

Ban Ki-moon
Secretary-General
United Nations
760 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Wednesday, February 23, 2011

RE: Condemnation of Meeting with Dictator Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

The Gabonese people as well as the Gabonese Community residing in the United States are stunned by your decision to meet with dictator Ali Bongo Ondimba as part of the February 24-26 Gabon/Equatorial Guinea/United Nations tripartite talks on the M'Banié island dispute.

We are particularly perplexed by the fact that you should choose to do so at the very time when oppressed peoples across Africa and the Middle East are seeking relief from decades of oppressive regimes whose genocidal trade and tendencies against their people, of late, has seemed to encounter only indifference from the United Nations, and particularly from yourself, Mr. Secretary-General, especially in matters pertaining to sub-Saharan countries such as Gabon, Togo, Congo Brazzaville, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, to name just a few.

While you have indeed been very vocal in the specific case of Laurent Gbagbo in Côte d'Ivoire, and recently, in the case of Muammar al-Gaddafi of Libya, we are wondering what sorts of bloodsheds and genocides you expect to see in Gabon and other such countries before you decide to put those countries on a United States agenda seeking a general moratorium on democracy in Africa, a move that would, at least, begin to point fingers directly at those regimes that have been traumatizing their people and crushing their most fundamental human rights aspirations?

Does it, Mr. Secretary-General, have to take a bloodshed and the full-blown genocide of the Gabonese people for you to begin to put into question the legitimacy of Ali Bongo Ondimba and demand from him that he heed the will of the Gabonese people who, for 43 years have suffered from the corruption and animalities of the Bongo family? How many Gabonese, Mr. Secretary-General, must begin to die before the United Nations begins to fulfill the mandate bestowed upon it by the nations of the world, a mandate that is as much concerned with conflict resolution as it is of conflict prevention?

It seems to us that the United Nations, especially under your leadership and that of your predecessor, has abdicated its responsibility as a conflict prevention body, and, thus, paradoxically limited its role to:

- 1) Letting countries become ablaze with political strife and genocides stemming from reactions to dictatorship,
- 2) And then pretending to come in to extinguish the blaze when the fire has been lit and crimes of genocide against the peoples committed?

It would seem to us that rolling out the red carpet to welcome dictators such as Ali Bongo Ondimba at the United Nations is pretty much against the various United Nations charters and resolutions on Human Rights. And we know very well, Mr. Secretary-General, that you are fully aware of the fact that the Bongo family has ruled over the Gabonese republic by dictate for more than 43 years. We know you are also aware of the fact that they have been able to stay in power for so long only because of police brutality, corruption, and the unconstitutional practice of rigged and unfair elections. What legitimacy, then, does the United Nations find in a Bongo regime that has despotically usurped the right of the Gabonese people to self-determination for 43 years, and is looking to continue to do so for generations to come if not stopped and overthrown NOW? We, the Gabonese people, certainly refuse to be ruled by the same family for 70 years, which is going to happen if Ali Bongo is allowed to stay in power for the next 28 years as planned, and this after his deceased father held the country hostage for 42 years until death took him away in June 2009.

We go no further than the various statements by the U.S. Department of State's annual Human Rights reports, which have asserted that Gabon is a country "dominated by a strong presidency and the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), which has held power since 1968 [Omar Bongo seized power in 1967]." The reports have further described the country as one in which the "human rights record remained poor," with "limited ability of citizens to change their government; use of excessive force, including torture toward prisoners and detainees; harsh prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; an inefficient judiciary susceptible to government influence; restrictions on the right to privacy; restrictions on freedom of speech, press, association, and movement; harassment of

refugees; widespread government corruption; violence and societal discrimination against women, persons with HIV/AIDS, and noncitizen Africans; trafficking in persons, particularly children; and forced labor and child labor.”

Also, among the close to 300 documents recently leaked by WikiLeaks that feature American diplomatic cables concerning Gabon, we find clear and convincing evidence that the United States does not really believe in the legitimacy of the Ali Bongo regime. For instance:

- In Cable No. 1473 of November 2009, an American Ambassador charges that France has had a hard time implementing Sarkozy’s “rupture” policy whenever crises related to issues of governance have erupted in its former colonies, such as Mauritania, Gabon, Madagascar, Niger and Guinea Conakry. According to the cable, France has tended to favor the status quo to the detriment of the noble principles of democracy and human rights. We note by passing that so is the United Nations doing in the very case of Gabon, that is, overriding the noble principles of democracy by giving legitimacy to a dictator whose victory the American diplomatic cables and even French sources have described as resulting from an inversion of votes. Otherwise, according to the cable, why would the U.S. Secretary of State herself, have warned President Obama against recognizing Ali Bongo as President of Gabon?
- In Cable No. 215456 issued by the American Embassy in Yaoundé, Cameroon, Mr. Ali Bongo Ondimba and his deceased father Omar Bongo Ondimba are shown as having directly benefited from, and plotted, the misappropriation of close to \$36 million stolen from the coffers of Banque des Etats d’Afrique Central (BEAC). The Gabonese governor appointed by Omar Bongo had also fraudulently diverted some 500 million Euros of the bank’s money into risky investments in France whose primary aim was to make such funds available to the President of Gabon’s family and political friends in Paris.

The above two cables by U.S. diplomatic officials summarize in very poignant fashion the main facets of the Bongo regime in Gabon: its political survival has been based only on rigged elections, rampant corruption, despotic rule, and use of military force to coerce the People into submission.

We do hereby, Mr. Secretary-General, dare to insist upon the need for the United Nations to stand for principles of democracy and human rights around the world, especially in Africa, and particularly in Gabon.

We simply cannot understand why the international community would ask for the resignation of dictators Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, or forcefully demand, in the case of Côte d’Ivoire, the departure of Laurent Gbagbo following an unconstitutional decision to stay in power, and not support the desire of the Gabonese people to get rid of their dictator, especially one who, like Mr. Laurent Gbagbo, has clearly not taken the democratic will of his people into account.

We believe that receiving dictator Ali Bongo at the United Nations and according him the honor of being seen with you is a move that is basically condoning the reign of permanent dictatorship and terror in Gabon, and the continuation of human right abuses. Omar Bongo reigned for 42-years since 1967 and, with no statutory nor constitutional limitation to his inherited presidency, his son Ali Bongo is also poised to reign for life, especially after he amended the Constitution in December 2010 to give himself the power to unilaterally rule the country by decree should a “crisis” arise. This is certainly contrary to everything that the United Nations stands for.

This is why the Gabonese people are seeking a resolution against Ali Bongo Ondimba that will ask him to step down immediately and let the people establish the legitimacy of their president through free and fair elections.

Sincerely,



Dr. Daniel Mengara
 President, “Bongo Doit Partir” (BDP)
 Professor of Francophone Studies, Montclair State University, New Jersey
 Tel./Fax: 973-447-9763 / <http://www.bdpgabon.org>

Mr. André Bouassa, Union du Peuple Gabonais (UPG – USA), North Carolina

Patrick Ambamani, Civil Society, Maryland, USA