

**Hillary Rodham Clinton**  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Sunday, February 6, 2011

**RE:** The Gabonese Community in the United States is asking for the Sacking of Eric Benjaminson, U.S. Ambassador to Gabon, and the Resignation of Dictator Ali Bongo of Gabon

Dear Madam Secretary of State:

The Gabonese Community residing in the United States is asking for the immediate sacking of Eric Benjaminson, currently serving as U.S. Ambassador to Gabon. We are also asking that the United States stands with the Gabonese people to reject the Bongo regime as illegitimate, and demands the resignation of Ali Bongo Ondimba. For these reasons, we will be demonstrating at the State Department on Feb. 8, 2011, at 9:30am.

The Gabonese Community residing in the United States, many of whom are Gabonese-Americans, is stunned and perplexed by the January 28 statement by Eric Benjaminson asserting that the United States are officially and fully recognizing Ali Bongo Ondimba as the legitimate president of the Republic of Gabon. We are also shocked by his recommendation that the Gabonese people should abide by the Gabonese law and constitution.

**The first question that comes to mind is:** what law and what constitution are the Gabonese people supposed to really abide by? Does the Ambassador really mean the law and constitution that have allowed the Bongo family to rule by dictate over the Gabonese republic for more than 43 years, and which have presided over, and comforted, the unconstitutional practice of rigged and unfair elections in Gabon while confiscating the Gabonese presidency for the same family for 43 years? And why should the Gabonese people be urged to abide by such abusive and dehumanizing laws when the United States' own Declaration of Independence, which enshrines the right for oppressed people to overthrow their government, stipulates that "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, — That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.*" Are you, Mrs. Secretary of State, and your Ambassador telling us that the Gabonese people do not have a right to the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness to which the American people have been entitled for more than 200 years now since the formation of their independent state? Are you telling us, Mrs. Secretary of State, that you do not support the United States' own Declaration of Independence when it further states that "*when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce [the People] under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security*"?

**The second question that comes to mind is:** what legitimacy does America 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?

Yet, we go no further than previous declarations by the American government itself, which has long held, and this no later than very recently through various WikiLeaks documents, that the Gabonese people live under a despotic

regime and are unable to elect a president of their choice. 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 States doing in the very case of Gabon, that is, overriding the noble principles of democracy by giving legitimacy to a dictator whose victory the very same diplomatic cable has described as resulting from an inversion of votes. Otherwise, and according to the secret cable, why would you, the U.S. Secretary of State herself, have advised 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 United States 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.

Mrs. Secretary of State,

As we already did during our demonstration at the State Department in July 16, 2010 when we protested your having received Ali Bongo at the State Department, we continue to insist upon the need for America to stand for principles of democracy and human rights around the world, especially in Africa, and particularly in Gabon.

We simply cannot understand why President Obama would ask for the resignation of Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, who is currently being overthrown by his people, 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 Gabonese people as they attempt to do the same. This contradictory stance is particularly surprising when one considers that the United States' own Department of State itself, in its very own annual reports on Human Rights in Gabon, has consistently described Gabon as a country "dominated by a strong presidency and the Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG), which has held power since 1968." 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."

We believe that Ambassador Eric Benjaminson has basically condoned the reign of permanent dictatorship in Gabon, and the continuation of human right abuses in a country that has now been ruled by the same family for 43 years. In fact, with Ali Bongo succeeding his deceased father following the rigged elections of August 30, 2009, Gabon is now in a situation where it will potentially be ruled by the same family for more than 73 years, should Ali Bongo stay in power for 30 years. 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 President Obama's Accra statement that Africa does not need strong men, that what Africa needs is strong and democratic institutions. Sadly, with the media, the army, the treasury, the parliament and the courts now

firmly under the firm control of Ali Bongo, this is the moment that Ambassador Eric Benjaminson chose to crush the democratic aspirations of the Gabonese people.

We will not let that happen. We seek immediate redress and will be satisfied only when Ambassador Eric Benjaminson is recalled to the United States and replaced by someone who understands the values for which Americans fought so hard, and which they have sought to support and disseminate around the world.

We will also, in addition, be satisfied by, at least, a more neutral statement that leaves it to the Gabonese people to decide the legitimacy of their president, when they eventually elect or select one of their own choosing.

Sincerely,

**For the Gabonese Community in the United States**



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