

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER ARRESTED ONCE AGAIN

On 1 August, Equatorial Guinean human rights defender Joaquín Elo Ayeto was arrested at his house in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea's capital, when members of the Gendarmerie forcibly entered his house and took him away. He was accused of carrying out illegal activities through the civil society platform, Somos +, which he is a member of and which the authorities claim is not legally registered. He was initially sent to Malabo Black Beach prison before being transferred on 13 August to Oveng Azem prison, in the eastern city of Mongomo, where he is held in pretrial detention. The Equatorial Guinean authorities must immediately release Joaquín Elo Ayeto from arbitrary detention which stems solely from his work as a human rights defender.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo

President of Equatorial Guinea
Palacio Presidencial de Guinea Ecuatorial
Avenida de Libertad,
Malabo, Guinea Ecuatorial
X/Twitter - @teonguema (Vice President)

His Excellency,

*I am writing to bring to your attention the case of human rights defender, **Joaquín Elo Ayeto**, a member of civil society platform Somos+ and the political opposition party Convergence for Social Democracy, who was arrested on 1 August and is currently being detained in Oveng Azem prison, in Equatorial Guinea's eastern city of Mongomo.*

On 1 August, Joaquín Elo Ayeto was in his house in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea's capital, when he was arbitrary arrested by members of the Gendarmerie who forcibly entered the house and took him away. He was taken to the Malabo gendarmerie station known as la Luna. Once there, he was accused of carrying out illegal activities through his organization Somos + which, they said, has not been properly registered. Three days later, on 4 August, Joaquín Elo Ayeto's lawyer went to the gendarmerie station where he was also arrested and accused of representing an illegal organization. He was detained there for more than 48 hours, until he was released on 6 August. On 9 August, Joaquín Elo Ayeto was transferred to Malabo Black Beach prison and on 13 August to Oveng Azem prison where he is currently held in pre-trial detention.

In June 2020, Joaquín Elo Ayeto applied for registration of Somos+ to the Ministry of Interior and Local Corporations. However, several days later, he was notified that the application should be validated by the General Direction of Human Rights, although such validation is not required by the law.

I would like to remind you that Article 13 of the Equatorial Guinea Constitution guarantees the rights to freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly.

In light of the above, I urge you to immediately release Joaquín Elo Ayeto as his arbitrary detention stems from his peaceful activism and the exercise of his constitutional rights of freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly. Pending his release, I urge you to ensure that he is protected from torture and other ill-treatment and has access to a lawyer, who must be allowed to carry out their work freely and without fear of reprisal.

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Joaquín Elo Ayeto is a member of the opposition political party Convergence for Social Democracy (*Convergencia Para la Democracia Social*), (CPDS) and a member of the coordination body for Somos+, a civil society platform established in 2015 which carries out human rights work.

Joaquin Elo Ayeto's detention took place a few days after he, with some other representatives from Annabon island, visited the French embassy in Malabo. The purpose of the meeting was to reinforce cooperation between the embassy and the human rights platform Somos+. Somos+ was working to expose the human rights violations that have been taking place recently in the Annabon island following the demonstrations of its inhabitants against the impact of some mining dynamite explosions taking place.

According to some media reports, a gendarmerie officer said that "Joaquin operates clandestinely and his association is illegal".

This is not the first time that Joaquín Elo Ayeto has been targeted for his human rights work. Over the past eight years, he has been a victim of threats, harassment and multiple arrests and detentions. On 29 November 2016, two military officers beat him after he posted an article online about an officer refusing to pay a toll. On 27 June 2017, he was arrested again after he and others from Somos+ had taken part in an event calling for justice for the death of a young taxi driver, allegedly killed by the army. A week later he was released. On 25 February 2019, he was arrested at his house in Malabo after being accused of having information on a plot to kill the president. He was allegedly subjected to torture at least twice while being held at the Central Police Station, which resulted in physical injuries. He was transferred to the Malabo Black Beach Prison where he spent almost a year in pre-trial detention until President Obiang ordered his release on 14 February 2020. He was again detained in December 2022 for organizing a conference on human rights and corruption in Equatorial Guinea "without official authorization" on International Human Rights Day.

In a short video posted on Facebook a few hours before his arrest on 1 August 2024, Joaquin Elo Ayeto said he was tired of being constantly arrested.

Article 13 of the Equatorial Guinea Constitution guarantees the rights to freedom of association, expression and peaceful assembly.

On 3 August, Angel Obama Obiang Eseng, Joaquin Elo Ayeto's lawyer was arrested and detained for 48 hours just for assisting his client. He was accused of providing legal representation for an illegal organization. He was subsequently released. However, on 14 August, he was temporary suspended as member of the Equatorial Guinea BAR Association, preventing him from practicing as lawyer. According to the Bar Association, defending Joaquin Elo Ayeto's organization was contrary to the association's statute. In addition to Joaquín Elo Ayeto, Angel Obama was also the lawyer of other human rights defenders and was working on other human rights cases.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: Spanish

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: 31 January 2025

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PRONOUN: Joaquin Elo Ayeto (he/his/him)

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

Vice-president, Teodoro Nguema
X/Twitter: @teonguema

Mrs Maria Jesús Diallo Besari
1st Secretary & Chargé d'Affaires a.i.
Embassy of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea
13 Park Place St James' SW1A 1LP
020 7659 9090
visa@egembassy.london
www.embassyofequatorialguinea.co.uk
Monday-Friday 09.30-15.00
Salutation: Your Excellency