

URGENT ACTION

DETAINED CARTOONIST MUST BE FREED IMMEDIATELY
Ramón Esono Ebalé, an Equatorial Guinean cartoonist and activist, has spent almost 5 months in prison. He is being held in pre-trial detention waiting for a trial date. He was charged with counterfeiting money, but Ramón has denied the allegations.

On 16 February, Equatorial Guinean cartoonist and activist **Ramón Esono Ebalé** will have spent five months in pre-trial detention. He 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. The cartoons were shared on the internet. He was informed that he had formally been charged with counterfeiting money on 7 December 2017, after having already spent three months in detention without charge. Ramón has denied the allegations against him and insists that he is innocent.

Ramón is currently in pre-trial detention at Malabo Black Beach prison. The court is yet to set a date for his trial.

On 31 January, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa, Commissioner Lawrence Mute, sent a Letter of Appeal to the President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. In his letter, he raised concerns over allegations regarding Ramón Esono Ebalé's arrest and his remand to pre-trial detention. He requested clarification on the allegations of this detention and suggested that it may constitute a violation of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Despite the harsh living conditions in the Malabo Black Beach prison, Ramón is in good spirits. He shared the following message: *"I want to thank all those who are still fighting, hoping I am released/freed from the current situation, which I have nothing to do with. I have my hopes set on still presenting "#218Empire" [my new piece] in Vienna, as planned, and asserting the national dream of being at the level of other nations, with the only thing I'm good at: DRAWING. I will not give up. I was not born with the world at my feet. I was born to my mother's happiness. And today I live to draw on behalf of my people. Thank you."*

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ramón Esono Ebalé, as he has been detained solely for the peaceful exercise of his right to freedom of expression;
- Calling on them to ensure that the criminal justice system is not misused to target or harass human rights defenders;
- Calling on them to ensure that the right to freedom of expression is respected and protected in Equatorial Guinea;
- Calling on the authorities to 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 26 MARCH 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 Foreign Affairs

Mr. Simeón Oyono Esono Angue,
 Ministro de Asuntos Exteriores y
 Cooperación Internacional
 Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Director of the Malabo Black Beach Prison
 Calle de Kenia
 Malabo, Equatorial Guinea

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. This is the third update of UA 219/17. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/af24/7586/2017/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 40 year old Equatorial Guinean cartoonist and activist, Ramón Esono Ebalé, was arrested in Malabo, the capital of the country, on 16 September. 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 mobiles 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, the two Spanish nationals were released. However, Ramón remained at the police station and was 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.

Ramón, who has been living abroad for several years, had returned to his country on 29 August 2017 to renew his passport. He was in the country waiting for his new passport to be processed when he was arrested.

On 7 December 2017, Ramón was unexpectedly brought to Court. The Court served Ramón with an indictment (Auto de procesamiento) which was dated 27 November 2017 in which he was charged with counterfeiting money.

Human rights defenders and activists in Equatorial Guinea are regularly harassed, intimidated, arbitrarily arrested and detained simply for the work they do. All these attacks are meant to obstruct their work and force them into silence.

On 2 February 2018, the Spokesperson on the human rights situation in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea of the European Union (EU) issued a statement expressing serious concern for the continuing restrictions of freedoms and arrests in the country. For the EU, these restrictions confirm the serious deterioration of the human rights situation in the country. The EU also reminded Equatorial Guinea that, as a member of the United Nations Security Council, it is expected to take all necessary steps to fulfil its international obligations regarding human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Further information on UA: 219/17 Index: AFR 24/7867/2018 Issue Date: 12 February 2018