PNUD, a UN organization, in a developing country that seems to be floating on a pool of oil similar or maybe larger than that of Kuwait. Since the organization responsible for knowing the answer could not respond, the visitor's only resort was attempting to find out the answer on his own. In a case like this, nothing is better than a stroll around the city.

He knew that there probably existed as much oil as was suggested. This was self-evident, there is data to prove it. The city in question has doubled in size in a few months. It can be divided into two halves of equal extension separated by less than three kilometers. In one half there are 50,000 inhabitants. In the other, barely 500. The difference in population per square meter derives from the fact that in the first half there live the original inhabitants, together with some foreign old-timers, while the people who work

in the oil business, the newly arrived foreigners who come from the most powerful country in the planet, live on the other side. That the latter live in one-family houses separated by large green spaces, protected by various security measures, communicated by paved roads with street lights, and that they have all kinds of services available is striking when one knows that in most of the other half the sewers run free on the streets carrying infectious waters, the roads are not paved but filled with mud, the houses are made largely of plywood and zinc-plank roofs that burn under the scorching sun, that the average house for eight people has two and a half rooms, and that there are no public services such as garbage collection, public transportation or any such thing.

The visitor thought that, should the income from oil be reflected on public accounts, wealth would be visible in other economic areas. The best building in the city is the site of a great bank. Seating near the entrance, the visitor was watching how some foreigners and very few natives entered. Curiously enough, the vast majority of the latter only go in because they have to clean the floors, watch the entrances or are the drivers of the former. On the other hand, the foreigners who go to the city's only hospital do go to work; they are doctors and medical

personnel who cooperate with this country. The patients are only natives, since the foreigners go back to their country when they need medical care. The hospital, unlike the bank, is gravely affected by power outages since, although there is a generator, nobody has bothered to turn it on since the day it was bought with international aid funds.

However, as long as the locals don't become sick, maybe they can have fun, that is, by checking in one of the new hotels proliferating in the city or by riding the luxury cars running on the streets. That, thought the visitor, would be a way to verify that oil dividends are reaching the entire population. With this in mind he stood at the entrance of one of the hotels. Again, the natives who enter do it to clean the rooms, to serve food or to take care of the garden. This is not shocking if you take into account that the price of a single room per night is equal to the average monthly salary of many people there. The incessant traffic of luxurious cars does, however, affect all of the city's inhabitants. Foreigners or their autochthonous drivers drive them, the natives dodge them, children and elders fear them, since they are not used to living surrounded by cars on paved roads with traffic lights, much less with traffic jams, and don't manage this intense road activity very well.

Suddenly the visitor sees a public fountain, a most simple block of cement with an even humbler spout. A boy drinks, another one waits, a girl carries a plastic container and another one a bucket. Here is, finally, a modest but evident contribution derived from the oil business. Well not quite; a more attentive look reveals an inscription by the author whose work palliates the inexistence of running potable water: "Fountain No. 5, Terrasa City Hall, Spain." He continues down the street and finds the same thing a little further "Fountain No. 7, Alcorcón City Hall, Spain." And he continues finding them. Who has convinced these city halls that the government of the country in question does not have the resources to provide even a simple spout out of its own pocket? What do we understand by international cooperation: paying some of the public services bills so that private pockets can place the country's money in safe heavens abroad? Why is it that the most foreign-indebted countries, the ones with higher poverty rates enjoying more international cooperation and financial aid, are governed by dictators and have their upper classes settled, together with their money, in the richest and most developed countries?

The sight of streets covered in mud, the filth of residual water running out in the open, garbage scattered everywhere, the absence of sidewalks barely

lit by scarce street lights, the lack of public transportation, banks, road signs or leisure spaces, not to mention libraries, civic centers, book stores, not a sign of urban or any other planning, makes one think that the 500,000 crude oil barrels that are pumped daily (that is assuming that it is not one million barrels, since there are no official figures) in a country with a population below 500,000, do not remain in the country even for a minute; instead they leave the country to enrich someone else.

That is why the visitor went in search of a different kind of information: what happened to human rights in this place? In the building that hosts the Human Rights Center, he is received by three people, three chairs and a table comprising all the furniture. When asked what they do there, they answer "little so far" since they have no electric outlets or telephone lines and, clearly, without any funding, they can only look at the future hoping for better times.

The visitor does not give credit to this display of good will and ingenuity, so he heads for the site of the Lawyers Guild in order to obtain more information; maybe by chance it is financed by the Madrid Lawyers Guild. What he sees is a piece of empty real estate with a placard explaining just such association. No trace of anything else. >From there,

he walks to the Palace of Justice to find out that it has electricity but no phone that is a phone line, since they do have the appliance and that the most modern piece of equipment available is a mechanical typewriter.

It seems, then, that the moment has arrived for the formulation of the first law of national economy in Africa: the larger the natural wealth of a country, the lower is the probability that its population is going to enjoy it. Angola and old Zaire are only two egregious examples of this law. The second law states that the larger the foreign intervention in an African country, mainly via international cooperation, the lower the probability of a sustained development.

Unfortunately, although protagonists themselves, not even the few university students in this country can perceive this. That is why that student was making huge efforts to pass a subject that is forgotten and relegated to a few specialized centers of higher education in the West, without suspecting that he will never be able to make use of what he has learned, unless it is to exclaim, as the classics did: *Homo homini lupus*.

FROM COCOA FIELDS TO OIL IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA WHERE TRICKLE DOWN IS NOT TRICKLING

Until very recently, the West African country of Equatorial Guinea had always been an exporter of agricultural, timber, and mineral products. In the 1990s oil started flowing from offshore fields, and nowadays oil comprises 90% of the country's exports. As a result there have been enormous increases of the gross national product, 76% in 1997 and 20% in 1998 and 1999. In other words, in a few years this impoverished country rapidly joined the medium income states.

However, behind this seeming economic miracle there is another story of mass corruption, a brutal regime, and the usual exploitative American oil companies. It is not the first time that American

companies make the discovery of rich resources seem like a curse instead of great hope to improve the lives of the majority of the local population.

IN A NUTSHELL

A good description of the situation in Equatorial Guinea is found in the September 2003 issue of *United States Department of Energy Information*:

"despite rapid growth in real GDP, there is strong evidence of government misappropriation of oil revenues, in particular, for lavish personal expenditures. Furthermore, the failure of the government to inject oil revenues into the country's economy, especially to fund much-needed improvements in the country's infrastructure, has meant little improvement in the economic and social welfare of most Equatoguineans. While real per capita GDP has doubled in the last five years, there has been little positive change in social indicators".

Not much else needs to be said to describe accurately the current situation of the country concerning the rapid and extraordinary increase of

the national product, and its unequal sharing between the ruling elite and the rest of the population. One almost does not need to check data from human rights NGOs to verify that the activities of powerful companies like Marathon, ExxonMobil, Triton and Atlantic Methanol are not benefiting most of the inhabitants of this country. However, most people are unaware of what is really happening here.

SOME INCOME DISPARITIES

It is a useful exercise to compare an Equatorial Guinean national working for any of the oil giants with an expatriate executive. The oil executives--usually Americans--work for 28 days in Equatorial Guinea and go away intermittently on leave for a month. Skilled expatriates--most originating from the Philippines -- work for nine weeks and are away on leave for four. In contrast, the Equatoguinean workers are on the job for eleven months.

The income differences offer a starker contrast. The oil executives receive between USD 10,000 and 12,000 p/month plus a week-end bonus of about USD 350. The white-collar workers receive between USD 7,000 and 8,000 plus the bonus of 230. The "Philippinos" receive between USD 1,800 and 2,000 plus a bonus of USD 50. Air tickets home,

accommodation, meals, and medical treatment are also part of the package for these employees.

Type of Worker	Income US\$ Per Month	Weekend Bonus US\$	Months on Job	Fringe Benefits
Oil Exec	10-12,000	350	6	airfare, housing, medical, meals
White collar	7-8,000	230	6	airfare, housing, medical, meals
Expat Labor	1,800-.2000	50	9	airfare, housing, medical, meals
Local hires	300-1,300	0	11	one meal a day

The local workers are only employed in the lower rungs of the oil operation and are paid in local currency. Cleaners earn between USD 300 and 470, security personnel earn between USD 670 and 800, car drivers earn between USD 670 and 900, secretaries and translators earn between USD 1,200 and 1,300. Their lunch meal is free, but they do not receive housing or medical benefits. The local hires have never heard of bonuses, and for them there are no free tickets home.

There also are no important secondary economic activities that have a positive impact on the local economy. The food for the expatriates is imported from Cameroon and Spain, and their houses, warehouses and other buildings are prefabricated, these are made in France and shipped into the country. Foreigners live in enclaves separated from the local population. Whatever infrastructure is built benefits the oil industry employees. The enclave is also a "no go area", and an elaborate security system blocks off the enclave from the locals. The well-to-do expatriates spending in Malabo or elsewhere in the country is essentially nonexistent. They live in the enclave and seldom venture beyond.

Finally, the number of nationals employed by the oil companies is minuscule and making very little substantial contribution to the national economy. Atlantic Methanol employs around 140 nationals, ExxonMobil 200, Triton 180, Marathon 250. Even if all nationals working for subsidiary companies are added to these figures, the total varies between 1,100 and 1,500 workers. In comparison, the oil companies employ around 6,000 expatriate workers.

Certainly the local people are better off working in the oil industry as compared to the traditional industries, but the point is that for the size

of the operations and the amount of oil pumped, the economic impact on the country is negligible.

TRICKLE UP

Native workers are probably not very fond of their leaders, but they are forced to support the president and his coterie. First, it pays to be on friendly terms with them because anyone wanting to work in the oil industry will have to apply to job agencies owned by Mr. Armengol and Mr. Mba Nguema, brothers of Mr Teodoro Obiang Nguema, president of Equatorial Guinea. They vet the workers and use this patronage system to retain political power. Furthermore, three dollars per month are withheld from their wages to finance the *Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial* (PDGE), the party that has been permanently in power in Equatorial Guinea and the only one receiving "popular support". Furthermore, the government retains 20% of the salary as an income tax, 0.4% for social security, plus USD 3.50 p/month for unemployment insurance. The local workers don't even dream that such deductions entitle them to some benefits or rights. Similarly, the existence of the PDGE does not mean the country enjoys any democracy.

The government also requires the companies operating in the country to transfer to the Treasury 21% out of the local workers monthly salary. It also receives 10% of the declared value of the oil exported. With these funds the government is supposed to provide the local workers with the necessary equipment: helmets, special clothes, shoes and so on, since the oil companies only provide equipment for the expatriate employees. In fact, all funds go to a private bank account in the US controlled by Mr Obiang Nguema. As the investigative ngo Global Witness reports, "billions of dollars of oil money have gone missing in countries like Equatorial Guinea. Much of the money appears to have subsequently turned up in offshore bank accounts controlled by state officials or their families".

GLOBALIZATION: OILING THE ELITES AND RUINING THE MASSES

It is President Obiang Nguema and a close circle of relatives who are becoming incredibly rich thanks to the oil industry. The oil companies don't deal with the state, but with its president. The oil business is the president's private business--all made possible thanks to the oil companies who are willing to deal with him. The president is not accountable to anyone, and no

one dares to question the arrangement due to the threat of imprisonment, torture or the exile.

The oil companies are pleased because the amount of oil extracted and the amount of funds transferred to Mr Obiang remain secret. It also seems that despite the companies' codes of "business ethics" they are not accountable to anybody either. Both the corrupt politicians and the oil companies benefit from this partnership. Never mind that impoverished people of the country are ignored. The country is left without proper roads, no clean drinking water, no proper public health care system, the educational system is in ruins, and many people must "make ends meet."

It is American foreign policy that makes this possible, and American foreign companies don't seem to care if the newfound wealth is wasted and supports a grotesque corrupt regime that one would only think of finding in a Graham Greene novel.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA SO CLOSE TO THE WEST, SO FAR FROM DEMOCRACY

United States sponsored secret flights and clandestine detention centres in Europe and elsewhere have received plenty of comment recently. Politicians and journalists tell us the "war on terror" demands extreme measures. At the same time, in countries which have nothing to do with that "war", detainees are held incommunicado, without effective judicial protection and routinely tortured in carefully ignored prisons. Reports about conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan are widespread, but almost little appears about what is going on in Equatorial Guinea, a country friendly to the West. One of Equatorial Guinea's prisons, surrounded by a tropical sea, has the same name as a relaxing California beach: Black Beach. In spite of this, it is not a sunny spot in a lost

paradise. It is an ugly compound in Bioko Island, near Malabo, Equatorial Guinea's capital.

This tiny country of 28.000 square kilometres and 500.000 inhabitants is located on West Africa's Gulf of Guinea between Cameroon and Gabon. Until independence in 1968, it had been a Spanish colony for almost 200 years. Since the landmark "scramble for Africa" Berlin Conference in 1884, it has been known mainly for its cocoa production, endless penury, dictatorships and the natural beauty of its jungles and beaches.

Until recently nothing much seemed to change, except now for the beauty and the cocoa, both for the worse. The country's beauty is being mercilessly spoiled by pollution from the offshore oil industry and intensive timber exploitation. The oil industry is controlled by head of State, Teodoro Obiang Nguema, who seized power from his uncle, through a coup in 1979. Timber production is controlled by the Minister of Forestry, Obiang's eldest son. Cocoa production, formerly run by colonial entrepreneurs, has nose-dived since independence when international pressure ended Spanish rule.

Following independence, dictatorship and neo-colonialism (globalization in modern parlance) have grown and are now even stronger than before. The

prison at Black Beach is an glaring example of their perverse synergy, compounded by the effects of extreme poverty on the general population. Dictatorship and neo-colonialism work hand in hand, greased by oil. Wealth from the oil industry over the last ten years has not trickled down to the population, its legitimate owner. Instead, it is channelled overseas to benefit Obiang and his entourage and the foreign corporations that back them. Equatorial Guinea is the paradigm of the "curse of natural riches".

Governments in Western capitals know this very well. International agencies and human rights organisations routinely criticise General Obiang's rule. However, those Western governments increasingly support him, steadily developing economic, political and military ties with his regime. When it suits them, the United States and Spanish governments, two of Obiang's major trading partners and close supporters, declare a willingness to cooperate with Equatorial Guinea's government in what they call its "democratization process".

This and similar statements appear in the media to mark political summits and official visits. The Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister told the Spanish Parliament after a visit to Equatorial Guinea in 2005, "the President asked Spain to accompany him in his endeavours to modernise the State and reform the

administration". In response, the Minister said the Spanish government was fully devoted to this task, although remaining "extremely critical and mindful concerning the rule of law and encouragement of those citizens willing to contribute to Equatorial Guinea's democracy and political life". ¹

Some of this "democratization process, was reported in a press conference in June 2006 by Weja Chicampo, leader of the banned MAIB (Movement for the Self-determination of Bioko Island). Chicampo arrived in Madrid after being expelled from his own country by Obiang. During the two years, three months and two days he spent in Black Beach, without proper charges, trial or legal assistance, he says, "they (the jailers) beat me until I lost my vision; then, after some more beating, I lost consciousness. My family and children were terrified. From that moment on a long agony starts and it will last for days, weeks... In order to give you an idea I can say that I was handcuffed for four months in a row. There were many other instances of torture like this." ²

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http://www.who.int/countries/cog/publications/missive_27.pdf

² <http://www.asodegue.org/junio2306.htm>

The number of political prisoners in Equatorial Guinea has averaged 200 in the last six years. A proportionate comparison would mean a figure of 20.000 in Spain. It must be noted that some detention centres escape any kind of control. Prisoners have no contact with the outside world. They remain at the mercy of their jailers and the jailers' boss: General Obiang. Chicampo reports that "there are transfers from Black Beach to other detention centres, in order to obstruct access of Red Cross teams to the prisoners while visiting facilities. I was transferred to a military prison (Acacio Mañé Military Unit) on April the 5th, 2004. Other prisoners that should not be seen were transferred to Punta Fernanda and other places".

The Spanish government has plenty of information about this reality and about the torture. But this does not prevent it from cooperating with the dictatorship in Equatorial Guinea even as, together with other European Union governments, it demands the closure of the US government's Guantánamo prison in Cuba.

The United States government too has the same information. Its Department of State has even made it partially public in its annual reports. The one

released in March 2006 notes of Equatorial Guinea:³ "The government's human rights' record remained poor, and the government continued to commit or condone serious abuses... security forces reportedly killed several persons through abuse and excessive force... The following human rights problems were reported: arbitrary arrest, detention, and incommunicado detention... There were reports of politically motivated kidnappings, there were continuing reports of government figures hiring persons in foreign countries to intimidate, threaten, and even assassinate citizens in exile." What can "abuse and excessive force" be except mealy-mouthed diplomatic jargon for torture?

Despite this, inter-governmental relations are excellent, according to the US ambassador in Malabo. In his 2005 Independence Day remarks at the US embassy, in front of Obiang and some members of Obiang's regime, he said: "We value our relations with Equatorial Guinea and are pleased that they are excellent and indeed, growing closer. I personally had the pleasure of accompanying his Excellency President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo on his June visit to Baltimore and Washington. In both cities, the President was well-received. Among both business

³ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61567.htm>

and government leaders, he made an excellent impression and called effective attention to further opportunities to strengthen our relationship."

Beyond the specious political discourse, attention should really focus on the United States' role in Equatorial Guinea: the enormous growth of its oil industry and the consolidation of dictatorship in the face of mounting internal opposition and foreign criticism. United States oil companies operating in Equatorial Guinea have made it the third largest African oil producer South of the Sahara in just ten years of industrial activity. The US embassy, formerly closed because of political differences with the Obiang regime, as was hinted at in the State Department report quoted above, was reopened once the oil companies established themselves, even though the dictatorship did not change its policies.

A review of the hard facts corrects the ambassador's rosy picture. ExxonMobil, Chevron-Texaco, Amerada Hess, Marathon Oil and other companies transfer vast profits to the United States from exploiting Equatorial Guinea's oil. For exploitation rights these companies pay huge sums of money directly to Obiang and his family into United States bank accounts. It is crystal clear that these sums should benefit all the people of Equatorial

Guinea, not just the ruling family. But that is not happening.

The European Union has reported⁴: "Equatorial Guinea's GDP growth was the world's highest between 1995 and 2001 and well above average growth in the region ...although it had one of the lowest only ten years ago. However, this increase in resources has not yet been matched in the social sphere by a similar improvement in the living conditions of the population, which still show worrying indicators."

Equally illustrative of the level of corruption among the country's elite are the findings of the United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in their "Money Laundering and Foreign Corruption" report, made public on July 15th, 2004. Among other issues, the report deals with Obiang's - and his family's - accounts in Riggs Bank⁵: "The Subcommittee investigation found that Riggs opened multiple personal accounts for the President of Equatorial Guinea, his wife, and other relatives." The total amount of bank deposits held by Obiang in

4

http://ec.europa.eu/comm/development/body/csp_rsp/print/gq_csp_pt.pdf

⁵ <http://www.senate.gov/~govt-aff/files/ACF5F8.pdf>

the United States and other countries is unknown, but it is believed that to exceed seven hundred million US dollars, in addition to the value of luxurious villas and other real estate investments.

In the meantime, Equatorial Guinea's Human Development Index is near the bottom of the medium human development group: position 121 out of 177 countries in the UNDP 2005 Human Development Report. The country has experienced some minimal improvement: in 1999, it was in position 131 out of 174 with GDP per capita (PPP\$) 1.817 in 1999, while in 2005 it was 19.780. The fact that not a single country in this medium human development group has a similar current GDP per capita indicates the grotesque injustice of wealth distribution in Equatorial Guinea.

Self-evidently, the triangle in Equatorial Guinea formed by Obiang's dictatorship, the country's oil wealth and Western economic interests results in prisons like Black Beach and another one in Bata (second most important city in the country). In other words: the Obiang clan's machinations thoroughly greased by United States oil companies, have turned them into plutocrats amidst an impoverished, oppressed population, who barely enjoy even the most meagre crumbs while the dictator's family and the oil companies feast.

General Obiang is a dictator. Backed by Western governments, he denies fundamental human rights to his compatriots. The United States government and its allies hypocritically tolerate Obiang's dictatorship so long as their international companies enjoy rights to exploit Equatorial Guinea's oil wealth. While an exclusive minority obtain huge benefits, the majority only enjoy a notional "democratization process", which in practice means occasional fraudulent elections, Presidential birthday "pardons" for prisoners, and empty political speeches on Independence Day, all under the complacent gaze of Western ambassadors.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA: A LOCAL POINT OF VIEW ON ASSESSMENTS BY INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS

Equatorial Guinea, a tiny country of 28.000 square kilometres located in Western Africa, has a GDP of \$25.69 billion (2005 est.) and a GDP growth rate (2004 est. average) of 25.7 per cent ⁶. With a population of 540.109 (July 2005 est. - same source), its flourishing economy is based on its main natural resources: petroleum and timber.

Because of this, the country has recently become a target of international attention, including the main world institutions -World Bank (WB) and several United Nations subsidiary bodies-, some international organisations -Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),

⁶ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/7221.htm>

European Union (EU)-, individual state agencies –the United States Department of State- and some big corporations and non governmental organisations (ngos). In recent reports made public by these observers, the country enjoys “a spectacular abundance of oil revenues” (OECD) and consequently “the world’s highest GDP growth between 1995 and 2001” (EU).

According to information provided by governmental sources, “in 1995, Equatorial Guinea was found to have massive reserves of petroleum. Shortly thereafter, significant reserves of natural gas were also discovered. These findings have generated substantial revenue for Equatorial Guinea, revenue which is being invested in increased transparency in its financial practices, and diversifying its economy, modernizing its infrastructure, strengthening its public health system, and promoting education to build a strong foundation for the future of the country.”⁷

Impressive as this data appears, the information provided by foreign agencies and country officials should be compared to information provided by locals. Then a clearer picture of the country can be seen.

⁷ <http://guinea-equatorial.com/about.asp>

On February 27, 2007, the website <http://actualidad.terra.es> posted a piece of news sent by (news agency) EFE under the title: "Seminar on poverty and conflict resolution opens in EG." The information says: "State radio made public today the government's plan, together with oil companies operating in EG, to organise a seminar to discuss measures to fight poverty and issues related to transparency and technology transfer."

But not all actions conducted by the government of EG are so public. Many things the government and its ministers get up to receive much less publicity.

For instance, on that very day in the mainland town of Acurenam, a group of children were bathing on the river bank as they always have. The Deputy Minister of Agriculture who accompanies President Teodoro Obiang on his pre-electoral tours around the district, took some time off to swim. He ordered some children to wash his car while he went swimming. Afterwards, he noticed his watch and some clothes were missing. The children did not notice anything was missing, since they do not have watches and bathe with only their shorts on, that is all they have.

The Deputy Minister conducted himself in private that day the same way he conducts himself in

his governmental affairs; he threatened to break all the children's legs if the watch was not returned. When it wasn't, he took them all in their wet clothes to the police station where some children were tortured, reports the Comisión Ejecutiva Nacional de Convergencia Para la Democracia Social (CPDS) - press release, February, 26, 2007.⁸

Sixteen children were detained. Most of the children were fifteen years old, others were seventeen, eight, and the youngest was five. A similar number managed to escape. This means that thirty children were able to share in the spoils of the robbery – as a best case scenario: assuming they actually did take the watch.

Then, they could still count on a good sixty US dollars by selling the watch on the black market. This would work out to two dollars per child. Ironically, two dollars a day is the exact amount which most people who don't happen to be governmental ministers live on in Africa –as estimated by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) scholarly reports.

In spite of this, these children with two US dollars each have more than enough to wander

⁸ <http://www.asodegue.org/febrero27071.htm>

through mud covered streets, to jump over open-air sewage pipes and to play count the few traffic lights and signs. Those are the only games they can play in a land without libraries, book stores and civic centres, or any real public services.

General conditions in EG have been disastrous for its most vulnerable and young population; 44.2 per cent of the population is aged under fifteen. According to the UNDP Human Development Report, 56 per cent do not have access to clean water and 47 per cent have no proper sanitation infrastructure. In addition, 19 per cent of children under five are not an acceptable weight for their age (1995-2003), and 65 per cent of births are not attended by qualified personnel (1995-2003). The country has 25 physicians per 100.000 inhabitants (1990-2004) to deal with these health problems and many others like malaria, other tropical illnesses, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

A day out with the deputy minister is not that expensive for the children of Acurenam, especially if you take into account the free transport to the police station, threats, beatings and torture. All these services are covered by the Minister and President Obiang, a very generous leader as we can see. None of this is news to the US Ambassador either.

On March 8, 2006, the US Department of State Report on Human Rights Practices in EG states that “Members of the security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused suspects, prisoners, and opposition politicians.” Further, “security forces continued to arrest and detain persons arbitrarily and with impunity. Security forces often detained individuals “on orders from superiors” without any further legal process.”⁹

In other words, the State Department quite accurately predicts the Deputy Minister’s behaviour a year beforehand. This is not a great mental feat since anyone who has seen or, worse, suffered “conflict resolution” under Obiang, can similarly predict such things. This is something all embassies accredited to Malabo know only too well. The Department of State tells of other similar abuses of power:

“Policemen violently attacked the young people and those accompanying them, hitting them with the butts of their handguns, causing substantial injury to several of them, and leaving some girls in the group undressed in public. At least 10 were detained on police premises. They were released one week later.”

⁹ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61567.htm>

According to some foreign sources, let alone government's sources, it seems that Equatorial Guinea is moving in the last years, in particular during the oil boom years, slowly but soundly, to higher standards of social and political development. Without doubt, credit has to be given to meetings held by EG ministers and UN high officials, business done by oil companies and cooperation programmes carried out by Western governments. Obiang is also a strong contributor to the wellbeing of his countrymen, mainly through his trips to the United States, France and Spain, where he always finds support for his policies.

But above all, most of the credit rests with foreign journalists. Their almost constant press coverage, and never ending courage to stand up to the oil companies have helped make Equatorial Guinea the household name around the world it has obviously become.

It is a shame that the children of Acurenam are so ungrateful and spend their time stealing from defenceless Deputy Ministers. Let's just hope that police station visits and their broken legs help them appreciate all that is done by Obiang, his government, and the international press in their name. Then, maybe in years to come they will be able to live on \$2.10 a day.

SPAIN AND EQUATORIAL GUINEA: DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AS FRAUD

Development cooperation between Spain and Equatorial Guinea is an exercise in political rhetoric, fine for soothing the consciences of sensitive citizens and useful to dissemble the policies of both countries' governments. The citizenry think they are "helping" the poor while politicians cover up the way cooperation is useless for the African country's development but good for increasing the scandalous wealth of the Obiang clan and to contribute to Spanish political and business expansion.

Some people think international development cooperation and official development aid are matters relating to current foreign policy. The truth is that some policy elements are new and others are not. In the pre-democratic years, the governing class argued

that Spain had been generous during its colonial era and that the proof of this was the spread of Catholicism and civilization as well as miscegenation. However, that generosity was not enough to produce doctors and engineers or to leave a political and social infrastructure in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea. So when independence came, frustrated in the Saharawi case, development cooperation was obligatory for Equatorial Guinea.

The same thing happened with the other colonial centres, England, France, Portugal. They left nations independent politically but not culturally and politically. Colonialism turned into neo-colonialism. The powerful could no longer directly exploit the weak as before, but they worked out new systems: conditioned loans, unfavourable trade deals (like the Lomé Convention of 1975), exorbitant charges for services, the fiscal policies of the IMF, World Bank projects and so on.

From independence in 1968 until approximately 1995 (when the oil exploration years began), Spain worked on development with Equatorial Guinea in the fields of politics, economics, the armed forces, education etc. Ironically, one of the first agreements signed in 1979 was the Protocol on Cooperation on Hydrocarbon Matters.

It is surely surprising that cooperation between the tenth world power and its former colony of just 28,000 square kilometres, 400,000 inhabitants and abundant natural resources has not managed to pull the colony from among the lowest places in the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index in its first 30 years of independence. It is more surprising still when one considers the development cooperation from the United States, France, China and other countries, without counting the international bodies and agencies: the United Nations, The World Health Programme, UNESCO, UNICEF and the European Economic Community.

Starting in the last years of the previous century and especially in the first years of the 21st Century, Equatorial Guinea experienced unparalleled rapid growth. The reason for this was its gas and oil: 81,000 barrels a day in 1998, 300,000 a day in 2004 and 420,000 barrels a day in 2005.

This has led the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to grow 18% in 2000, 66% in 2001, 20% in 2002, 10% in 2003 and 25% in 2004. Per capita income has gone from some US\$600 in 1998 to US\$2000 in 2000 and

to US\$5300 in 2005. (Bureau of African Affairs, 2007¹⁰).

The oil sector makes up 97% of the country's exports and 92% of its GDP, but in addition there are timber, cacao, minerals, fisheries, agricultural produce and tourist potential. Once again it is surprising, surely, that a country able to produce a barrel of oil per person per day, one that counts with other resources and is a trade partner of the richest countries in the world, the most noteworthy being Canada, the United Kingdom and Norway, counts too with aid links to school students in the United States, and in Spain (the municipality of Alcorcón (in Madrid) and church schools in Monforte (in Galicia)). All these links indicate what is commonly understood as development cooperation by rich-country citizens concerned for people in poor countries.

Karen Miller, former secretary of the Hatcher primary school (Kentucky, USA) moved to the capital of Equatorial Guinea, Malabo, and e-mailed her friend Jenny Jonhson about school needs in the country. The world's fifth largest oil company, Marathon Oil, which operates in Equatorial Guinea, published Jenny's response:

¹⁰ www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/7221.htm

"I felt the need to help. I knew this was something God wanted me to do. I put up posters in the school. The only problem was making sure the books donated by teachers and pupils arrived. I want to thank all those who have helped with this project. First of all to God, our Father for making this happen, to the school community and especially Marathon for starting this aid project for the students of the island of Bioko." The estimated cost to the company was some 35,000 Euros.¹¹

Last April 13th, the municipality of Alcorcón signed a permanent cooperation agreement with the Organization of Ibero-American States. The fact that Equatorial Guinea is not exactly located in the ibero-american area does not stop the municipality saying "we are very proud as a city to join this project of a meeting between cultures. Material cooperation with Equatorial Guinea, initially of 60,000 Euros will enable the start up of a reading project on the one hand, with school libraries and on the other hand, teacher training in Spanish and local languages and in mathematics.¹²

In the first week of June, the church schools of Monforte organized a solidarity fair to raise funds for

¹¹ www.marathon.com

¹² www.oei.es/noticias/

their colleagues in Equatorial Guinea. According to a local daily paper "the piñata, the jumble sale, dinner and dance and donations raised 7,794 Euros." Unlike the reports above, no mention is made of the uses made of the money.¹³

Perhaps the teacher, the mayor and the religious teaching staff are unaware that the government of Equatorial Guinea with a budget of US\$2 billion in 2005 could well afford to pay for some text books and school libraries.

Preoccupied with prayers, meetings and brunches, maybe they have not had the chance to get to know the reality of the country but instead have collected over 100,000 Euros. Even if that sum reaches Equatorial Guinea, which may be unlikely, that money does not even come close to the 380,000 Euros paid for a Lamborghini sports car acquired in 2005 by Teodoro Nguema (son of President Obiang and Minister of Agriculture and Forestry) according to a report in the South African Cape Times of July 20th.

It can be argued that a similar effort by 16 other solidarity groups could match the money that Nguema might have used to benefit his people. This

¹³ www.lavozdegalicia.es/

last alternative seems more likely to benefit the development of Equatorial Guinea except one might prefer that people not live dependent on the charity of others. 27 solidarity groups with similar fundraising ability would be needed to match Nguema's penchant for luxury cars, since the same article reports he also spent 800,000 Euros that year buying a Bentley Arnage and a Bentley Mulliner.

Even so, it is hard for the good will of development workers, donors, sponsors and volunteers to keep up with the pace of spending: the US Forbes magazine, specializing in listing the world's wealthiest people, reported that on June 5th 2006 Nguema also rented the yacht of Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, fifth wealthiest man in the world, for 600,000 Euros.

TeodorĂn, as he is known, has a mansion and a recording studio in the United States and various properties and interests in other countries. the Global Witness organization, dedicated to uncovering corruption in countries rich in raw materials, reports that the mansion is worth US\$35 million. ¹⁴

Although ordinary citizens are unaware of these facts, the government knows very well, but still

¹⁴ <http://www.globalwitness.org>

maintains cooperation links. With regard to State development aid there is abundant information from various official sources (and quasi-official, like political parties, institutes and foundations) and all are great at being aware of next to nothing and confusing almost anyone.

The State Secretariat for International Cooperation¹⁵ declares: "the government.... bears collective responsibility for respecting and defending peace and human dignity and equality at the world level. Poverty reduction is an ethical duty for the world's most prosperous citizens and a political obligation for all the governments on the planet."

Lovely aims that perhaps don't marry up too well with military spending of 17 billion Euros in 2007, 15th highest in the world¹⁶, while expenditure on development aid is 3 billion¹⁷. From that last amount one has to subtract those loans that create more debt, debt forgiveness and so on¹⁸ while that first figure for defence can be left out of the equation altogether until someone proves the link between arms spending and development.

¹⁵ www.aeci.es

¹⁶ <http://www.antimilitaristas.org>

¹⁷ www.realinstitutoelcano.org

¹⁸ <http://www.intermonoxfam.org/page.asp?id=2673>

Spanish development aid to Equatorial Guinea devoted nearly 4.5 million Euros to healthcare in 2004-2005, spread over various projects: control of endemic diseases, water purification, community health and health workers¹⁹. With that sum President Obiang would have struggled to purchase his two mansions in Maryland in the United States.

But it is not a matter, you might say, of tracking down every last cent, these African countries are known for their idiosyncrasies and no one is perfect. Well, in that case, take the example of quality healthcare, Spain's for example, a country placed 21st in the Human Development Index, while Equatorial Guinea is placed 121st.²⁰ Per capita spending on healthcare is US\$1640 and US\$139 respectively

Development cooperation galactic style, to use a fashionable term, would ensure that people in Equatorial Guinea enjoyed the same level of health care as people in Spain. Multiplying 450,000 people by US\$1640 works out at a little more than US\$700 million. Coincidentally the same amount Obiang transferred to personal accounts in the unexpectedly extinct RIGgs Bank, based, by the way, in the United

¹⁹ www.mae.es/Embajadas/Malabo/es

²⁰ www.planalfa.es/fers

States and, as luck would have it, the main investor in Equatorial Guinea.²¹

One can look at it yet another way. Obiang spends about US\$70 million a year on "security", a figure to be treated with caution since the actual sum is unknown even to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute²². But it can be inferred from purchases of war equipment. Spain, the United States and Israel have all sold Obiang military materiel and trained his troops and police. In ten years of oil exploration one might well have thought Obiang could have increased his people's life expectancy with such a sum, but it remains about half that of Spain: 43.5 and 79.5 years respectively.

Or again, development cooperation is very much more than money. According to Spain's International Cooperation for Development Law (23/1998, July 7th.) "development processes will be promoted with respect to the defence and protection of human rights, basic liberties and economic and social welfare needs...."

²¹ www.forbes.com

²² www.sipri.se

Those processes do not exist ²³ , as Spain knows very well, although the Minister for Foreign Affairs omits to mention it and prefers to talk about other things, while parliamentarians who visited the country in 2007 "found improvements and returned optimistic". ²⁴

Political declarations, projects, reports and aid workers abound, but that is not development cooperation. To talk as if there were development cooperation is an insult to the people of Equatorial Guinea, in fact one should talk about a development cooperation fraud.

Translation copyleft Tortilla con Sal

²³ www.amnistiainternacional.org/ and

www.state.gov/g/drl/hr

²⁴ www.asodegue.org/junio1607.htm

EQUATORIAL GUINEA: 40 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

1. ONE DECADE OF ENORMOUS ECONOMIC GROWTH.

Equatorial Guinea, a very small country (28.000 sq km and population around 550.000) situated in the Gulf of Guinea, in Western Africa, has remained almost unnoticed for the rest of the world until the last years of the last century and the beginning of the 21st.

In recent reports made public by international observers, the country is mainly associated to “the spectacular abundance of oil revenues” and consequently with the “the world’s highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth between 1995 and 2001”. The comparison of the economic data either with the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa nowadays, or with Equatorial Guinea before the oil era, is revealing. Concerning GDP, the average annual growth between

1984 and 1994 was 3.0, while between 1994 and 2004 it reached 21.6. Besides, concerning GDP per capita, the average annual growth between 1984 and 1994 was 0.5, while between 1994 and 2004 was 18.4. At the same time, GDP was 10.0 and GDP per capita 7.4 in 2004 for Sub-Saharan Africa. The average annual growth in the industry (1994-2004) was 43.1 for Equatorial Guinea, while it was 25.5 for in 2003 for Sub-Saharan Africa.²⁵

2. MISMATCH BETWEEN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

Has economic development been translated into human development? The OECD is rather sparing in its assessment: "Oil revenues are considerable and have deeply transformed the economic structure of

²⁵ OECD/AfDB (2002) African Economic Outlook. Equatorial Guinea, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/35/1/1824667.pdf>, accessed 14/5/2007; Cooperación Guinea Ecuatorial – Comunidad Europea (2002) Estrategia de la Cooperación y Programa Indicativo 2002-2007, Malabo, http://europa.eu.int/comm/development/body/csp_rsp/print/gq_csp-pt.pdf, accessed 14/5/2007.

the country; however they have not yet greatly benefited the whole of its small population.”

The European Union states: “this increase in resources has not yet been matched in the social sphere by a similar improvement in the living conditions of the population, which still show worrying indicators. Equatorial Guinea is currently in position 110 (out of 162) in the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)”.

The United States Department of State is sententious in its description: “The majority of the population lives by subsistence agriculture, supplemented by hunting and fishing. (...) There is little evidence that the country’s oil wealth is being devoted to the public good.”.²⁶

3. MANAGEMENT OF OIL WEALTH: ECONOMIC SUCCESS AND SOCIAL FAILURE.

²⁶ (2) United States Department of State (2003) Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, USDS, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18181pf.htm>, accessed 14/5/2007.

While sources coincide in their description of Equatorial Guinea's economic success, together with the lack of a similar social progress, they differ in their judgement of the reasons behind the mismatch.

The OECD stresses the “inadequacy of the institutional environment of Equatorial Guinea. (...) Basic infrastructure is one of the major bottlenecks for the development of Equatorial Guinea. (...) Other serious concerns arise from the weak separation of power between judiciary, executive and legislative.”

For the European Union, the lack of social progress “is mainly due to a paralysed and very inefficient administration, which curbs the country's development.” It further stresses lack of awareness about the ‘public service’ idea, power centralization and lack of knowledge of procedures and laws as negative factors.

The United States Department of State has another explanation: “Corruption and a dysfunctional judicial system disrupt the development of Equatorial Guinea's economy and society. (...) The government budget still does not include all revenues and expenditures. (...) Application of the laws remains selective. Corruption among officials is widespread,

and many business deals are concluded under nontransparent circumstances”.²⁷

Poor infrastructure, lack of inefficiency, or simply corruption? In 2004 the United States Senate released a report on money laundering focusing in Equatorial Guinea. The senators consider the president and his family responsible in several cases of grave wrongdoing: “Riggs Bank managed more than 60 accounts and certificates of deposit for Equatorial Guinea, its officials, and their family members, with little or no attention to the bank’s anti-money laundering obligations”. Oil is at the core of this: “Oil companies operating in Equatorial Guinea may have contributed to corrupt practices in that country by making substantial payments to, or entering into formal business ventures with, individual E.G. officials, their family members, or entities they control, with minimal public disclosure of their actions”.²⁸

²⁷ United States Department of State (2005) Background Note: Equatorial Guinea, USDS, Bureau of African Affairs, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/7221.htm>, accessed 14/5/2007.

²⁸ United States Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (2004) Money Laundering and Foreign corruption: Enforcement and Effectiveness of the Patriot

4. POLITICS AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA

Equatorial Guinea's recent history shows the country had three solid foundations on which the government could have based the country's development. During the twenty nine years of continuous Obiang's presidency, Equatorial Guinea has signed or ratified all major international instruments in every sphere of the political realm and has become a party to almost any major international convention. Besides, during this period, major powers, plus the former colonial power, Spain, have been trading with Equatorial Guinea and cooperating in its development. Moreover, the oil boom of the last ten years has provided the funds to finance development projects.

However, Teodoro Obiang, who became the country's president through a coup against his uncle Macías in 1979, has sought above all to perpetuate himself in power and reap all benefits. This has been possible through a mix of a) marred elections; b) political repression; c) control of the state powers: judicial, legislative and governmental; d) control of

Act. Case Study Involving Riggs Bank,
<http://hsgac.senate.gov/files/ACF5F8.pdf>, accessed
14/5/2007.

the country's resources; and e) international political and economic support.

a) Municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections are held and political parties other than the -ever winning- president's Partido Democrático de Guinea Ecuatorial (PDGE) are allowed to participate in the elections. However, as it happens with any other political activity and the exercise of the political, social, economic and cultural rights, what exists in theory does not exist in reality. "In early January 1996 Obiang called for presidential elections. International observers agreed that the campaign was marred by fraud. (...) In April 2004, parliamentary and municipal elections took place. President Obiang's party and allied parties won 98 of 100 seats in parliament and all but seven of 244 municipal posts. International observers criticized both the election and its results".²⁹

b) The regime's human rights record is very poor. This has been documented in several reports by the United Nations Human Rights Commission Special Representative, who has described torture as a "normal means of investigation". The representative has also pointed at beatings and abuse of suspects,

²⁹ (5) United States Department of State (2005).

prisoners and opposition politicians as well as lack of food and medical care for detainees.

c) The current constitution -in force since 1982- gives the president extensive powers, amongst them: naming and dismissing members of the cabinet, making laws by decree, and dissolving the Chamber of Representatives. He also appoints the governors of the seven provinces. At the top of the judicial system is the president himself and his judicial advisers. Besides he retains his role as commander in chief of the armed forces. Most of the highest government positions are occupied by the president's close relatives (brothers, sons, half-brothers and uncles), by members of his clan (Esangui) and by people chosen from his hometown (Mongomo). On the other hand, the law does not provide for access to government information.

d) Control by Equatorial Guinea's elite of the state resources has already been shown above. Suffice it to underline that besides the most important industries, oil and timber, almost any other economic sector -except for subsistence activities- is also under its control.

e) There are a number of individual countries and international state bodies cooperating with Equatorial Guinea. On the one hand, cooperation

laws and principles require that assistance must contribute to the improvement of the social and economic situation of the population. Moreover, aid has to be linked to the implementation of democratic policies by the recipient government. On the other, in practice, cooperation is carried out with disregard to political conditions. While some non government organisations (NGOs) have terminated projects in Equatorial Guinea because of those, individual countries and international agencies maintain aid programmes and political links.

CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING POOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN A RICH COUNTRY.

Equatorial Guinea's recent history shows that its sudden and easily acquired wealth has proved unable to make the country go noticeably up the scale of human development. On the other hand, the country's economic and political integration in the international community has not helped either.

According to the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) rank, Equatorial Guinea is close to the bottom of the medium human development group and it is placed in position 121 of 177 countries. The country has experienced some improvement in the

last years, during the oil period: In 1999 it was placed in position 131 of 174, closer to the bottom of the same group. However, GDP per capita (PPP\$) was 1.817 in 1999, while it is 19.780 in 2005. There is not a single country in this group with a similar GDP per capita. The closest is Oman with 13.584, placed in position 71, near to the top of the same group. On the other hand, life expectancy at birth is 74.1 in Oman and 43.3 in Equatorial Guinea.

In other words: almost forty years after the country achieved independence (October 12, 1968) and more than ten years after the start of the oil industry, Equatorial Guinea's position in the HDI is quite far from what is expected for a country with the world's highest GDP growth in 1995-2001.

This challenges explanations about lack of progress that point to administration inefficiency, poor infrastructure and, of course, cultural and natural reasons. Equatorial Guinea's example shows that misappropriation and mismanagement of wealth by the elite is the main cause behind the lack of human development. At the same time, this casts serious doubts about aid policies by Western powers towards Third World countries.

FLY AIRBUS A330-300 TO MALABO: WHY EVERYONE IS HEADING TO THE HEART OF DARKNESS

Starting April 1st, 2008, Lufthansa offers 295 seats, three times a week, in a superb Airbus for anyone wanting to travel from Frankfurt to Malabo, Equatorial Guinea's capital city. It now seems incredible that in the 90's only Iberia flew to Malabo, from Madrid on Sunday morning, and back the same evening with a group of civil servants, a bunch of nuns and priests plus some Equatorial Guinea nationals.

This new connection between Equatorial Guinea and the rest of the world beyond its closest African neighbors, joins those of Air France, Swiss International Air Lines, Royal Air Maroc, KLM, Spainair, Sonair, Jet Air and some others. Even

flights from unspecified airports in Europe with airlines which are not IATA members — although they advertise as such — can be found on the Internet.

The airlines tell the public this intense activity is due to growing business opportunities and changes taking place in the African country: “Blessed by a growing economy in recent years, the country maintains numerous international trade relations, principally in the energy sector.”³⁰

THREE MEN AND A HELICOPTER

However, seasoned travellers do not agree on this point. Simon Mann, a British mercenary once told the UK’s television Channel 4 that “things were very bad” in Equatorial Guinea and that “regime change was badly needed”. He added that “the regime was stumbling, the State was sinking”.³¹

Mann is the model of the English gentleman. He studied in Eton, the world’s most elitist school,

³⁰ [http://www.lufthansa.com/online/portal/lh/uk/info and services/local box?l=en&nodeid=2088346&cid=1000243](http://www.lufthansa.com/online/portal/lh/uk/info_and_services/local_box?l=en&nodeid=2088346&cid=1000243)

³¹ <http://www.asodegue.org/marzo1208.htm>

cradle of renowned travellers since its foundation in 1440. After graduating he spent the next 30 years travelling the world together with other gunmen, shooting to order or off his own bat in order to make money. His last trip for that purpose, began in South Africa in 2004 and has landed him in Malabo's Black Beach jail, where he has just been imprisoned after being jailed for a time in Zimbabwe.

Many people learn at school that travelling is the best way to learn. Mann has certainly changed his opinions. A mere week at his Black Beach prison cell has led him to abandon his former negative image of Equatorial Guinea and to declare the country "has experienced an incredible change in four years".

On the same day in Madrid, where he lives as a Geneva Convention refugee, Severo Moto, president of Equatorial Guinea's government in exile, said the opposite: "I am coming back home!" in order to bring freedom and democracy to the country.³²

Moto's travelling experience is the opposite of Mann's. The more he travels the world the further he gets from Equatorial Guinea. Seeking all kinds of support for his political return home, he has been to

³² <http://www.guinea-ecuatorial.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=704>

many different places. But none of them has taken him even half way to his apparent destination. What is worse, he has come close to losing both his life and his refugee status in Spain.

Mann and Moto are not alone in their plight. Since 2004, after a life of travel for pleasure, one of their main supporters, Mark Thatcher, son of former British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, has some difficulty leaving Britain. Many countries refuse to grant him a visa precisely for his past involvement in adventures that were too big for him. How come his partners failed to notice that this true wet blanket has failed in virtually all the sports, business and financial projects he has undertaken?

Mann now complains that Moto and Ely Calil, another financial backer, cheated him. Thatcher says he thought the helicopter he rented for their botched plan, was meant to serve as an ambulance. Moto says he knows nothing at all about Mann's *coup d'état*. Calil, who made his fortune in the oil business, has left his fancy residence in London's Chelsea. His current whereabouts are unknown.

NOTIONAL COUPS, NOTIONAL OPPOSITION

The only clear thing emerging from this Marx Brothers remake is the advisability of choosing one's travel companions for a *coup d'état* with care. Opposition leaders inside the country know this all too well. That means cultivating relations with the most important foreign centres of political power. In other words: travelling from Malabo to the United States and European Union capitals.

Unfortunately, despite frequent invitations for these leaders to visit powerful countries with leverage over Equatorial Guinea, their visits have not borne fruit. On the eve of legislative elections due next May in Equatorial Guinea, *Convergencia Para la Democracia Social* (CPDS), an opposition party founded underground in 1990, today has two representatives in the national congress. The remaining 98 seats are held by supporters of Teodoro Obiang, President without a break since 1979.

One might say that the important thing is not the number of trips, but their quality. Up until now, it seems that CPDS secretary general, Placido Mico, has yet to learn what Moto knows: world governments are far more interested in Equatorial Guinea's oil than in its people's human rights. All those foreign trips have not taught Mico what Obiang and any other dictator who leans on US friendship knows: so long as they

obey imperial policies, they will stay in power, unless their own people bring them down.

Mico never tires of declaring in every city he visits that CPDS “is a political party aiming to introduce changes in Equatorial Guinea once it gets power, which it will acquire by democratic means. For this, it works peacefully for the establishment of a democratic regime in Equatorial Guinea”³³. It may seem incredible, but he adds that he is confident that the United States government may change its current policies towards Equatorial Guinea.

This and similar statements are sweet music to Obiang and the world leaders who support him. So they are more than happy to pay for Mico’s air tickets and travel expenses. The Equatorial Guinea opposition leader gives them no trouble and above all guarantees that their corporations increasing investments and business in this small oil-rich African country are safe. Furthermore, this heavenly status quo means they can meet with Mico openly. So in the unlikely event that domestic public opinion questions Equatorial Guinea’s lack of democracy, they can say they are doing their share to support it.

³³ <http://cpds-gq.org/laverdad56/opinion3.html>

TYRANNY: GOOD FOR BUSINESS

No wonder more and more airlines are offering new connections to Malabo³⁴. International entrepreneurs have realised, as politicians have, that their businesses are not in peril with the current government or any other likely to succeed it. Such security does not apply to Equatorial Guinea's people, whose human rights are violated on a daily basis. It seems corporation CEOs do not get news about Obiang's policemen chasing after opposition leaders and sometimes torturing them to death. They also seem not to know that business is the preserve of the elite, that democracy is just a dream for the majority of the population either at home or in exile.

One learned observer of Equatorial Guinea who, oddly enough, does not travel there, explained last March 17 why businessmen choose this country for their activities:

“We have heard many times during the last years that Equatorial Guinea is changing. The truth is that real development has not taken place. What exists is an enormous development of Obiang's

34

<http://thereport.amnesty.org/eng/Regions/Africa/Equatorial-Guinea>

entourage's enterprises. These have made them incredibly rich while the majority of the population remains poor.”

He adds: “News coming from different parts of the country speak of little enthusiasm amongst the people entitled to register for the elections. They are tired of the same people governing all the time, no matter who the citizens vote for. Some reports also inform of irregularities.”

TRAVEL: THE GREAT EDUCATOR

In the meantime Obiang himself and his family also travel to Europe and the United States. On arrival he is greeted with flattery. In the April 12, 2006 press conference by United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, she said: “Thank you very much for your presence here. You are a good friend and we welcome you.”

From time to time Obiang has to listen to “recommendations” and “suggestions” about governance and human rights on his trips abroad, but his bank accounts and properties keep on growing anyway. Neither do the admonitions affect the income of Western companies operating in Equatorial Guinea.

When criticism cuts him to the quick, he fights back and speaks his mind. He is right. Why the half-hearted criticism at the same time as they openly flatter him? This helps explain Obiang's growing interest in China: a country he has visited five times in the last few years.

Obiang's trips to Europe and the United States, generate new ones in their turn, from Western Prime Ministers and Foreign Affairs Ministers, from other high government officials and from big corporation CEOs. If two sandals and an ass were all it took Herodotus to write impressive reports of the political and social events he witnessed in his travels, what will these people write from their first class seats in an Airbus A330-300, equipped with "two meter long beds, wine cellar, 5-star chef, musical classics and video"?

Back home, after a two or three day visit to Equatorial Guinea, they declare the country has made important steps towards democracy, that the political situation has vastly improved, and last but not least, praise the outstanding environment for foreign investment. That is why people say travel broadens the mind. Maybe when Western airlines start giving seats to the thousands of people from Equatorial Guinea who have never flown with them, those people too will at last see the wonders of Equatorial Guinea

so fulsomely described by foreign politicians and businessmen.

Moral: increase international air connections with Equatorial Guinea.

AIDS AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF SPANISH DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION IN

At the end of October 2007 in Madrid, Spanish President Zapatero promised 0.7% of GDP towards development aid during some workshops promoted by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and presided over by Queen Sofía. As he did so, a boy we can call Miguel, ill with AIDS in Equatorial Guinea, was dying in his mother's arms in the hospital of Malabo the country's capital. His doctors administered an extract from tree bark instead of the internationally recognized treatment, anti-retrovirals.

These drugs are available in Equatorial Guinea. International agencies donate them. One is not dealing with witchdoctors but doctors trained by the AECID. Among that agency's purposes is training

these doctors to treat AIDS and to advise their clinical work with AIDS patients.

The reason Miguel did not receive the right treatment is the corruption of the people responsible for caring for his health. According to ASODEGUE - the Association for Democratic Solidarity with Equatorial Guinea - the Prime Minister of that country called a meeting months ago of the national coordinators of the campaign against AIDS and of the international agencies working in the country. Among these are the delegates of the World Health Organization and AECID's experts who advise Equatorial Guinea's Health Ministry.

A niece of President Obiang also took part in the meeting. She is not a doctor but a businesswoman. She presented the meeting's participants with a project to produce the bark extract - called Fagaricine - to market it as an AIDS treatment. She also asked their opinion about the project.

In its January 2008 Republic of Congo WHO Office Information Bulletin, the WHO notes "Fagaricine is not an AIDS drug."³⁵

Whatever the opinion of the experts may have been, shortly afterwards a tragedy took place when a group of patients, including Miguel, attended their routine appointment in the Malabo Hospital to collect their treatment: anti-retrovirals. But they received another one instead: Fagaricine. The group of guinea pigs included children and adults and at least one expectant mother. No explanation was given, most of the people did not even know.

They soon began to get worse. Some died. The population became concerned. Despite foreign aid and government propaganda, AIDS treatment in the country is a disaster. Currently, Fagaricine is no longer prescribed in that hospital but it is sold in a few pharmacies.

Meanwhile, Obiang and his circle receive medical care abroad. Some via payment of astronomical bills in private clinics in the United States and others for free in Spain's public hospitals.

35

http://www.who.int/countries/cog/publications/missive_27.pdf

At the same time, in Equatorial Guinea private clinics flourish whose services only the very well-off can afford. Several are owned by President Obiang's wife and most of them have his family members as partners.

The government is unable to provide health care to the population. As opposition leader Plácido Mico noted in November 2007 in the National Economic Conference, "the health care situation in Equatorial Guinea, a multimillionaire country, is without doubt the best example of our deep inequalities, injustices and social exclusion, as is the distribution of wealth in the country. Apart from Mongomo, no general hospital in the country permits even a straightforward x-ray."³⁶

Equatorial Guinea is one of the main producers of oil and gas in Africa and has been a most favoured beneficiary of technical and economic aid from Spain for decades. The AECID implements its health work there " via various projects with one common denominator: the formation of a framework permitting the institution building of the National Health System."

³⁶

<http://www.cpdsgq.org/comunicados2007/noticia071113.html>

One of these projects, the control of endemic diseases, is carried out for AECID by Spanish state bodies, the National Centre of Tropical Medicine and the Carlos the Third Health Institute. With formidable funding, they aim "to achieve the training and improvement in operative capacity of local technical personnel in the Health System and in the National Programmes." (www.maec.es) The main endemic disease is AIDS. The argument the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation's office in Equatorial Guinea use to justify their expenditure is that it is being used to build "local capacity" for each of the "National Programmes".

Tuberculosis and AIDS are allowed to get out of control at the same time discriminatory laws are issued against people who are HIV positive, like Presidential Decree No. 107/2006 of November 20th 2007, which ordains "the requirement of an HIV/AIDS test certificate in order to obtain certain public services."

During the recent electoral campaign in Spain, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega, the Spanish government's First Vice-President and Presidency Minister promised, alongside Miguel Angel Moratinos, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and Leire Pajín, Secretary of State for International Cooperation, that Spain would "make

history in the next four years" and be " a leader in solidarity". She also stressed that Spanish socialists believe in politics "as a means to make the world a better place" and that , since we are the eighth biggest economy in the world "we have to take on the responsibility demanded by our place on the world stage". (<http://leirepajin.blogspot.com/2008/02/de-la-vega-reafirma-en-acto-de-la.html>)

Despite the sonorous propaganda about international aid, more resounding still is the silence about the Obiang family's corruption and the results of Spanish development cooperation in Equatorial Guinea.

WAITING FOR GODOT IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA... THE REST OF THE WORLD WAITS TOO

1. TEODORO OBIANG, THE PRESIDENT WITH A CLEAR AND CONSTANT POLICY

While members of the opposition to President Teodoro Obiang's regime are detained and tortured in prison merely for being in opposition, international human rights organizations are denied entry to Equatorial Guinea. While some are set free with neither charges nor trial or else pardoned after a lapse of time, subsequently they are fined and their movement restricted to their hometowns. While the supposed leader of a coup d'état, Severo Moto, is tried in absentia, a handful of associates are left to rely exclusively on the mercy of the court, their fate decided by the Chief Justice of the Nation, who, not

by accident, presides over the trial (Art. 86 of Equatorial Guinea's Fundamental Law).

If someone were to bet 100 Euros that this account referred to events taking place in June 2008 they would lose. The events in question took place in 1997, eleven years ago. An Amnesty International Release on Equatorial Guinea (AI INDEX: AFR 24/07/97), published on October 14th 1997 gives a complete account of the events in question.

It seems the long decade since those events has changed nothing. The failed coup has been repeated with the same protagonist, the regime continues imprisoning and torturing, Obiang continues in power and Amnesty International never fails to publish similar reports year in, year out. However a couple of changes have in fact taken place and for the moment one can say that the first of them is for the worse.

This first change is that Obiang's political acuity has sharpened. However much one dislikes the fact, he is smarter than one might want to admit. He toys with his equals around the world and with his rivals at home. Without counting the high official posts he held during the precious regime of his uncle Francisco Macias, Obiang has been in power for 30 years. In this time, he has made himself immensely

rich and has enriched his family. He occupies an accepted place in the international community. He has wiped out the meagre opposition and the only doubts relating to his future stem from his health and his succession, neither of which are completely under his control.

Amnesty International denounced in their 1997 report that the denial of access for international human rights organizations to the country "contradicts the policy of openness in relation to human rights issues publicly promised by President Obiang in February 1997."

While Obiang's policy of broken promises has lasted for more than 10 years, his policy on torture is much older. In 1978 Amnesty International regarded it as a systematic practice to the point that in its March Bulletin of that year it defined Equatorial Guinea as "a huge torture camp whose only exit is the cemetery." A report published in 1990 with the title *Tortures in Equatorial Guinea*, collected information for the twenty years from 1968 to 1988.

2. THE SPANISH SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY GOVERNMENT: THE DEMOCRACY OF NEVER-TOO- MUCH DIALOGUE

Obiang only fools people who let themselves be fooled. Pronouncements made from time by Spain's Foreign Minister Moratinos on "helping, accompanying, offering incentives and motivating a country like Equatorial Guinea to move forward the process of democratization and defence of Human Rights", once more display the Kingdom of Spain as a dummy State led by the interests of others and in contradiction to the aspirations of its Constitution.

For years Moratinos has travelled to Equatorial Guinea or received Obiang in Spain. Still, his opinion on "advances in the democratization process" is as valuable today as those of the US entertainment magazine Parade which also observes some progress. It rates Obiang thirteenth in the list of the world's worst dictators after having placed him eleventh in 2007 and tenth in 2006.

The main difference is that the magazine describes Obiang outright as a dictator and does not propose dialogue about it. Meanwhile, the Spanish Socialist Workers Party seems to be waiting for another decade to pass just so as to be completely sure before uttering the word. Maybe for that reason the magazine has a circulation of 42 million while the Minister's Press releases are not even read by his own advisors. Nothing else explains really the publication

of his "somewhat impassioned" opinion on Obiang's last visit to Spain.

Obiang has got to where he is by administering dose after dose of broken promises wherever necessary, wrapped up in oil contracts. The result has been murder, torture and other serious human rights violations, but still Moratinos gets all impassioned when he and Obiang meet up. It is true that his counterparts in the US receive Obiang as a "good friend" and in China and other countries they greet him with the red carpet, but that does not make Obiang any less a criminal. Rather it turns those hosts of his into aiders, abettors and accomplices of his barbarism.

If Obiang's declarations no longer fool Foreign Ministers and Presidents, those of Moratinos fool no one either. Who, outside the Spanish Socialist Workers Party, believes that government policy towards Equatorial Guinea is adequate in the light of the last thirty years? Nonetheless, on May 29th this year, shortly after the rigged elections held in Equatorial Guinea, the government again presented in the Congress of Deputies its routine litany: "our only remedy is to continue insisting on a constructive dialogue".

3. THE OPPOSITION: STILL WAITING FOR NEWS ON NKRUMAH, MANDELA, LUMUMBA AND BIKO

The second change has taken place in the political opposition. The leaders of the Convergence for Social Democracy (CPDS) that held two seats in Equatorial Guinea's 100-seat parliament - the remainder being taken up by Obiang's party members - are going through moments of political and personal anguish. Not surprisingly, since they ended up with just one seat, continue to be harassed as usual and have been abandoned by the international community, which prefers oil in the hand to democracy on the wing.

The opposition has shown its desperation and fury via various communiqués from its National Executive over the last month. These offer a mixture of denunciations, laments, meditations after the fact on what happened, vague accusations, unattainable proposals and reflections lacking self-criticism.

The CPDS denounces that "the electoral process of Sunday May 4th 2008 in Equatorial Guinea surpassed all forecasts of the brutality of the fraud prepared by Obiang and his regime, marking a clear regression in the country's political evolution."

The CPDS laments the betrayal of the international community, especially Spain and the United States since the elections "were not held in conditions of liberty, transparency and equality as was expected by the Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister, Miguel Angel Moratinos or as the United States ambassador in the country intended."

The European Union is not immune from the attacks since the release of funds (more than Euros 10m) intended for Equatorial Guinea assigned to the ninth European Development Fund to carry out projects in areas like human rights and good governance is regarded by the CPDS as "the strongest insult that could be received".

The CPDS Executive pauses to meditate on "the unhappy history of Equatorial Guinea that repeats itself cyclically" because in 2002 "when Equatorial Guinea most needed the UN, this body decided to withdraw, as if by chance, the Special Representative for Equatorial Guinea, leaving the population defenceless and at the mercy of the arbitrary will of Obiang. Many of the people arbitrarily detained then have only just been pardoned in June."

Finally, they offer a very negative judgement on the policy of dialogue. They consider that "the rapprochements (by its bilateral and multilateral

partners) made towards the regime that governs Equatorial Guinea are made for other reasons, not expressed in public declarations, perhaps possibly the benefits obtained from the situation of a totalitarian and despotic regime, not respectful of people's rights, reasons which favour the individuals, institutions or countries that make such rapprochements, which unscrupulously damage the legitimate interests of the people of Equatorial Guinea, their right to live in freedom and to benefit from their natural resources."

Despite admitting their desperate political situation they still "call on the international community, particularly the multilateral and bilateral partners represented in Equatorial Guinea to recognise that their silence at the repression and all the abuses perpetrated by Obiang and his regime on the people of Equatorial Guinea, along with all the arbitrary abuses inflicted on the opposition and on dissidents in the country seem to amount to complicity in the damage the regime thus inflicts on this people. The CPDS would like to see a pronouncement on what happened in this country on May 4th this year, as well as on the post-election harassment that followed."

What the CPDS describes is correct. It even understates things. It has received the biggest blow in its history not only for having lost one of its two seats

at the hands of its enemies but because it has been abandoned by those it considered its friends. But in that case, why go running to them once more?

It does not matter now that what happened was the chronicle of an abandonment foreseeable beforehand and warned of at the time. But what sense does it make to make new appeals that will themselves also be ignored? It hardly makes any difference now to point out that the international community is an accomplice of the regime against the country's people. But more than anything, it does nothing to lift the population of Equatorial Guinea out of their shameful situation.

The May 2008 elections have confirmed, if any further confirmation was necessary, that the political game played so far with such poor cards by the CPDS against experienced criminals, bought judges and with an audience of observers watching out for their own interests, is over.

It is not the moment for lament or roundabout accusations. If the CPDS is not faithful to the logic of its own analysis of the situation and gets caught up in absurd reproaches and threats that show up its weakness even more, not only will it be finished but, as its own National Executive says of other actors

involved, it runs the risk of being an accomplice in Obiang's game.

The struggle for the rights of Africans in Africa has not been achieved mainly or even most importantly in the sessions of corrupt parliaments or in meetings in offices in Madrid or Washington with diplomats concerned about the people of Equatorial Guinea in words but not in fact. Nor, obviously, has the struggle advanced by repeating over and over again to people who have not the least idea of the suffering of people in Equatorial Guinea that "the CPDS is the only democratic opposition and seeks political change by peaceful means..."

The political strategy faced with murderers, their accomplices and look-outs cannot consist of touring Europe and the United States to complain to people without the least intention of losing their own benefits so as to promote the rights of others. Political action cannot base itself on making speeches day after day in a parliament lacking legitimacy to deputies who only heed to the person that pays them.

To design a new political action it is more useful to consider the pantheon of African leaders. Nkrumah based his political struggle on organizing the masses, which cost him repeated spells in detention. Mandela directed a political transition but

not without first insisting on the right to self-defence of the oppressed (what Western politicians call violence) to the Supreme Court in Pretoria in 1964, for which he was condemned to life imprisonment. Lumumba was assassinated by the CIA, the armed wing of the United States government that specialises in murdering popular leaders the world over for their opposition to imperialism. Biko managed successfully to mobilise the inhabitants of South African cities before being assassinated in police custody.

Conclusion: Neither dialogue with Obiang nor political tours by the opposition will bring human rights to Equatorial Guinea

It is told that years ago an old Equatorial Guinean, unhappy at his country's evolution on which a Spanish person was talking asked, "Hey, this independence stuff, how long does it last?" One has to suppose that the passage of time has given him the answer, although doubtless thousands of Equatorial Guineans are asking the same question now about this democracy stuff.

Democracy does not exist in Equatorial Guinea nor will it under the current dictatorial circumstances prolonged by external help from powerful economic interests in exchange for oil.

Once the political game is exhausted, or what is no more than the trappings of a democratic system, for Equatorial Guineans to be able to see human rights respected, requires a resistance struggle to be carried through against the individuals who violate people's rights and those who abet them.

In other words, rights are taken, not given. That most likely means dropping certain useless friendships and support, working more in the street and in villages than in Parliament and abandoning the parody of democracy for the drama of popular struggle.

It is essential not to compromise the enduring right of peoples and individuals to a life of liberty, justice and peace via a political slogan to the liking of corrupt leaders like "a peaceful political alternative" - fine for the oppressor, not so great for the oppressed.

US PRESIDENT-ELECT: THE LATEST AFRICAN SAINT

Until the election in the United States of November 4th last, hagiographers had identified 1000 saints born in Africa. First place is assigned to Augustine of Hippo in the fourth century. Bakhita, a Sudanese of Darfur, who received that name from slave traders and is better known as Josephine Margaret Afortunada (a translation of Bakhita) lived until the middle of the last century.

By their works they have become part of what the Catholic church calls "the Church Triumphant" which intercedes with God on humanity's behalf. The works of Augustine are well known and Bakhita is praised for these words: "If I were to meet again the slavers who abducted me and tortured me I would kneel and kiss their hands because if that had not happened I would not be a devout Christian now."

What happened on November 4th has given rise to a series of miracles which, without doubt, will allow us to refer to Barack Obama as the latest black saint. The first miracle consists in that, without knowing the great good he has done in Africa during his time as a Senator, the communications media, and thus the great masses, have already canonized him.

According to his press office, in his work "As a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Barack Obama has fought to focus America's attention on the challenges facing Africa". Like elastic, his magnanimity stretches a long way, "He has also increased America's focus on the long term challenges of education, poverty reduction, disease, strengthening democratic institutions and spurring sustainable economic development in Africa".

If some devil's advocate argues that these marvellous works already carried out are insufficient reason to elevate their author to an altar, then the project Obama announced during his presidential campaign leaves no room for doubt as regards Africa undying debt to him.

"Obama and Biden will expand prosperity by establishing an Add Value to Agriculture Initiative, creating a fund that will extend seed capital and

technical assistance to small and medium enterprises...They will also strengthen the African Growth and Opportunity Act to ensure that African producers can access the U.S. market and will encourage more American companies to invest on the continent...Obama and Joe Biden will double our annual investment in foreign assistance from \$25 billion in 2008 to \$50 billion...They will fully fund debt cancellation for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries in order to provide sustainable debt relief and invest at least \$50 billion by 2013 for the global fight against HIV/AIDS." And "As president, Obama will take immediate steps to end the genocide in Darfur..."

One cannot know for sure if Obama is thinking of Bakhita when he makes clear that the two measures he proposes with regard to Darfur are to deploy a strong intervention force in the area and to bring the Khartoum government to trial. However, the history of the United States indicates that this last proposal will end up being somewhat less Christian than the hand-kissing the former slave promised her former slavers.

When United States' Presidents deploy intervention forces in countries they consider enemies and persecute their governments and leaders, while kisses are scarce, by contrast there is an abundance of missiles, napalm, torture, destitution,

depleted uranium - in a word, Apocalypse by human hand.

Since the Second World War, Democrat and Republican Presidents of the United States have ordered the bombing of 34 countries, among which figure African countries like Belgian Congo, Libya, Somalia and Sudan. However, the list of countries condemned by them is much longer if one talks about US weapons and military training used against Africans by diverse internal and external aggressors, whether in wars or in repression undertaken by dictatorial governments against their own citizens.

An awkward detail may perhaps deflate somewhat the illusion of all the millions of Africans who want to stick badges, medallions and scapulars featuring Obama on their breasts. It turns out that George Bush, still President, and likewise all his predecessors in that job, are equally deserving of this cult of devotion.

In effect, during his own presidential campaign Bush proposed the same as Obama: plenty of US aid to fight AIDS and malaria, reconstruction of countries devastated by genocide, schooling for the poorest children, guiding African countries to good government and agricultural autonomy, preferential treatment for impoverished countries in the World

Trade Organization Doha round and a whole heap of similarly saintly good works.

Although Bush could not make his good works match his words about Africa, during his eight years of unrestricted power, in direct contact with God the Father, also omnipotent, Bush's kind heart is sufficient guarantee for some Africans who worship the country they consider "the oldest democracy, the most modernizing and solid on Earth, able to overcome political and social prejudices."

On February 26th this year, Bush, overcome with a spirit of goodness, declared, "America is on a mission of mercy. We're treating African leaders as equal partners..... This mission serves our moral interests -- we're all children of God, and having the power to save lives comes with the obligation to use it. ...Americans should feel proud, mighty proud, of the work we're doing in Africa. At every stop, I told people that the source of all these efforts is the generosity of the American people. We are a nation of compassionate and good-hearted folks."

Africans who remain alive despite US charity and compassion need not undress one saint so as to dress up another. If Bakhita pardoned her enemies with infinite sweetness, Obama has already done likewise to the military leaders whose armies and

guerrillas have devastated the Democratic Republic of Congo (RDC) for the last few years.

He has not said a single word on the approximately five million dead in the RDC, the hundreds of thousands displaced, the women raped, the child soldiers and he has said even less on the responsibility of US multinationals in that infernal war. Obama has considered it more saintly to encourage entrepreneurs to invest in Africa.

Although right now some Africans look at their new saint ecstatically, many other Africans are dying just to increase profits for the US multinationals that carry off their raw materials: Cabot Corporation, Eagle Wings Resources International (a subsidiary of Trinitech International), Kemet Electronics Corporation, OM Group and Vishay Sprague, among others, have all been identified by the United Nations for their role in the war in the RDC.

But the roughly 5 million dead do nothing to stain the second miracle, which consists in the fact that it is not just African-Americans in the United States and black people elsewhere pray for Obama. Even some who live under African dictatorships supported 100% by the United States government, praise the US and its President-elect, not for his good works, but for the colour of his skin.

The leaders of the Convergence for Social Democracy -CPDS, one of Equatorial Guinea's opposition parties-, in the name of "militants and sympathizers of the CPDS and likewise of the people of Equatorial Guinea in general" have congratulated Obama for his "victory of planetary reach". Surely bowled over by the celestial ecstasy induced by communication between two black souls dedicated to international politics beneath the gaze of the Almighty, Plácido Mico, the CPDS leader, wrote to Obama, "we ask God Almighty to inspire and guide your actions in government leading the United States of America and to protect you for a long time."

Here then is the fourth miracle which consists in spiritually uniting Africans in a new negritude, a political one this time, that does not distinguish between oppressors and oppressed. The President of Equatorial Guinea and CPDS oppressor, Teodoro Obiang, sent this message to Obama on November 5th: "The whole people of Equatorial Guinea, my government in general and myself personally... express to you our most sincere, warm and effusive congratulations for such a singular and historic achievement... A hope for complete change, political, social and economic renewal for all. So therefore we wish your Excellency the best achievements,

successes and prayers for your personal health and that of your august family."

Senator Obama is not known to have criticised perennial United States policy in Equatorial Guinea, nor to have announced measures against the dictatorship of Teodoro Obiang in Equatorial Guinea, like the ones to be employed in Darfur. One has here an extraordinary case in contemporary history of the Sacred: a miracle that multiplies like the bread and fishes. Alongside Saint Obama appear simultaneously thousands of other Holy Innocents. All of them approve the line marked out by big capital and its propaganda media - the change of a black face for a white face to replace the exhausted figure of George Bush.

Obama collected US\$640 million dollars for his campaign. That money did not come from women and children affected by AIDS in Uganda, or the war mutilated of Angola, from impoverished farmers in Chad or Niger. Nor did it come from homeless people in New Orleans, or black people in US prisons, proportionately six times more numerous than white prisoners.

That money came from Wall Street, from big banks and multinational companies like Goldman Sachs, J.P.Morgan Chase, Citigroup, IBM, Microsoft

and Google. Exxon-Mobil is the oil company with most presence in Equatorial Guinea, one of the most powerful companies in the world. Its supportive relations with Teodoro Obiang perpetuate the people of Equatorial Guinea's martyrdom.

Other black people have already held positions of high authority in the US. Colin Powell of the Episcopalian-Anglican Church, once a Republican, now a Democrat, is someone forever loyal to the empire. Condoleezza Rice is a member of the Presbyterian Church. She defines herself as a "moderate Republican".

Obama does not renounce these predecessors, nor their works, nor their allure. He simply reformulates them. If one asks what makes them different to Bush, the answer seems to be very little at all, except their skin colour? On that basis, the only change one can expect is to see all these black United States saints placed up on the altars, ensuring that at least there are black saints up there to be revered, just like the white ones.

À L'ABORDAGE DE LA GUINÉE EQUATORIALE. À QUI LE TOUR?

A l'aube du mardi 17 février de cette année, un groupe d'Africains que l'on pourrait définir, dans l'économie mondialisée d'aujourd'hui, comme une *joint venture*, c'est-à-dire une association temporaire d'entreprises, est arrivé par la mer, en voyage d'affaires, au vieux port de Malabo, la capitale de la Guinée équatoriale.

Il est probable que son intention première était de présenter une proposition à un grand homme d'affaires africain dans l'une des luxueuses résidences qu'il a dans cette ville. Bien qu'il en ait d'autres au Maroc, en France, aux USA, etc., celle-ci est connue sous le nom de Palais Présidentiel, qui est un nom approprié puisque sa deuxième occupation est celle de Chef de l'État de la République de Guinée équatoriale.

Lisbone, juillet 2008, Teodoro Obiang Nguema

Mbasogo au 7ème Sommet de la Communauté des pays de langue portugaise. Photo AFP/Getty Images

Ne le trouvant pas, car il était dans une autre de ses demeures dans la zone continentale du pays, les chefs d'entreprise optèrent pour le plan B, pour lequel ils n'étaient pas préparés correctement, à en juger par les résultats.

En effet, la joint venture se brisa lorsque des employés aux ordres du chef d'entreprise local lui manifestèrent violemment leur désaccord avec son initiative. Après plusieurs heures d'échange intense de tirs, au cours de la matinée du même jour, les locaux réussirent à convaincre les visiteurs que leur projet n'était pas à leur goût. Les nombreux trous que leurs lance-grenades portables occasionnèrent au palais attestent du grand intérêt que ceux-ci avaient à mener à bien leur projet.

La méfiance du grand homme d'affaires envers les propositions économiques de ses collègues devint évidente lorsqu'il décida non seulement de ne pas se joindre à eux mais aussi de mettre tous ses employés au travail pour faire échouer celles-ci.

Il semble qu'il y soit parvenu, bien qu'avec beaucoup de mal, et le coût final de l'opération est peut-être très supérieur à ce que l'on imagine.

L'activité de la ville et de ses environs a été interrompue pendant deux jours. Depuis ceux qui travaillent pour les compagnies pétrolières jusqu'aux enfants qui vont à l'école primaire, tout le monde est resté chez soi. Ceux qui, par inadvertance, sont restés entre deux feux ont payé cher leur manque de chance. Selon plusieurs témoins, dans le quartier d'Ela Nguema une femme enceinte a été atteinte par un tir et on ne connaît pas son état.

Dans le même secteur également, un autre enfant a été impliqué malgré lui dans la chasse à l'homme réalisée par les militaires équato-guinéens. Un étranger, semble-t-il, s'était caché dans le cimetière, où l'on arrive par ce quartier populaire qui compte plusieurs écoles. Les militaires, dont le courage n'est pas une des qualités, ont eu recours à leur technique habituelle: obliger les civils à accomplir leur volonté.

Ils leur dirent d'entrer dans le cimetière – car ils n'osaient pas le faire eux-mêmes malgré leur nombre, leur armement et leur uniforme – et de jeter des pierres dans les herbes qui poussent entre les tombes pour vérifier «si quelque chose bouge». Les pleurs désespérés de l'enfant ne cessèrent pas jusqu'à ce que deux auxiliaires militaires israéliens décidèrent d'aller voir qui c'était.

Lors de cet incident, les Equato-Guinéens en uniforme ont une fois de plus prouvé leur incapacité militaire et leur bassesse morale tout en révélant le rôle croissant d'autres hommes d'affaires étrangers en Guinée Equatoriale, quant à eux invités par son président, Teodoro Obiang. Il s'agit d'anciens militaires israéliens reconvertis qui offrent sur internet leurs «services et solutions de sécurité» pour dictateurs, paramilitaires, contre-révolutionnaires, mercenaires, etc.

Quand des sources proches du gouvernement et des agences de presse affirment qu'«un hélicoptère des Forces Armées et de la Sécurité de l'État a coulé une des embarcations des assaillants», il faut savoir que la localisation de celles-ci leur a été donnée par un GPS militaire nord-américain, que l'appareil depuis lequel les tirs ont été effectués est soviétique et que le pilote est probablement ukrainien ou israélien. C'est pour cela qu'Obiang vient de dire, après les faits, que grâce à ses amis américains il est encore en vie.

Tandis que chacun de ces hommes d'affaires, exécutants, employés ou «coopérants » étrangers fait son travail pour le compte d'Obiang, ces forces armées s'emploient à ce qu'aucun tir de leurs ennemis ne les atteigne, et pour ce faire elles n'hésitent pas à se cacher dans le premier édifice qu'elles rencontrent, comme ce fut le cas lors de l'assaut contre deux

banques de Bata le 5 décembre 2007, lequel s'avéra être une opération cousue main.

Les assaillants arrivèrent par la mer, ils emportèrent l'argent qu'ils trouvèrent dans la caisse et sans causer de dégâts ils revinrent à l'eau. C'est alors que les forces de sécurité décidèrent de sortir dans la rue et se mirent à accabler de tirs vengeurs les étrangers qui résident dans la ville et qui, pour leur malheur, se trouvaient à proximité des banques.

Par la suite, ces forces, comme il arrive chaque fois que se produit un désordre public ou que le dictateur veut terroriser la population, se sont adonnées à la chasse à l'étranger et ont donné libre cours à leur sauvagerie et à leur mépris pour la vie et les biens d'autrui.

Le premier homme d'affaires de Guinée équatoriale et d'autres hommes d'affaires étrangers établis dans le pays et avec des intérêts dans la zone, c'est-à-dire dans le pétrole du Golfe de Guinée, se montrent très préoccupés par la concurrence montante de nouveaux arrivés et à cause de cela ils font circuler des nouvelles qui sont dans le ton de la ligne dominante actuelle. La page web du gouvernement a annoncé mardi que «notre pays a de nouveau été victime d'une attaque terroriste des rebelles du Delta dans la ville de Malabo ».

Le principal, c'est que le public ne sache pas que le MEND (sigle en anglais du Mouvement pour l'Emancipation du Delta du Niger) a démenti sa participation à cette opération. L'important est de passer sous silence le fait que le MEND était occupé il y a une semaine par l'attaque réussie d'une plateforme gazière de la Compagnie Shell au Nigéria. Il faut éviter que les gens réfléchissent aux objectifs du MEND, qui sont principalement la libération d'Asari*, l'attribution de 50 % des bénéfices du pétrole extrait du Delta et le retrait des troupes nigérianes du Delta. Il faut laisser dans l'ombre l'historique du MEND, dans lequel on trouve des attaques contre les forces nigérianes et les compagnies pétrolières qui opèrent au Niger.

Ce qui est impératif, comme toujours, c'est d'éviter que les citoyens réfléchissent à ce qui se passe et pourquoi.

Il se passe qu'en Guinée équatoriale un baril de pétNIG2RIANERole revient à chaque habitant chaque jour que le soleil se lève, puisque l'on en extrait tous les jours environ un demi-million, sans compter le gaz et les autres richesses naturelles qui aussi leur appartiennent.

L'homme d'affaires Obiang, également dictateur, bien qu'il soit un grand ami des autorités et

des compagnies pétrolières des USA (dixit Rice), bien qu'il soit reçu en Espagne avec une certaine «passion» (dixit Moratinos), bien qu'il soit couvert par de puissants pays de l'Union européenne et bien qu'il soit depuis peu protégé par des «experts» en sécurité d'Israël, ne peut pas éviter que les gens ne soient pas satisfaits de voir sans y goûter les richesses et les privilèges dont il jouit avec sa famille et ses comparses.

Beaucoup émigrent vers des pays moins hostiles, la majorité souffre parce qu'elle ne peut pas le faire, une minorité s'adonne sans succès à la politique et quelques-uns collaborent avec lui pour obtenir un peu de l'immense butin. La vie scandaleuse de la minorité au pouvoir génère du ressentiment et de l'attraction pour la zone. Au demeurant, tout le monde sait que voler un voleur vaut cent ans de pardon et une récompense matérielle.

La longue liste de vols, tromperies, corruptions, abus, subtilisations, etc., qui se donnent libre cours depuis le début de l'exploitation pétrolière n'a rien d'étonnant: des compagnies étrangères et du gouvernement d'Obiang aux Équato-Guinéens, d'Obiang à la communauté internationale et ses organismes officiels, des fonctionnaires – ministres, bureaucrates, policiers – aux citoyens... de tous ceux

qui le peuvent contre les autres qui sont plus faibles, pour le dire en une fois.

Deux domestiques du palais se sont enfuis en emportant quelque 6 millions d'euros subtilisés à Obiang. Un adolescent, petit-fils d'Obiang, a été accusé le mois dernier d'avoir volé des liasses de billets dans un coffre de son grand-père pour les offrir à ses copains. Son frère aîné dilapide l'argent de l'État en voitures de luxe, résidences, fêtes et plaisirs, tandis que le reste de la famille et leurs proches ratiboisent ce qui reste. Pourquoi d'autres n'essaieraient-ils pas de bénéficier de cet apparent puits sans fond?

En 1933, le général Butler, l'un des deux seuls marines qui ont reçu la médaille du courage du Congrès, dit: «La guerre se fait au bénéfice de quelques-uns aux dépens de beaucoup. J'ai passé 33 ans et 4 mois de service actif dans le corps des Marines. J'ai servi à tous les échelons jusqu'à celui de général. Pendant tout ce temps j'ai été essentiellement un cogneur de haut vol pour les grandes entreprises, Wall Street et les banquiers. En résumé, j'ai été un mafieux, un gangster pour le capitalisme. »

Butler présente l'histoire non officielle, ce que son pays a réellement fait au Mexique, en Amérique Centrale et en d'autres lieux avec des hommes comme

lui. «En regardant le passé – ajoute-t-il – je crois que je pourrais apprendre quelques combines à Al Capone ; lui opérait sur trois districts, moi je l'ai fait sur trois continents. »

L'histoire officielle d'Obiang et de ses acolytes parle de terroristes lorsqu'elle se réfère à ceux qui les importunent. Il est fort probable que l'histoire vraie dira, dans le futur, que les assaillants de Malabo, de Bata et du MEND dans l'Atlantique Sud, tout comme ceux que l'on appelle les pirates de l'océan Indien sur les côtes de Somalie et beaucoup d'autres groupes africains moins connus sont des formes alternatives, des évolutions et des transformations de la lutte pour la survie et contre l'injustice colossale du capitalisme aux temps de la mondialisation. Demandez votre tour, le temps presse.

*Traduit par Philippe Cazal,
révisé par Fausto Giudice*

EQUATORIAL GUINEA 2009: THIRTY YEARS WITH OBIANG AND TWENTY WITH THE OPPOSITION

Next August, the 3rd, few in Equatorial Guinea will celebrate the 30th anniversary of the coup d'état led by Teodoro Obiang Nguema against Macias Nguema, his uncle and the head of the State. Obiang's government refers to what happened with these words:

“In 1979, after the devastation of a decade under the tyrannical President Macias, then-Lieutenant Colonel Obiang took control of the government and was named President of the Supreme Military Council.”

What did Obiang do while working under Macias' orders to stop the decade old devastation?

“In 1969 –the official history continues - Obiang becomes the National Guard Liuetenant, with all the forces and military quarters based in Malabo under his control.”

He became commander in chief of the Armed Forces in 1975, and “in 1979 a presidential decree made him vice-minister of the Popular Armed Forces.”

What did Obiang do in these 30 years to avoid another dictatorship?

In 1982 “Obiang became President of the Republic for an initial seven-year term. He was re-elected to additional terms in 1989, 1996 and 2003. (...) President Obiang won re-election once again in 1996. Infrastructure and housing is now being rebuilt more quickly as new water, sewage and drainage are being installed and hundreds of miles of new roadways are being built to connect all of Equatorial Guinea’s cities and towns. Healthcare and education also top the agenda as new, modern state-of-art

hospitals and clinics are being built and staffed and teachers are being trained to better teach students”.³⁷

Buried under this mountain of promises about public works, lies one certain fact: Obiang wins election after election with more than 95% of the votes. In the 2002 presidential elections he got 97%, in the 2004 legislative and local elections he won 98 out of the 100 parliament seats plus 237 out of the 244 country's municipalities. In the 2008 legislative elections he got 99 seats.

The main difference between the deposed president and the current one, is that Obiang knows how to read the signs of the times and to adapt himself accordingly. This has allowed him to hold on to power for thirty years, count on foreign support and enrich himself enormously thanks to the oil industry, also under his control.

The past thirty years can indeed be described as golden thirty years for Obiang, but not for the great majority of Equatorial Guinea's inhabitants. Country reports published by the World Bank, the European Union and some of the United Nations agencies, let

37

<http://espanol.republicofequatorialguinea.net/Government/index.cfm?PageID=30&3>

alone those by non governmental organisations, especially those devoted to human rights and human development, present a quite different reality.

Obiang is willing to play the democratic game in front of the international community, because in each game he marks the cards and keeps the best while deals the rest.

If appearances have to be kept up of regular elections, of honouring international treaties, of adhering to foreign initiatives on transparency, accountability and good governance, for Obiang this is no problem. He lets the opposition win a parliamentary seat, he signs international treaties only to honour them in the breach, and varnishes his masterwork with glowing propaganda about the government's good works.

Obiang has many good friends who just happen to govern powerful countries. These convince public opinion that Obiang's scam is legitimate and only needs a few tweaks and minor improvements. To that end, they offer technical assistance and cooperation, while making clear there is no great urgency. Since oil production started in Equatorial Guinea in the mid 90s, his friends have become even more reliable than ever, despite knowing the reality all too well:

The 2004 Department of State report on Equatorial Guinea accurately summarised its political situation: “Citizens did not have the ability to change their government peacefully.”³⁸

In 2009 the Department refers to the country as a “nominally multi-party Republic with strong domination by the executive branch”.³⁹

For his part, Obiang thinks it wise to take preventive measures. He sends soldiers and policemen to assassinate, kidnap and torture his “enemies”, and in general to make life difficult for political opponents.

In spite of this and of the fact that there is no shortage of people willing to get their share of the enormous oil cake in exchange for loyalty, some still remain who do not give up. Some of these string along with Obiang’s pretence of democracy. Others prefer to try and oust him.

Considering their actions so far, it can safely be said that Obiang has clearly defeated them all. He intimidates, persecutes and entertains members of the first group, according to his whims. He attacks

³⁸ <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2004/41601.htm>

³⁹ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/7221.htm>

members of the second whenever he can. These have managed to discomfit him once, but Obiang's friends and luck have been on his side.

Neither group of the opposition can claim that their respective strategies have come anywhere close to achieving their goals. The reverse is true, as chances of success seem to be inversely proportional to the increase in their actions.

Playing Obiang's democracy game is not an easy task. If a player does not perform as expected, other players will not take them seriously. Equatorial Guinea's leader of the parliamentary opposition declares again and again to the international community, to the media, to various international political institutions, that his party plays by Obiang's rules and also reassures the world that his party will only use non-violent means to achieve power.

But if the international community does not demand that Obiang play by internationally accepted rules to stay in power, why does the opposition think they have to do so? It seems the international community accepts opposition to Obiang as long as its leaders give up their people's right to resist the Obiang regime's human rights violations.

Philosophers dealt with the problem of using legitimate violence against an aggression many centuries ago. Since the 13th century it is accepted that “in the case of a deadly attack, there is more obligation to protect one’s own life than the attacker’s”.

If a political party which opposes a never ending dictatorship renounces legitimate defence against its violence, it is delegitimizing itself, because it actually helps the dictatorship it claims to oppose. When this party seeks support from international actors, despite their party's poor record of resistance and even knowing full well their petition will be met with indifference, they are digging their own political grave.

It is true that a legitimate defence requires another condition, namely that there are reasonable chances of success. In this respect it has to be noted that it is all about not giving up the right to legitimate resistance. Further, there can be no likelihood of success if the possibility of resistance is totally abandoned.

The non-parliamentary opposition, made up of several small groups, has not renounced political violence. But its failure, too, is obvious and due

mainly to lack of popular, militant support, to splits and internecine fighting and other shortcomings.

The option of a coup d'état has not yielded useful results. Nor is there much chance that it will. The lack of a popular militia and bad planning, along with the use of foreign mercenaries, explain the failure. Day after day, Obiang increases his own security, and he can count on foreign support. It seems that only a palace coup, like the one Obiang himself authored 30 years ago, is likely to succeed.

It can be said that the opposition too, like Obiang, have placed their hopes in foreign hands. The difference between the two camps is that European and North American Presidents and Prime Ministers prefer oil in their own countries to ensuring human rights in Equatorial Guinea.

The struggle carried out by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is illuminating. The oil plunder plus the damages it causes to the Delta physical conditions and to its inhabitants' health, together with the government's repression, are the reasons the MEND mentions to explain its attacks against the interests of the foreign companies that benefit from the oil industry with the consent of the government.

What is taking place in Nigeria, taking into account its much bigger size, is similar to what happens in Equatorial Guinea: “Since 1970, \$350 billion in oil revenue has flowed to Nigeria, yet 75% of Nigerians live on less than \$1 a day. (...) Nigerian governments have negotiated joint ventures with multinational companies for unregulated oil production since 1958. Over 50 years of exploitation in the Niger Delta has resulted in systematic human rights abuses and environmental devastation”.⁴⁰

Against this the MEND has declared its aims: reparations for environmental damage and also control of the Delta's natural riches. It has also made public its means: “Leave our land while you can or die in it. Our aim is to totally destroy the capacity of the Nigerian government to export oil”.⁴¹

In recent years, its achievements have been made known. The government, heeding a request by the big oil companies, sent the army to violently repress the Delta people protests, which resulted in thousands of dead, tortured and prisoners.

Popular resistance, however, kept up the struggle and the MEND was created. It has forced

⁴⁰ <http://www.counterpunch.org/mistiliso7172009.html>

⁴¹ <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=13121>

cuts in oil production from almost two and half million barrels per day to less than one and a half.

Unlike what is taking place in Equatorial Guinea, the Nigerian government does not despise the MEND. This is not a gift from the government –it maintains its military actions against the guerrillas– but the MEND, through its resistance, has placed itself in a position that deserves its enemy’s respect. Nowadays, both camps are holding conversations.

Meanwhile, Obiang represses the opposition parties that he so despises. At the same time, the only opposition leader with a seat in parliament, made public a communiqué after the attack against the president’s palace in Malabo that took place last February, the 17th, 2009, which was disingenuously attributed to the MEND by the government:

The party “congratulates the State Security and Armed Forces for their quick and efficient response and declares its support and solidarity with them”. It also reiterates once again “that (the party) rejects all movements aimed to achieve power through violence”.⁴²

⁴² <http://www.cpds-gq.org/comunicados2009/noticia090217.html>

While the Equatorial Guinea parliament unanimously declares the MEND “a terrorist group made up of mercenaries with evil intentions and recommends maximum repression”⁴³ Nigeria president has offer the MEND an amnesty. This offer is supported by many, including Nobel prize winner Wole Soyinka.

Equatorial Guinea politicians, both in power and in opposition, might do well to pay attention to what Soyinka’s said about Nigerian politicians: “In tandem with his predecessor Olusegun, President Umaru Yar’Adua must be made to recognize that he shoulders a moral and political responsibility for failure to make a decisive breakthrough in the quest to terminate hostilities in the Delta region. Much of the toll of death and destruction could, and would have been avoided if only these two rulers had lived up to their charge.”⁴⁴

These words, of course, are also relevant to those in Europe and North America who “accompany Obiang in his efforts to improve democracy in

⁴³ <http://guinea-equatorial.com/News/index.cfm?NewsID=599>)

⁴⁴ (<http://thenewsng.com/opinion/between-amnesty-and-amnesia-%E2%80%94-wole-soyinka/2009/06?version=print>)

Equatorial Guinea” and to those who claim to support the opposition camp in its political activity.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY THE UNESCO-OBIANG PRIZE

Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo may be welcome among the world's most powerful people, who work for his favour behind the scenes in return for lucrative trade deals, but he is less favourably viewed by human rights defenders, development agencies and the citizens of his country. Agustín Velloso looks at Obiang's controversial effort to obtain wider global respect and appreciation through the creation of an international prize in partnership with UNESCO.

THE BAD

Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, Equatorial Guinea's recalcitrant leader, is a very wealthy man. He has amassed such a fortune that he could only get rid of his bank notes by burning them.

He cannot use his money to buy power – he has, after all, enjoyed that in its absolute form for the last thirty years. His eldest son wants for nothing, and his family is wallowing in plenty. Global Witness published a report entitled ‘The Secret Life of a Shopaholic: How an African dictator's playboy son went on a multi-million dollar shopping spree in the US’.⁴⁵

Neither does Teodoro Obiang need money to earn a place among the world's most powerful. He is already a welcome member of this cabal, which often treats him with affection. Welcoming him in Washington back in 2006, erstwhile secretary of state Condoleeza Rice said, ‘You are a good friend, and we welcome you’.

He has been welcomed to Beijing six times by Hu Jintao, who said to him, ‘bilateral relations between our two countries have developed through goodwill’.⁴⁶

Obiang is chummy with Spain's left and right. Foreign minister Moratinos (Spanish Socialist

⁴⁵ <http://www.globalwitness.org/library/secret-life-shopaholic-how-african-dictators-playboy-son-went-multi-million-dollar-shopping>

⁴⁶ <http://www.embajadachina.org.mx/esp/xw/t217927.htm>

Workers' Party) declared in 2006 that Spain aimed to 'accompany, encourage, and motivate Guinea to progress on the path of democratisation and the defence of human rights'.⁴⁷

This is precisely what Aznar (Popular Party) felt as well, back in 2001, when, as head of government he urged Obiang to 'carry on the process of democratisation in Equatorial Guinea'.⁴⁸

A parliamentary delegation comprising these two and the Convergence and Unity party visited Guinea in 2007, and noted the 'progress made in the democratisation process'.⁴⁹

In January 2010, Gustavo de Arístegui, MP and spokesperson on foreign affairs for the Popular Party,

47

<http://www.diariodeleon.es/noticias/noticia.asp?pkid=291461>

48

[http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Paises/ArbolPaises/Guinea Ecuatorial/Monografia/documentos/Guinea Ecuatorial.pdf](http://www.maec.es/es/MenuPpal/Paises/ArbolPaises/Guinea_Ecuatorial/Monografia/documentos/Guinea_Ecuatorial.pdf)

⁴⁹ <http://www.asodegue.org/junio1607.htm>

elucidated one of Obiang's best-known qualities by declaring him 'profoundly hispanist'.⁵⁰

Citizens of Equatorial Guinea, the United Nations and other international agencies working in human rights and development, however, hold a negative, if not loathsome opinion of the man.⁵¹

THE UGLY

Obiang is not oblivious of what the world thinks of him, and he believes that money is the cure. This is where lobbyists, public relations firms and lawyers come in. Over the last few years, there has been a growing number of internet pages bearing editorials and testimonies praising this evil man.

The strength and growth of the pro-Obiang lobby is remarkable. At the last count,⁵² there were

⁵⁰ <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-guinea-ec-aristegui-entrevista-obiang-visita-privada-guinea-ecuatorial-20100112142347.html>

⁵¹ <http://www.amnesty.org/fr/region/equatorial-guinea/report-2009>

⁵² <http://archive.corporateeurope.org/docs/lobbycracy/lobbyplanet.pdf>

around 17,000 personnel in Washington, and another 15,000 in Brussels.

Cassidy & Associates represents Obiang in the US. In 2008, the firm billed US\$23 million. Since 2004, the Obiang portfolio has been worth US\$120,000 per month – this according to the US Department of Justice.⁵³

Cassidy & Associates is credited with the warm welcome given to Obiang by Rice. The photograph of Obiang and Rice is of such enduring value that it features on the front page of the official Guinea website, alongside typical landscape pictures of the country.

Pressure groups have also been very influential in this regard. Frank Ruddy, former US Ambassador to Equatorial Guinea declared, ‘A few years ago, at least US officials wouldn't talk about the relationship with Equatorial Guinea, or they would admit all the problems and horrible human rights abuses. Now,

⁵³ [http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Cassidy%26 Associates](http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Cassidy%26%20Associates)

you would have thought this is Mother Teresa's brother running Equatorial Guinea.’⁵⁴

Whereas, these pressure groups are an important source of good publicity for Obiang, it is the support he gets from powerful world leaders that helps create a positive image for him.

More importantly, powerful leaders continue to work in Obiang's favour behind the scenes within key national, international and bilateral institutions. Obiang, for his part, returns the favour by signing lucrative trade deals, military contracts and other agreements with their governments.

There are ongoing probes into Obiang's massive corruption both in the US and in Europe. One US Senate sub-committee declared that it had frozen US\$700 million in a Riggs Bank account, which had subsequently disappeared. This information is contained in a report entitled 'Money Laundering and Foreign Corruption'.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ <http://motherjones.com/politics/2007/05/putting-lipstick-dictator>

⁵⁵ http://hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Files.View&FileStore_id=52AD7316-F7CA-4031-BF49-75FB5B6BDF88

In both France and Spain, there are judges engaged in a futile effort to delve into an account in the Santander Bank that holds US\$26 million, properties in Asturias, Madrid, Canary Islands and other vast holdings in France that belong to the people of Equatorial Guinea. This information is public, but Obiang's friends have frustrated the process.

Obiang has accumulated his riches dealing with the multi-nationals that control the country's oil industry. (See article regarding France by Eulàlia Solé in La Vanguardia 'Embarrassment for France', and another article on Spain written in May of the same year).⁵⁶

It is probably because of the disdain with which he regards Spain that Obiang assigns the role of promoting the country there to a clumsy public relations person.

In 2009 this person stated, 'Until a few months ago, I did not even know that Spanish is spoken in Equatorial Guinea'. This rather bleak calling card notwithstanding, she declares: 'I proudly run an information service for Equatorial Guinea, here in Spain, and elsewhere'.

⁵⁶ <http://espacioseuropeos.com/?p=6764>

Whereas one may lend credence to what she says, it is puzzling that as the head of this service, she uses an email address linked to Centauro, a company associated with 803 and 806 numbers (sex chat lines), and not one associated with the embassy or any other official organ of the Guinean government.

She introduces herself in a pompous and clumsy way on an Internet forum associated with Equatorial Guinea: ‘Hi, my name is N.B. I am a journalist and working for various media. I had the pleasure of meeting Armando who introduced me to this forum, and your contributions’.

Since she is not able to attract the attention that she feels her ‘office’ deserves, she spends her time frequenting and promoting the forum – a task for which she is probably paid. In one message, she refers to an article on Equatorial Guinea that was going to appear in *Hola* magazine in August 2008. ‘It was I who encouraged the emotive human interest angle of the story, that is in line with the magazine’s character’.

One of Obiang's image consultants hit upon the idea of an initiative that the whole world would appreciate for its intrinsic value, and that would be linked to an institution held in high regard by everyone.

Encouraged by this idea, Obiang attended the UNESCO General Assembly in October 2007, where he announced his intention to establish the 'UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for the Preservation of Life', to be funded by the government of Equatorial Guinea.

Considering what little regard Obiang has for the lives of his fellow citizens, the name was a little too bloody, even for UNESCO which itself has a shady history of associating with arms dealers and dictators.

Following another brainwave from yet another advisor, the government of Equatorial Guinea presented UNESCO with a document entitled 'Establishment of an UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences' on 29 September 2008.⁵⁷

Neither the corruptor nor the corrupted could have anticipated the collateral effects of this proposal.

⁵⁷ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001629/162938f.pdf>

How could they? Here is a powerful man, accustomed to buying whatever he wants. In addition there is the support of the UN and a number of its more neoliberal-leaning agencies only too eager to grab an opportunity to justify their sad existence, in total disregard of their statutory obligations. (See the extension of the deadline for proposals for the prize⁵⁸).

As soon as the matter came to light, a number of governments anticipated the impending storm and voiced their criticism. At the same time, various NGOs who have had Obiang in the cross hairs objected. In January of 2010, it was officially announced that UNESCO was provisionally withdrawing the Prize. UNESCO explained that they were conducting a review of procedures regarding this and other prizes. This was clearly an attempt to lend some legitimacy to the shady dealings.⁵⁹

The mobilisation by this group of influential NGOs along with key personalities succeeded in forestalling a global scandal, and bringing to light a number of key issues:

⁵⁸ http://portal.unesco.org/science/en/ev.php-URL_ID=7767&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

⁵⁹ <http://scidev.net/es/news/unesco-aplaza-premio-de-guinea-ecuatorial-por-protestas.html>

1. The cynicism of certain international organisations and their inability to fulfil their mandate and that of the UN Charter.
2. The attempts by Obiang and his political and economic cronies to buy what all the money in the world couldn't buy him: The support of his people and the respect of the rest of humanity.
3. The importance of concerted action by groups of people opposed to impunity and corruption by those in power.