

Statement of Gustavo Gallón Giraldo, Former Special Rapporteur on Equatorial Guinea

Side Event Equatorial Guinea, Geneva March 27, 2014.

Dear friends,

I am sorry not to be present at this meeting to which I have been invited by the organizations of Equatorial Guinea. A personal difficulty has prevented me at the last-minute to accompany them on this side event regarding the human rights situation in the country in which I was the last Special Rapporteur appointed by the Commission on Human Rights, until 2002 when the post was abolished by 26 votes in favour and 26 votes against. It was a post that the national civil society always considered of vital importance.

The words that will follow are a clear manifestation of my commitment and solidarity as a human rights defender with all those who struggle for years to find the path of respect and protection of the rights of all the people of Equatorial Guinea and who dream of the establishment of a democratic State.

I would like to greet the human rights defenders who are present here today and extend my sentiments of admiration. I met some of them in Equatorial Guinea. I invite you all to listen to them carefully.

According to reports from civil society, the media and of the few special procedures that have been able to visit the country, the situation has not changed in Equatorial Guinea. Quite the contrary: many of us think it has gotten worse.

The civil society organizations working in the country, and calling for the respect of human rights, do so in the midst of enormous difficulties and virtually with no financial resources. Human rights defenders are imprisoned and persecuted, as well as political opponents. The rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association are strongly repressed. One could say that undoubtedly there is no independent press, nor adequate access to the media in Equatorial Guinea.

Torture and arbitrary detention continue to be regular practices in detention centres. Unable to exercise a free political opposition, one can speak of a justice dependent on the executive power. The right to free movement in the interior of the country is strongly limited by constant military checkpoints and controls of the armed forces across the country.

Approximately 80% of the population lives in poverty, despite the enormous economic resources derived from the export of oil and gas that the country receives for years now. Equatorial Guinea is the African country with the highest average income in Africa, equivalent to that of Spain and Italy. Social investment is minimal and the country's resources are in the hands of a few people.

The information which I have, indicates that the violation of human rights is systematic.

Equatorial Guinea is one of the most scandalous cases of human rights violations, and since the abolishment of the mandate which I had the honour to exercise, the case of Equatorial

Guinea has been made “invisible” and it has been forgotten by various supervising United Nations bodies.

Following the latest Universal Periodic Review (UPR) which took place 4 years ago, Equatorial Guinea has neither implemented the accepted recommendations nor has it made the necessary reforms proposed by those recommendations. This is something that these undoubtedly credible human rights defenders present in this side-event can confirm.

Member States and observers of the Human Rights Council have an opportunity in the coming May to make important recommendations to Equatorial Guinea during the second UPR and I respectfully invite them to do so, as a first step, which can contribute to the finding of real solutions.

Finally, I invite the States and civil society organizations to support the initiative of the human rights defenders present here today, who intend to start a campaign so that the Human Rights Council performs a closer monitoring of the situation in the country, and for this they are convinced that it is necessary that Equatorial Guinea has again a Special Rapporteur. This should help protect, respect and guarantee the rights of Guineans, as it has done in the past.

The organizations that have organized this side-event, have realized throughout this week a large number of meetings with diplomatic missions of the different regional groups. Some of them consider that this initiative can succeed as it did in the case of Belorussia.

For our friends in Equatorial Guinea, the path is marked, so as one anonymous phrase says:

"There are those who do not lose anything by trying, but there are those who lose everything if they don't."

Thank you.

Gustavo Gallón Giraldo

Human Rights Defender