

HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA

ISSUE

Having been governed by successive oppressive regimes since 1968, the government of President Obiang has begun to make some timid gestures in favour of a more open regime. However, elections held in November 1993 were a "farce" and human rights violations of the most pernicious kind continue.

BACKGROUND

Ruled by tyrants, scarred by malaria, isolated by geography and language, Equatorial Guinea has had a bloody history. Under the sanguinary hand first of Macias, responsible, according to some estimates, for the murder of 40,000 people, including 21 cabinet ministers over eleven years, and later of Obiang, his nephew's brother, who maintained his villainous repression, Equatorial Guinea has reached the bottom in almost every measure of quality of life.

Faced with the rising tide towards democracy in the 1980's, Obiang abandoned military rule in 1982 and formed a civilian government. In 1986, he allowed the formation of a single political party, his own. In 1991, he permitted the introduction of a multi-party system but harassment, arbitrary arrests, torture, especially of political opponents, persisted. Multi-party elections were set initially for September 1993 but were postponed until November.

Several donor countries tried to intervene to ensure a reasonable expression of political opinion during the campaign but were unsuccessful. Fearing fraud, half of the legalized parties eventually boycotted the poll. Large-scale abstentions and allegations of wide-spread vote-rigging marred the elections which were won by Obiang's ruling Equatorial Guinean Democratic Party. Many international observers characterized the election as a farce. Since the elections, intimidation and arrests of opposition supporters and leaders who boycotted the elections as well as other abuses by security forces, continue. Obiang has, of course, claimed that the elections have legitimized his grip on the nation. Some donors have, nevertheless, reacted to his election with veiled threats to cut aid which, because of its dependency on foreign aid, would have an important impact on the Equatorial economy.

The overall human rights situation remains sombre. Arbitrary arrests and torture were reported again in 1994. Civil and political rights are not respected. Opposition opinion is not tolerated. Discrimination, especially against foreigners like Nigerians, is rampant. Economic, social and cultural rights are rudimentary.

At the 50th session of the Commission on Human Rights, a consensus resolution was adopted expressing the Commission's concern about the human rights situation in Equatorial Guinea, and renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, M. Alejandro Artucio. The Special Rapporteur will be reporting on the latest developments before the upcoming session of the