

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST UNABLE TO LEAVE COUNTRY

Ramón Esono Ebalé, a cartoonist and human rights activist who spent almost five months in prison after being falsely accused of counterfeiting money, remains unable to leave Equatorial Guinea due to authorities failing to provide him with a passport.

Ramón Esono Ebalé was released from Malabo Black Beach prison on 7 March 2018, after spending more than five months in pre-trial detention. All charges of 'counterfeiting money' were dropped after the state's main witness retracted his testimony and admitted that he had been asked to accuse Ramón of counterfeiting activities. Ramón was arrested and detained in the capital of the country, Malabo, on 16 September 2017, and questioned over his cartoons that criticised Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang and his government.

Since his release, Ramón Esono Ebalé has been trying to join his wife and 6 year old daughter, who he hasn't seen for more than seven months, in El Salvador. However, more than two months after his release, Ramón Esono Ebalé remains stuck in Equatorial Guinea as a result of undue delays by the national authorities to provide him with a passport that would allow him to travel and reunite with his family.

Ramón Esono Ebalé submitted the required paperwork to obtain his new passport when he returned to Equatorial Guinea, on 29 August 2017, after living abroad for several years. The process to renew a passport usually takes only a few weeks, and there are concerns that delays by the authorities to provide Ramón Esono Ebalé with this travel document are a continuation of the harassment he has faced since coming back to Equatorial Guinea.

Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Equatorial Guinea is a state party, enshrines the right of everyone to be free to leave any country, including his own. The Human Rights Committee has explained that the refusal by a state to issue a passport, or unreasonable delays in the issuance of travel documents, may deprive individuals from their right to leave their own country.

Ramón Esono Ebalé has told Amnesty International that the fact that he cannot leave the country to be with his family is a further element of the harassment he has faced. "I have a weird feeling. This is my town, this is my country but this is not like that how I would like to be in here. The situation that I am living right now for me it is a kidnaping. It is a kidnaping of the state of Equatorial Guinea against me. For me literally is a kidnaping".

Please write immediately in French or your own language urging the authorities to:

- Promptly provide Ramón Esono Ebalé with a passport to travel freely, including to leave his own country, and ensure his right to freedom of movement is fully respected;
- Ensure that the right to freedom of expression is respected and protected in Equatorial Guinea;
- Ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders and activists to work without fear of punishment, reprisal, or intimidation.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 JUNE 2018 TO:

President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea
Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo
Palacio Presidencial
Avenida de la Libertad
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
Salutation: His Excellency

Minister of the Interior
Minister for the Interior and Local Corporations
Clemente Engonga Nguema Onguene
Ministerio del Interior,
Malabo, Equatorial Guinea
Salutation: Dear Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. HER EXCELLENCY MRS MARI-CRUZ EVUNA ANDEME, Embassy of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, 13 Park Place St James' SW1A 1LP, 020 7499 6867, Fax 020 7499 6782, embarege-londres@embarege-londres.org, www.embarege-londres.org, Salutation: Your Excellency

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Ramón Esono Ebalé is a 40-year-old Equatorial Guinean cartoonist and human rights activist who has used his art work to criticize the human rights situation in his country. Ramón was arrested in the capital of the country, Malabo, on 16 September 2017. He was leaving a restaurant at around 7pm in the company of two Spanish nationals, when state security agents arrested them. The three were handcuffed, had their mobile phones confiscated, and were then taken to the Office against Terrorism and Dangerous Activities located at the Central Police Station. Once there, they were questioned by more than a dozen security agents. After answering questions regarding their reasons for being in the country and their relationship with Ramón Esono Ebalé, the two Spanish nationals were released. However, Ramón Esono Ebalé remained at the police station being questioned about his cartoons that criticised Equatorial Guinea's President Teodoro Obiang and his government. The security agents warned Ramón that his cartoons depicting the president and him sharing them on the internet, could be considered defamatory.

On 7 March 2018, Ramón Esono Ebalé was finally released following a decision by a court in Malabo. Eight days earlier, on 27 February 2018, the charge of counterfeiting was dropped after the state's main witness retracted his testimony against Ramón Esono Ebalé and admitted that he had been asked to accuse him of counterfeiting activities. (For more information see <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr24/8000/2018/en/>)

In Equatorial Guinea, human rights defenders and activists are regularly harassed, arbitrary arrested and detained for their peaceful and legitimate work. All these attacks are meant to intimidate them and force them into silence.

Equatorial Guinea is a country with a serious record of human rights violations, including violations to the rights to freedom of expression and of association.

Name: Ramón Esono Ebalé
Gender m/f: male

UA: 89/18 Index: AFR 24/8363/2018 Issue Date: 9 May 2018