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Africa - Equatorial Guinea

Africa Cup

Football and fun to forget media freedom violations?

14 November 2014

Equatorial Guinea has been chosen to host the next Africa Cup of Nations football tournament, to be held from 17 January to 8 February 2015, although its president figures prominently on the Reporters Without Borders list of [Predators of Press Freedom](#).

President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Basogo continues to appear at international events without ever being challenged over the appalling way he has crushed freedom of information in his country.

During the tournament you will see the football stadium turf, the players and the excited public and you will hear the cheers, the scores and interviews but you will not hear anything about the poverty, corruption or political crackdowns because freedom of information is non-existent in Equatorial Guinea.

It is not the first time this year that Nguema Basogo, the president for the past 35 years, has managed to pass himself off as a respectable leader. In June, he hosted an African Union summit that turned a deaf ear to protests from human rights and media freedom NGOs, [including RWB](#), and to their calls to raise the issue of how Equatorial Guinea flouts civil liberties.

Equatorial Guinea's economic situation is often portrayed in a favourable light in articles in international publications that are more like advertorials

"Equatorial Guinea has some cards in its hand, above all its sizable oil and gas deposits, which seem to make everyone forget its shocking record as regards fundamental freedoms," said Cléa Kahn-Sriber, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Africa desk.

"We urge the football fans following this tournament, which is supposed to unite nations and promote values, not to forget that, despite its polished facade, Equatorial Guinea is in reality a dictatorship that tramples on its citizens' rights."

In Equatorial Guinea, the state has a monopoly on news and information. The constitution proclaims press freedom but the 1992 law on press, publishing and broadcasting gives the government broad censorship powers.

Independent media are virtually non-existent. State-owned *RTVGE* is the only TV station available except for one owned by Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, the president's eldest son, who is also second vice-president and in charge of defence and security.

The print media are no better. The few privately-owned newspapers such as *La Opinión*, *El Sol*, *El Time* and *La Nación* are all in financial trouble and appear only sporadically. Most privately-owned publications are owned by government allies and practice self-censorship.

Radio seems to be the only source of independent information. According to the [US State Department](#), international radio stations such as the *BBC* and *Radio France Internationale* manage to broadcast locally.

The elite also has access to news coverage from abroad via satellite TV and the Internet. But the May 2013 parliamentary elections showed that nothing can be taken for granted, because [the government blocked Facebook and the main opposition websites](#) for the elections and access today is still piecemeal.

Science and education minister Lucas Nguema Esono renewed the threat at the start of this month when, in a TV interview, he said that any website criticizing the government would be regarded as terrorist in nature. The warning contrasts with the president's announcement a few months ago of

a national dialogue and invitation to exiles to return.

No international news agency has a correspondent based in Equatorial Guinea and the few foreign reporters allowed to visit are closely watched. *Financial Times* Africa editor **Javier Blas** and *Financial Times* reporter **Peter Chapman** were arrested by armed security agents in January while doing a report on preparations for an investment conference.

After holding them for three hours at the national security ministry, officials escorted them to the airport and put them on flight out of the country without returning their laptops, notebooks and recorders.

Equatorial Guinea is ranked 168th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

(photo: Equatorial Guinea's Teodoro Obiang Nguema Basogo looks at his gifts before the Africa Cup of Nations (CAN 2012) final football match / AFP - Franck Fife)

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