

June 11, 2010

Irina Bokova
Director-General of UNESCO
UNESCO Headquarters
7, place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP
France

Cc: The Executive Board of UNESCO

Dear Director-General Bokova,

We write to you, in our capacity as Laureates of the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize, to express our opposition to the UNESCO-Obiang Nguema Mbasogo International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences.

As honorees of UNESCO in recognition of our “notable contribution to the defense and/or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world,” we feel a particular responsibility to take a clear stand on this issue. We share the grave concerns voiced by thirty freedom of expression organizations in a May 20, 2010, letter, regarding the creation of the UNESCO-Obiang award in light of the severe repression in Equatorial Guinea. We also agree with the signatories to that letter that the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize itself will be undermined if UNESCO moves forward to bestow a different prize that is named for and funded by the leader of a regime that oppresses the media.

We understand that you may have the opportunity to discuss the controversy over the UNESCO-Obiang prize with the Executive Board of UNESCO at a forthcoming informational meeting on June 15. We urge you to work with the Executive Board to find a solution to the controversy that preserves the integrity of UNESCO as an organization that upholds and promotes core United Nations principles. We note that UNESCO’s constitution clearly states that “[t]he purpose of the Organization is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture *in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations.*”

We greatly appreciate the valuable work of UNESCO to advance freedom of expression, as well as your strong personal commitment to this cause. The

controversy over the UNESCO-Obiang prize threatens to undermine the valuable work of UNESCO in this regard and more broadly. We sincerely hope that you will resolve this matter at the earliest opportunity.

Yours,

Monica González (Chile, 2010)

Sonali Samarasinghe Wickrematunge (widow of Lasantha Wickrematunge, Sri Lanka, 2009)

Lydia Cacho (Mexico, 2008)

Cheng Yizhong (China, 2005)

Raúl Rivero (Cuba, 2004)

Geoffrey Nyarota (Zimbabwe, 2002)

Nizar Nayyouf (Syria, 2000)