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HUMAN RIGHTS IN EQUATORIAL GUINEA

ISSUE

The human rights situation in Equatorial Guinea continues to be a concern to the Canadian government.

BACKGROUND

Independent trade unions are nonexistent. The opinion press is muzzled. The Fang tribe monopolizes political and economic power, to the detriment of the Bubi, Ndowe and Ibo. Nepotism is the rule. Sexual equality is recognized in the constitution, but the weight of cultural traditions relegating women to the background is still felt. Violence against women goes unpunished by the government. The people live under surveillance; the State Security, including an 800-strong presidential guard in the palace itself, is what keeps President Obiang in power. Equatorial Guinea is regularly denounced by observers such as Amnesty International and the United Nations.

The first years after Equatorial Guinea achieved independence (in October 1968) were dominated by a dictatorial regime of terror and death. Equatorial Guinea lost nearly one-third of its population. Many, especially intellectuals, were suppressed or done away with, and tens of thousands fled to Spain, Gabon (some 50,000) and Cameroon (30,000). Although President Teorodo Obiang Nguema Mba Nzago, the present Head of State, declared a general amnesty when he came to power in August 1979, resulting in the return from exile of a large number of refugees, it was not long before human rights violations (persecution, unwarranted arrests, summary executions, etc.) and corruption were again a part of the scene.

Political pluralism, accepted when the country achieved independence, was severely tested afterwards: the three parties formed in 1963 were banned by the Macias Nguema party in favour of a single party. President Obiang also formed his single party, the PDGE, in 1987. Elections were held in 1982, 1988 and 1989, rubber-stamping the single party's monopoly. The CCR was created by the exiled opposition in 1981. President Obiang allowed multipartism in January 1992, authorizing 13 other parties, but repression against members of the opposition continued.

The first pluralist elections were held in 1993 amidst such falsification that nearly half of the legally recognized political parties boycotted the voting, suspecting electoral fraud and repression. Much of the international community felt that this was a mere similitude of democracy. In April 1995 Severo Moto Nsa, leader of the PPGE, and two officers, were imprisoned by Obiang for a so-called attempted coup d'état. The charges against the three men were totally bereft of credibility and in many minds underscored the paranoia of this inwardly-turned regime. However, an about-face occurred in August 1995, when Moto and 25 other prisoners of conscience were released.