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Equatorial Guinea profile

President: Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo

Mr Obiang Nguema is Africa's longest serving leader and has been in power for three decades.

In 1979 he seized power from President Francisco Macias Nguema, who was the leader at independence and whose rule prompted a mass exodus and thousands of deaths. The former leader was tried and executed.

The new president relaxed some of the restrictions of his predecessor - such as a ban on the Catholic Church - but kept the absolute control he inherited.

Officials said Mr Obiang won more than 97% of the vote in presidential elections in December 2002. Opposition candidates had withdrawn from the poll, citing fraud and irregularities. Officials reported similar results following the November 2009 presidential elections.

A French judge announced in May 2009 that he would launch a landmark investigation into whether President Obiang and two other African leaders plundered state coffers to buy luxury homes and cars in France. It became known as the case of "ill-gotten gains".

A complaint filed by Transparency International France, accused the leaders, who denied any wrongdoing, of acquiring millions of dollars of real estate in Paris and on the French Riviera and buying luxury cars with embezzled public money.

However, a French appeal court threw out the case saying the activists couldn't act against foreign heads of state. A subsequent ruling, in November 2010, authorised an investigation into the charges.

Wealthy son

The president's son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, has been resisting attempts by the

US administration to seize some \$71 million worth of his assets, denying charges that they were obtained with allegedly corrupt funds taken from his country.

US authorities in 2011 filed to seize a \$30 million Malibu, California, oceanfront home, a \$38.5 million Gulfstream jet, a Ferrari worth more than \$500,000 and dozens of pieces of pop singer Michael Jackson memorabilia worth almost \$2 million.

They argued that Obiang obtained the items with money corruptly taken from his impoverished country through a variety of alleged schemes, including requiring companies to pay so-called taxes and fees to him as well as to make donations to his pet projects and then took those funds for his own use.

Proposed changes to the constitution were put to a referendum in November 2011, and according to the government, accepted by voters. Critics allege that while the changes are presented as democratic reforms they will actually entrench the president's position.

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