

Equatorial Guinea

Issue

The status of human rights in Equatorial Guinea has improved but continues to concern the Government of Canada.

Background

In theory, Equatorial Guinea is a pluralistic constitutional republic with legal instruments that safeguard human rights and provide effective protection for its citizens. In reality, it is a dictatorship whose people live under surveillance, and President Obiang's hold on power depends on the effectiveness of his State Security (which includes a presidential guard of 800 men in his palace), which holds total disregard for the law. Political and economic power and legal authority are monopolized by the Fang at the expense of the Bubi, Ndowne and Ibo. Nepotism is the rule. The Constitution recognizes sexual equality; but cultural traditions still relegate women to second-class citizens. The Government does not condemn violence against women. There are no independent unions, and the press is muzzled.

The early years following Equatorial Guinea's independence (in October 1968) were dominated by a dictatorial regime that spread terror and death, a period during which Equatorial Guinea lost nearly a third of its population. Many people, particularly intellectuals, were eliminated or disappeared, and tens of thousands chose to leave the country. Although the current head of state, President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mba Nzago, declared a general amnesty when he took power in August 1979, causing many refugees to return from exile, human rights abuses (persecution, arbitrary arrest, summary execution, corruption) soon reappeared.

The political pluralism which existed at the time of independence subsequently endured great hardships. The three parties formed in 1963 were outlawed by the Macias Nguema regime in favour of a single party. President Obiang allowed a multi-party system in January 1992, authorizing 13 other parties, but repressive measures against members of the opposition continued.

The first pluralistic elections were held in 1993, but in such a climate that nearly half of the legally recognized political parties boycotted the election, fearing election fraud and repression. For a large segment of the international community, the election was a travesty of democracy. In April 1995, Obiang jailed the head of the PPGE (the main opposition party), Several Moto Nsa, and two officers, accusing them of an "attempted coup d'état". The charges against the three men lacked any credibility and they confirmed for many the paranoia of a regime turned inward. An about-face occurred in August 1995, when Moto and 25 other prisoners of conscience were freed.