

OPEN SOCIETY  
JUSTICE INITIATIVE



September 28, 2010

Dear Executive Board Member:

You will by now be familiar with the global outcry following the creation of the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences (the Prize), with its negative impact on UNESCO's reputation and mission.

On June 10, 2010, the undersigned nongovernmental organizations submitted to UNESCO's Internal Oversight Service Investigation Section (INV), the attached Request for Investigation (the Request). The Request alerted INV to the possibility that, in contravention of United Nations policies and staff rules, UNESCO may have accepted money representing illicit proceeds of corruption or other crimes, in the form of the \$3 million funds donated for the Prize from the obscure "Obiang Nguema Mbasogo Foundation".

The Request explains why, even if not bound by national law, an institution such as UNESCO should under UN principles carry out its activities in accordance with internationally accepted anti-money laundering best practices. This is to ensure that receipt of large donations from heads of state and other politically exposed persons, or entities in which they may be interested, does not unwittingly expose the organization to undue legal, political or reputational risk.

The Request documents several recent or ongoing criminal and regulatory investigations in the United States, France, and Spain, as well as a case before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, suggesting a pattern of suspected money-laundering and other apparent acts of corruption by the Prize donor, President Obiang, or persons closely affiliated with him. Taken together, such investigations raise substantial grounds for suspicion that the sources of the funds donated for the Prize may be linked to illicit activities.

While INV has yet to provide a formal reply, we understand that the office considers itself unequipped to respond to charges of the gravity raised in the Request. In its report of

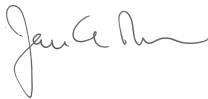
September 10, the UNESCO Working Group on Prizes has highlighted this disturbing gap in the organization's control systems, noting that "there is no specific procedure applied when the integrity of a private or individual donor of a UNESCO Prize comes into question." Responding to informal inquiries, UNESCO investigative staff were unable to even confirm whether the purported donor, the Obiang Nguema Mbasogo Foundation, is a governmental or a private entity.

Director-General Bokova has stated that the global campaign precipitated by creation of the Prize is "unmatched in scope by any other event in the last decades of the life of this Organization." As she herself acknowledged, UNESCO's name, integrity and high stature are in "serious danger." Scrutiny of the Prize has revealed that grievous systemic flaws in screening procedures for funds donated pose a serious risk to the integrity of the organization.

In light of this, we urge you and your colleagues on the Executive Board to take decisive action to terminate the Prize and also to reform the Prize system more broadly by adopting financial controls to ensure that this risk is averted and the credibility of UNESCO is strengthened.

We attach the full Request as sent to INV here for your reference, as well as a short briefing paper about the prize controversy more generally.

Sincerely yours,



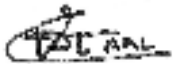
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Cc: Irina Bokova