

« OUR PRESIDENT HAS REMOVED HIS NAME SO THAT THE PRIZE CAN BE RENAMED UNESCO-EQUATORIAL GUINEA »»

Agapito Mba Mokuy, President Obiang's special counsel for international institutions, stated on November 8, 2011, after a press conference in Paris, that the removal of the name of his president from this 3 million dollar prize, reinforced by the resolution of the 52 member states of the African Union (AU) in favor of awarding the prize, opens the way to its approval.



Agapito Mba Mokuy, President Obiang's special counsel for international institutions.

African Markets : *We are now in 2012, why has this prize, established in 2008, not yet been awarded to any scientists?*

Agapito Mba Mokuy: In 2008, the Executive Board of Unesco, the organ responsible for the approval of prizes, had given its green light to the proposal made by president Obiang. Among the criteria for the attribution of prizes, it is stipulated in the first article that each Unesco prize must be approved and created by the Executive Board upon the recommendation of its general director (at that time, Unesco was led by the Japanese Koichiro Matsuura). In the second article, it is stipulated that each prize must bear the name Unesco as well as that of its endower. Using these criteria, Unesco gave the name "Unesco-Obiang Prize for research in life sciences." Our president did not impose his name. Following this, the general director at that time, respecting the decision of the member states, started to award the prize by establishing an international jury to examine the nominations of

scientists they had received. This jury made three recommendations for the prize by naming three winners: two Africans (Egypt and South Africa) and a Mexican.

So why has the Obiang-Unesco prize not been awarded to these three scientists?

At the end of his mandate in 2009, the Japanese Koichiro Matsuura turned over his post to the Bulgarian Irina Bokova. The latter informs the member states of her difficulties in carrying out the decision of her predecessor to implement the awarding of the prize. Her position is based on the fact that she has received letters initiated by two international NGO's, Transparency France and Sherpa, which were able to mobilize some public figures (see sidebar). The difficulty is related to the name of president Obiang Nguema

Mbasogo, which poses a problem. Faced with this blockage, during which the funds have been retained for three years by Unesco, our president indicated that he wanted his name to be removed from the prize and that it henceforth be renamed the "Unesco-Equatorial Guinea Prize." Furthermore, at the last session of the Executive Board it was decided that a working group be created to reevaluate this question, so as to unlock the matter completely by the spring of 2012. And we have no doubt of a positive outcome, since at the last summit meeting of the AU in Malabo in June of 2011, the 52 member states approved a resolution in favor of awarding this prize.

*Comments gathered by
Christian Lapeyre*

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL FRANCE AND SHERPA

"The Obiang prize remains suspended"

In a joint communiqué⁽¹⁾, the two NGOs Transparency International France et Sherpa declared that "during a meeting of the 58 members of the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the government delegations decided to maintain the suspension of UNESCO-Obiang prize, which has a value of 3 million dollars. As no consensus was reached, the question will be discussed again during the next meeting of the Board in the spring of 2012."

In the same communiqué, the two NGOs seem to regret that following the suspension of the prize "for an undetermined period" decided by the Executive Board of UNESCO, the Head of State of Equatorial Guinea could obtain a favorable decision with "the return of the prize to the agenda based on a resolution of the UA decided in his favor last June, during a summit meeting which he hosted in Malabo as temporary president of the UA." In fact, they insist, the Obiang prize has met with "strong opposition from both governments and civil society."

And they conclude with this important clarification. "On 29 September, 2011, 18 eminent writers, journalists, and public figures, including the Nobel Prize winner, Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu, the well known Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, and the poet and ex-ambassador from Mexico to UNESCO Homero Aridjis, made public a further appeal to reject Obiang's claim, who is the current record-holder in Africa for longevity in power."

⁽¹⁾ Communiqué issued 5 October 2011