



## **Clooney Foundation for Justice Statement on Mass Trial in Equatorial Guinea**

June 6, 2019 - The Clooney Foundation for Justice's TrialWatch program has partnered with the American Bar Association Center for Human Rights (CHR) to monitor the prosecution of approximately<sup>1</sup> 130 defendants charged in a single trial with alleged crimes in connection with an alleged 2017 coup d'état attempt in Equatorial Guinea. 112 defendants were convicted, receiving sentences ranging from 3 to 97 years, with 20 defendants receiving sentences of over 70 years. A preliminary report prepared by Juan Mendez - the former UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and a member of the Clooney Foundation for Justice's TrialWatch Advisory Board - documents egregious violations of the right to a fair trial in proceedings that concluded on May 31, 2019.

According to the report, the President of Equatorial Guinea, who was the target of the alleged coup, personally handpicked military judges to be added to the panel of judges hearing the case, after the trial had already begun. Trial monitors also reported that a representative of the military sitting in the audience periodically arranged for notes and commentary to be passed to the judges. This clearly compromised defendants' right to an independent and impartial tribunal.

Other fair trial violations documented in the report include the failure to investigate allegations that torture was used to extract confessions and the fact that the defendants were tried together with virtually no individualized allegations of wrongdoing.

Former Special Rapporteur Juan Mendez and CHR have "call[ed] upon the Equatoguinean authorities to drop charges against and immediately release the many defendants whose connection to the alleged coup was never proven. With respect to the other defendants, CHR urge[d] the Equatoguinean authorities to review the sentences imposed and either institute proceedings that respect the due process of law or release defendants unconditionally." CFJ calls upon Equatorial Guinea to carefully consider these recommendations and encourages all of those with influence to urge the government to commit to protecting the rule of law and the right to a fair trial.

A full TrialWatch Fairness Report on this trial is forthcoming.

### *About the Clooney Foundation for Justice's TrialWatch Project*

TrialWatch is a project of the Clooney Foundation for Justice focused on monitoring and responding to trials around the world that pose a high risk of human rights violations. For more information, visit <https://cfj.org/project/trialwatch/>.

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<sup>1</sup> As explained in the preliminary report, the number of accused and sentenced is approximated because there were multiple inconsistencies between the prosecutor's various submissions listing the defendants and therefore is based on the monitor's notes.