

## BRIEFING FOR IX SULLIVAN SUMMIT INVITEES

### Background on Equatorial Guinea

President Obiang, in power for 33 years, is the world's longest-ruling head of state. He has claimed at least 95 percent of the vote in the six presidential elections since he seized power in 1979 – elections marred by irregularities, intimidation, and voter fraud. His ruling party and its allies control 99 of the country's 100 seats in parliament. He exercises extensive control over all branches of government.

His predecessor, Francisco Macías Nguema, ruled the West African country with great brutality. Obiang served in various posts under the Macías government, including as head of the National Guard and chief of Black Beach Prison, where inmates were subjected to severe torture. As much as a third of the population had been killed or exiled by the time Obiang deposed Macías in a 1979 coup. Although Obiang's methods have been less extreme by comparison and the incidence of torture has declined in recent years, he also rules by repression and fear.

In early 2010 his government abducted four Equatoguineans from Benin, where they were living as refugees, held them in secret detention for months and tortured them to get them to confess to participating in an alleged February 2009 coup attempt. The dissident exiles were later executed by firing squad within an hour of being convicted by a grossly unfair military trial. Their families were not permitted to see them.

Basic civil liberties are denied to the people of Equatorial Guinea. Freedom of speech and the press are routinely curtailed. Civil society groups are not permitted to operate freely and independently. Equatorial Guinea does not have a single registered human rights group, and the few local activists who seek to address human rights related issues are vulnerable to intimidation, harassment, and reprisals.

The country's beleaguered political opposition is pressured through various means, including arbitrary arrest. A leading opposition member, who is also one of the country's most respected doctors and human rights activists, was detained for four months in early 2012 on politically motivated charges. He was granted a partial presidential pardon and released from prison following an unwarranted conviction, but official harassment against him continues.

Oil was discovered in Equatorial Guinea in the mid-1990s. It is now the fourth-largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa. Given its high oil revenues and tiny population of approximately 700,000 people, Equatorial Guinea has the highest per-capita gross domestic product of any African country and one of the highest in the world. This natural resource wealth has offered the Obiang government an opportunity to address dire social needs, in keeping with its obligations to advance

the economic and social rights of its citizens.

While the government has invested some of that money in infrastructure such as roads and power plants, oil proceeds have funded ostentatious lifestyles for the small elite surrounding the president and a massive building spree largely designed to impress foreign visitors. The Sullivan Summit is slated to take place at a luxury \$830 million conference center and resort complex built by the government in Sipopo, outside of Malabo. The Sipopo complex's 52 luxury villas and a mile-long artificial beach stand in stark contrast to the dilapidated houses and unpaved roads of the slums where poor residents of Malabo struggle to meet their basic needs.

The government's public investments in social spending, which have increased somewhat compared with earlier years, prioritize projects that have little direct benefit for the poor. Two new, ultra-modern hospitals serve the country's elite while most of the country's people lack reliable access to running water, reliable electricity, quality education or primary health care. There have been some areas of relative progress in recent years, such as reduction of alarmingly high rates of maternal and child mortality, thanks in part to a malaria prevention program largely funded by foreign oil companies. Yet the rates remain high, with nearly one in every eight children dying before his or her fifth birthday, according to 2010 United Nations (UN) and World Bank statistics.

The government does not publish basic information related to its budgets and spending. Citizens and journalists lack the freedom to monitor the use of the country's natural resource wealth. Equatorial Guinea was expelled from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, an international effort to promote more openness about how countries profit from their natural resources, in April 2010 for failing to meet its basic requirements. The Obiang government has not reapplied nor has it made progress to address the limits on civil society participation that marred its earlier candidacy.

The government of President Obiang is rife with allegations of corruption tied to Equatorial Guinea's natural resource wealth. High-level government officials, including members of his family, are under investigation for corruption and money laundering in France, Spain, and the United States. President Obiang's eldest son and potential successor, Teodoro ("Teodorín") Nguema Mangue, is the subject of ongoing corruption investigations in France and the United States. According to a legal complaint filed by the United States Department of Justice in June, Teodorín spent more than \$300 million to buy mansions on four continents and make other high-ticket purchases between 2000 and 2011, a startling amount given his official government salary of less than \$100,000 per year. Justice Department documents detail instances of alleged extortion and embezzlement of public funds by Teodorín while he served as the country's Minister of Agriculture and Forestry for more than a decade.

On July 10 of this year, French judicial authorities approved an international arrest warrant for

Teodorín on money laundering and corruption charges. On July 19, French police seized a luxurious, six-story mansion in a chic Parisian neighborhood valued at approximately €100-€150 million (US \$122-184 million) as part of their ongoing investigation into his alleged money laundering activities in France. In two previous seizures, they reclaimed high-end cars, artwork, antiquities, wine, and designer clothes valued at more than €45 million (\$55 million).

Through his lawyers, Teodorín has denied all corruption allegations in France and the United States. Obiang and his government have vociferously defended Teodorín. In May, Obiang promoted his son to a new post – second vice president – which is not specified in the country's constitution. The Obiang government and Teodorín's lawyers then asserted that the new post granted him immunity from prosecution abroad.

### **Public Relations Efforts and the Sullivan Summit**

President Obiang's government has gone to great lengths and expense to seek to polish its tarnished image. It spent more than \$13 million in the United States over the past decade on lobbyists and public relations firms, and has financed similar efforts to seek improved ties in Europe. He has frequently sought to enlist the support and endorsement of respected organizations, such as with his push to sponsor a UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization prize. UNESCO issued the prize only after dropping his name from the award.

In his drive to improve his reputation and global standing, President Obiang has frequently pledged to improve governance of the country. In a high-profile speech at the Cape Town Global Forum in June 2010, for example, Obiang promised greater transparency, social development, legal reform, and respect for fundamental freedoms. In 2011, he delivered speeches to the UN General Assembly and, as the chairman at that time of the African Union, praised democracy and human rights principles. In March 2010, his government agreed to carry out dozens of recommendations issued during the UN Human Rights Council's review of Equatorial Guinea's human rights performance.

But Obiang's government has made very limited progress to realize any of these commitments. Constitutional changes approved in November 2011, for example, place term limits on the presidency, but otherwise entrench and expand Obiang's unchecked powers. They allow him to name an undisclosed number of members of a newly created Senate and to appoint or approve the heads of "independent" institutions ostensibly charged with improving government accountability.

There are early indications that the Sullivan Summit may serve as a platform to present a falsely positive image of President Obiang and his government. The Sullivan Foundation has said in a news media statement that President Obiang will host its IX Sullivan Summit in an effort to "combat the negative image of Equatorial Guinea." It added that the event would "showcase to the international community the advancement Equatorial Guinea has made in human development

and the human rights arena.”

In addition, the summit registration materials circulated by the foundation present Obiang as a reformer who “has placed a tremendous emphasis on social development and good governance.” The materials do not acknowledge the well-documented problems of harsh repression, grinding poverty and allegations of rampant corruption in Equatorial Guinea. The foundation also issued a news media statement defending its choice of locale for the IX Sullivan Summit, arguing among other points that “President Obiang has modernized his country and has implemented major political reforms.”

The foundation has stated that human rights would be a major theme of the summit but there is no information to suggest that it intends to include anyone on the program who would speak critically about the government’s record, such as local human rights defenders.

There is already precedent for President Obiang’s government to use the Sullivan Foundation to promote a better image. In December 2011, shortly after accepting the foundation’s “Beacon of Africa” award on behalf of the African Union, for which he was then serving as the rotating president, President Obiang claimed that he was personally granted the award in “recognition of his leadership.” This claim was repeatedly cited by the government of Equatorial Guinea as an indication of the international respect Obiang purportedly had earned.