

URGENT ACTION

CARTOONIST HELD IN PRE-TRIAL DETENTION

Ramón Esono Ebalé, an Equatorial Guinean cartoonist and activist, has now been charged with counterfeiting money and is being held in pre-trial detention after being detained without charge for almost 3 months.

Ramón Esono Ebalé, cartoonist and activist from Equatorial Guinea, who was detained on 16 September in Malabo, has now been formally charged with counterfeiting money by a Court in Malabo (*Juzgado de Instrucción Único*).

On 7 December Ramón was unexpectedly brought to Court, after the judicial year had officially closed on 30 November. None of his lawyers had been notified about the hearing. However, Ramón's father managed to contact one of his lawyers who was fortunately available to assist Ramón. The Court served Ramón with an indictment (*Auto de procesamiento*) which was dated 27 November.

The indictment accuses Ramón of counterfeiting money and orders his pre-trial detention with bail set at 20 million XOF (35,000 USD). During his pre-trial detention, Ramón is allowed access to his family and lawyers.

Previously, on Saturday 2 December, one of the lawyers publicly denounced Ramón's situation on the radio and accused the judge of perversion of justice. According to the lawyer, the unexpected and hurried nature of the indictment hearing could be a response to the interview.

His indictment was only made public 7 days after the end of the judicial year, which means that Ramón and his lawyers cannot appeal for his release at least until the judicial year resumes on 15 January 2018.

All previous appeals and pleadings submitted by the defence have been ignored by the judge. Ramón's lawyers are emphasizing the importance of a fair trial for Ramón. They continue to firmly believe that Ramón's detention and charges are in connection with his art work, which he uses to critique the human rights situation in the country.

Please write immediately in Spanish or your own language:

- Urging the authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Ramón Esono Ebalé as he appears to be detained solely for his peaceful activism;
- Calling on them to ensure that while he is still detained, that all his due process rights are respected
- Calling on them to ensure that the right to freedom of expression is respected in Equatorial Guinea;
- Calling on the authorities to ensure a safe and enabling environment for human rights defenders to work without fear of punishment, reprisal, or intimidation.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 24 JANUARY 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

And copies to:

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

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the second update of UA 219/17. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr24/7135/2017/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The 40 year old Equatorial Guinean cartoonist and activist, **Ramón Esono Ebalé**, was arrested in the capital of the country, Malabo 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 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.

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

The Cartoonists Rights Network International, on 2 November, announced that Ramón had been awarded with the '2017 Award for Courage in Editorial Cartooning'. This is an annual award given to a cartoonist or cartoonists who have exhibited great courage and self-sacrifice in the pursuit of their craft and in the exercise of free speech.

In Equatorial Guineam human rights defenders and activists are regularly harassed, arbitrary arrested and detained for their 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 freedom of expression and freedom of association.

Name: Ramón Esono Ebalé

Gender m/f: m

Further Information on UA: 219/17 Index: AFR 24/7586/2017 Issue Date: 13 December 2017