



AFRICAN ASSOCIATION OF
JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

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In behalf of

The African Association of Jehovah's Witnesses

**Contribution for the
47th session of the Universal Periodic Review (4 – 15 November 2024)**

Equatorial Guinea

Contact Information

Contact address in South Africa
Office of AAJW:
1 Robert Broom Drive East, Rangeview,
Krugersdorp, 1739,
South Africa
Tel: 27 11 761 1200
Email: aajw.za@jw.org

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ABOUT THE SUBMITTING ORGANIZATION

African Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses (AAJW) is a public benefit organization registered in South Africa, with membership in Angola, Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

This association works to promote the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in various parts of the world, particularly when Jehovah’s Witnesses face violations of such rights.

SUMMARY OF THE SUBMISSION

This submission to the Human Rights Council (HRC) on Equatorial Guinea highlights human rights issues and current failures by Equatorial Guinea to implement accepted recommendations during the previous Universal Periodic Review (UPR) cycle.

Jehovah’s Witnesses in Equatorial Guinea and as a worldwide organization respectfully request that the Government of Equatorial Guinea take the necessary steps to:

- (1) Respect the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions and end expulsions of Jehovah’s Witness children from schools;
- (2) Ensure that children from minorities can benefit from access to education without discrimination;
- (3) Guarantee to all, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, freedom to peacefully manifest their religion and to enjoy peaceful freedom of expression throughout the country;
- (4) Abide by their commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Equatorial Guinea, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Covenant) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) for all citizens, including Jehovah’s Witnesses.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Jehovah’s Witnesses have been in Equatorial Guinea for more than 80 years. Their activities were proscribed from 1971 to 1982, and they were officially registered in 1994.
2. Jehovah’s Witnesses in Equatorial Guinea generally enjoy freedom to practise their religion openly and without hindrance. Nevertheless, they face ongoing religious discrimination in government-regulated schools and occasional interference with peaceful manifestation of religious beliefs.
3. This submission was prepared in compliance with the guidelines as related to consent or publicized cases.

II. ISSUES

Religious Discrimination in Schools

4. The Republic of Equatorial Guinea acceded to the Covenant on 25 September 1987. Article 18.4 provides:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.”

Article 27 provides:

“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion.”

5. Equatorial Guinea acceded to the Convention on 15 June 1992. Article 2 provides:

“1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

“2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child’s parents, legal guardians, or family members.”

Article 14.1 provides:

“States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.”

Article 28.1 provides:

“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, ... on the basis of equal opportunity.”

Article 30 provides:

“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion.”

6. Article 13.1(f) of the Constitution of Equatorial Guinea provides that every citizen enjoys the right “to freedom of a religion and worship.” Article 15.1 provides that “any act of partiality or discrimination duly found on the basis of ... religion ... or other analogous motives is punishable by law.”
7. Despite the prohibition of partiality or discrimination on the basis of religion, in some government-regulated schools, children who are Jehovah’s Witnesses suffer discrimination or expulsion for their conscientious objection to participating in certain ceremonies that are contrary to their sincerely held religious beliefs.
8. The following are examples of such discrimination against Witness students:
9. **On 1 February 2022**, in Bata, Litoral Province, three Jehovah’s Witness children – Child A (13 years), Child B (11 years) and Child C (12 years) – were expelled from school for respectfully abstaining from raising the flag and singing the national anthem, actions that violate their religious beliefs. **On 1 March 2022**, the regional delegate invited the parents to his office, and they explained the reasons for the children’s respectful stand. **On 9 March 2022**, the parents were summoned before the Provincial Governor of the city of Bata to

explain the reasons for their children's action. The Provincial Governor also summoned a representative of Jehovah's Witnesses, Mr. Hermegildo Iyanga. Following the meeting, the father of the three children and also Mr. Iyanga were sent to the police station and were detained for several days, after which they were taken to court. The examining magistrate released them on condition that they report to the court twice a week. On **14 March 2022**, the father of the three children and Mr. Iyanga were criminally charged with civil disobedience. They subsequently learned that the judge dropped the criminal charges, but no written decision was provided. The father of the three children, a fisherman, suffered financially because his work was disrupted by the requirement to report to the police station twice a week.

10. **On 9 March 2022**, in Ikunde, Bata Litoral Province, a 21-year-old Jehovah's Witness was expelled from school because of respectfully declining to sing the national anthem. Several letters were sent to the school, but the student was not reinstated. Friends assisted his family in having him admitted into another school.
11. **On 28 February 2023**, in Mongomo, a 17-year-old high school student was expelled from school for respectfully declining to sing the national anthem. On **9 March 2023**, the student and his father were summoned to the police station by the Government Delegate, and the chief of police detained the student for allegedly breaking the school flagpole. After two days, the police interrogated him and found that he was not guilty of any offence. However, the student was held in police custody until 13 March 2023 and spent some 96 hours in jail.

Restriction of Manifestation of Religious Belief and Freedom of Expression

12. Article 18.1 of the Covenant provides:

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.”

Article 19.2 provides:

“Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.”

13. The following are examples of incidents affecting Jehovah's Witnesses in which these provisions have been violated:
14. **In April 2023**, Jehovah's Witnesses in Baney went to their place of worship, known as a Kingdom Hall, to peacefully celebrate the annual Memorial of Jesus' death, the most sacred occasion in their calendar. However, the Government Delegate of Baney arbitrarily informed them that they could not hold the meeting there without permission. In Equatorial Guinea, it is not a requirement to seek permission to hold religious meetings in places of worship. The local Witnesses were obliged to travel some 25 kilometres to Malabo, the capital, in order to attend this gathering. Only after considerable effort were representatives of the Witnesses able to obtain a meeting with the Delegate and receive permission for regular weekly worship meetings to resume.

15. In Equatorial Guinea, **2 April** is termed “the National Day of Prayer,” and all religious denominations are called to gather in one place for this celebration. **On 1 April 2023**, the Government Delegate of the district of Luba warned Jehovah’s Witnesses in the region that, if they did not attend this meeting, he would forbid them to hold religious meetings at the Kingdom Hall in Luba. The following Thursday, the Delegate went to the Kingdom Hall before their regular religious meeting started and loudly made a public accusation that the Witnesses were disobedient to authority. He concluded by saying that the meeting would be the last one and that the Kingdom Hall would remain closed until they appeared before the Secretary of Worship. For several months the Witnesses ceased to use that Kingdom Hall and met for worship in Malabo, some 30 kilometres away. After the intervention of the Minister of Justice, the Kingdom Hall was reopened.
16. **On 13 January 2024**, in Nkuantoma, Bata, a group of about 12 Jehovah’s Witnesses were sharing their religious beliefs. Two local Witnesses called at the home of the President of the Village Council. Later in the day, this man asked for documents permitting them to discuss their religion in people’s homes. A local Witness minister spoke to the Council President and explained that the Witnesses are authorized to peacefully share their beliefs all over the country. Later, the Government Delegate arrived with soldiers and ordered that the local Witness minister be locked up until Monday for manifesting his beliefs without authorization and for allegedly refusing to identify himself. The Director of the Gendarmerie, however, told everyone to go home and instructed the local Witness minister to return on Monday at 9.00 a.m.
17. **On 15 January 2024**, the Director of the Gendarmerie said that he cannot put anyone in jail for manifesting his religious beliefs. The Witnesses confirmed that their confession was authorized by presidential decree. The prosecutor, who was there by chance, said that they had committed no wrong. The Deputy Director then sent them back to the Government Delegation. Eventually, the Witnesses were directed to ask for permission when forming groups of more than five people to perform religious acts outside places of worship, because the Government Delegate did not want these gatherings in his jurisdiction. This is a clear breach of article 18 of the Covenant.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF ACCEPTED RECOMMENDATIONS

18. Following its previous review in 2019, Equatorial Guinea supported specific recommendations made by member States. (A/HRC/42/13/Add.1)
19. Uganda recommended that the Republic of Equatorial Guinea “[s]trengthen efforts to improve access to education among vulnerable persons.” (A/HRC/42/13, para. 122.129)
20. Algeria recommended that the Republic of Equatorial Guinea “[p]rioritize the protection of children’s rights.” (A/HRC/42/13, para. 123.49)
21. Kyrgyzstan recommended that the Republic of Equatorial Guinea “[p]rioritize the protection of the rights of the child, eradicating corporal punishment and domestic violence and enhancing access to education.” (A/HRC/42/13, para. 123.50)
22. Spain recommended that the Republic of Equatorial Guinea “[c]ontinue taking all the necessary measures to guarantee full exercise of freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly in order to have political pluralism and effective and real freedom of the press.” (A/HRC/42/13, para. 122.83)

23. Timor-Leste recommended that the Republic of Equatorial Guinea “[s]trengthen its efforts in bringing its laws and practices into line with international standards for press freedom and freedom of expression.” (A/HRC/42/13, para. 122.84)
24. Jehovah's Witnesses in Equatorial Guinea have not found that these accepted recommendations have been implemented in such a way as to put an end to discriminatory expulsions and subsequent denial of education to their schoolchildren who, because of their sincerely held religious beliefs, have respectfully declined to follow practices that strongly offend their conscience. Additionally, recommendations on manifestation of religious belief and freedom of expression are not fully implemented in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

25. Jehovah's Witnesses in Equatorial Guinea and as a worldwide organization express concern at the restriction of religious freedom, in particular for children, as noted above in this submission. They respectfully request that the Government of Equatorial Guinea take the necessary steps to:
 - (1) Respect the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions and end expulsions of Jehovah's Witness children from schools;
 - (2) Ensure that children from minorities can benefit from access to education without discrimination;
 - (3) Guarantee to all, including Jehovah's Witnesses, freedom to peacefully manifest their religion and to enjoy peaceful freedom of expression throughout the country;
 - (4) Abide by their commitment to uphold the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Equatorial Guinea, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the Covenant) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention) for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.