

November 15, 2017

Open Letter to the President of Equatorial Guinea: Release Artist and Writer Ramón Esono Ebalé

Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo
President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea
Palacio Presidencial
Avenida de la Libertad
Malabo, Guinea Ecuatorial

Your Excellency,

We write to express our deep concern in response to the unjust arrest and subsequent detention without charge of Ramón Esono Ebalé in Malabo on 16th September 2017, and to urge you to release him immediately.

Mr. Ebalé and two of his friends were stopped by police, handcuffed, and had their mobile phones seized while getting into Mr. Ebalé's sister's car after leaving a restaurant in Malabo. Police then interrogated Mr. Ebalé about his drawings of, and blog posts about members of the Equatoguinean leadership, and told him – in front of his two friends – that he needed to make a statement explaining those drawings and blog posts. It was confirmed by police that only Mr. Ebalé was the target of the arrest, and not his two friends.

Mr Ebalé has learned that he faces potential charges of counterfeiting and money laundering; offences that were apparently never mentioned to him or his friends when they were arrested. Mr. Ebalé's prolonged detention without charge gives rise to serious concerns that these allegations are no more than a pretext to justify the ongoing arbitrary deprivation of liberty he is being subjected to.

Mr. Ebalé's extended detention at Black Beach prison without charge appears to be a clear violation of Equatorial Guinean law, which requires charges to be filed within 72 hours of an arrest. A judge has not mandated preventative detention in his case, which under exceptional circumstances would allow the police to hold him without charge for longer, nor does there appear to be a basis for such an order.

Mr. Ebalé, a renowned cartoonist who has been living abroad since 2011, has now spent 60 days in prison. His arrest in Equatorial Guinea—where he returned to renew his passport—has received global attention with calls for his release from fellow journalists, artists, activists, and human rights and press freedom organizations.

As Equatorial Guinea prepares to join the UN Security Council in January 2018, the world is watching the case of Mr. Ebalé closely. We hope that as your country takes this prominent position on the world stage, your government respects all human rights, including the right to freedom of expression, as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In this vein, we call on your Excellency, and the judicial authorities in Equatorial Guinea to respect the rights of all artists, human rights defenders, activists, and, more generally, all individuals in Equatorial Guinea who wish to exercise their right to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association without fear of being harassed or prosecuted.

To this end, we urge you to order Mr. Ebalé's immediate and unconditional release from prison.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours Sincerely,

African Movement for Democracy

Amnesty International

API Madrid

Arterial Network

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists

Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Member of the House of Lords, President of JUSTICE

Cartoonist Rights Network International

Centro para la Apertura y el Desarrollo de América Latina (CADAL)

Committee to Protect Journalists

EG Justice

English PEN

Freemuse

Ghanaian Centre of PEN International

Human Rights Watch

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International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Kenyan Centre PEN International

Kissima Diagana, Mauritanian journalist

Lucina Kathmann, PEN International Vice-President Emerita

Mexican Centre Pen International

Network for Solidarity, Empowerment and Transformation for All – NewSETA

Norwegian Centre PEN International

Open Secrets, South Africa

PEN Afrikaans

PEN-America

PEN Eritrea

PEN International

PEN-Zentrum Deutschland

Project on Organizing, Development, Education, and Research (PODER)

Reporters Without Borders

Sierra Leone Centre PEN

Swedish Centre PEN International

The Doughty Street International Media Defense Panel

Transparency International

Ugandan Centre PEN International

UNCAC Coalition

Un Mundo Sin Mordaza

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), within the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

Y'en A Marre