

**Unesco to Give Science Prize Financed by Dictator**  
**The New York Times**  
**July 13, 2012**  
**By Steven Erlanger**

PARIS — Over the objections of the United States and other Western nations, Unesco will award on Tuesday a prize financed by the dictator of Equatorial Guinea, who has been accused by rights groups of embezzling hundreds of millions of dollars from his tiny, impoverished but oil-rich West African state, Unesco officials and Western diplomats said Friday.

The award no longer bears the name of the president of Equatorial Guinea, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Instead, it is called the Unesco-Equatorial Guinea International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences, and it is scheduled to be awarded during a day of seminars and celebrations here in the presence, according to a draft schedule, of Mr. Obiang himself.

But it is not yet clear that he will attend, Unesco officials said, in part because of the legal troubles facing his son, the country's vice president. A French court on Friday issued a warrant for the arrest of the son, Teodorin Nguema Obiang Mangué, after he refused to be interviewed by magistrates about allegations of money laundering and embezzlement, claiming diplomatic immunity.

Since 2010, French judges have been looking into claims of corruption under President Obiang, President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of Congo and Omar Bongo, a president of Gabon who died in 2009.

The prize was first proposed in 2008. The United States and other countries blocked the award for years, but in March, the 58-nation executive board of Unesco — the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization — voted to go ahead.

The executive board also chose to dismiss concerns by the organization's legal counsel that the award violated protocols by being financed directly by the government and not by the nongovernmental organization listed in the prize statutes. The counsel had recommended that the funds not be disbursed for the prize.

The director general of Unesco, Irina Bokova, also opposed the award but felt she had to follow the wishes of the executive board, Unesco officials said. Ms. Bokova, through a spokeswoman, declined to comment on Friday. But in a letter to the chairman of a group of Western European and North American diplomats on Thursday, Ms. Bokova wrote that she was "constitutionally obliged to implement the decisions of the executive board," and that had the board not acted, "I would have continued to suspend the implementation of the prize." The group had complained in a letter to Ms. Bokova on Monday that "the prize is detrimental to the reputation of Unesco," and that the board ignored the advice of Unesco's legal office.

Later on Friday, the group wrote another letter to the executive board urging that the prize not be awarded until the legal issues are resolved, "so there is no cloud of illegality hanging over the prize." The letters were provided to The New York Times by diplomats who oppose the prize.

Mr. Obiang, who took power in a coup in 1979, provided \$3 million over five years; half the money is to go to recipients and half is to cover the costs of selecting the winners, who are all distinguished scientists. There are three winners a year, who each get

\$100,000, a diploma and a statuette by the Equatorial Guinean artist Leandro Mbomio Nsue, a former government minister.

David T. Killion, the United States ambassador to Unesco, said Friday that while Washington supported recognition of African scientists, "We condemn Unesco's decision to award this prize against the wishes of many of its own member states and the international human-rights community."

He said that the source of the prize money was "questionable," and that international rights organizations and nongovernmental organizations considered Equatorial Guinea "one of the world's worst human-rights offenders." He said it "scores poorly on most global indices related to freedom of expression and access to education." Despite its relatively recent oil wealth, the tiny country has one of the highest infant-mortality rates in the world and an average life expectancy of 62.75 years.

The influence of the United States in Unesco has been reduced since it cut off all its financing for the organization — once 22 percent of the total budget — because the Palestinian Authority was made a full member last October. Washington said it had to cut off financing under existing legislation, and the Obama administration has thus far failed to persuade Congress to change its mind.

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