

Multipartite municipal elections were held in September 1995. Ten parties united to form a common platform of opposition (POC). Observers pointed to the spirit of participation and felt that this experiment was a step in the right direction. The political parties even enjoyed a general ambiance of freedom and free expression during the election campaign.

Unfortunately, the balloting was fraught with irregularities, including the unwarranted seven-day delay between the vote counting and the proclamation of the official results. The opposition made an important breakthrough, but felt that it had been cheated of a victory. Repression increased, forcing a number of opponents into exile.

Presidential elections will take place in the spring of 1996, again without any mechanism having been introduced to guarantee neutrality in the election process. The election list used for the municipal elections has been done away with, and only citizens who have lived in the country for five years in a row may run; this rules out virtually all the present opposition leaders.

The UN Commission on Human Rights has consistently criticized the authorities of Equatorial Guinea. The Special Rapporteur for Equatorial Guinea will report to the Commission at its next session in March 1996.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada has recognized Equatorial Guinea since it achieved independence in 1968, but our relations have been quite limited. Our Ambassador in Libreville, Mrs. Louise Charron-Fortin, is also accredited to Malabo. Equatorial Guinea has no ambassador accredited to Canada.

Canada is concerned about the persistent human rights violations in Equatorial Guinea. Our representatives have repeatedly raised this question with the authorities of Equatorial Guinea, challenging them to take steps to open the way for the return of political refugees, bring those responsible for violations before the courts, and respect the international obligations necessary to establish constitutional rule. Ambassador Charron-Fortin took part in a mission to observe the municipal elections of September 17, 1995, accompanied by other members of the diplomatic corps. The group expressed their comments to the local authorities immediately after the balloting.

Equatorial Guinea is not a recipient of large amounts of Canadian bilateral aid. CIDA's bilateral interventions consist of a few small projects in agriculture and education under the Canadian Local Initiatives Fund valued at \$140,000 in 1994-95. Trade between our two countries has been minimal for a number of years. In 1995, we exported aircraft parts valued at \$103,000; imports were negligible. Subcontracting in the oil sector is carried out by some Canadian companies. Prospects for improvement in the near future are dim.