Equatoguinean magazine editor's hunger strike for freedom, 2011

February 11,
2011
to: February 18,
2011
Country: Equatorial Guinea
Country: Spain
Location City/State/Province: Malabo
Goals:
To protest against the regime of President Teodoro Obiang Nguema and to encourage other Equatoguineans to rise up and demand change.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 4th segment:

- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 5th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance
- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)

Methods in 6th segment:
Classifications

Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Democracy
Group characterization:

• writer

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel
Partners:
Not known
External allies:
Activists around the world
Involvement of social elites:
Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

• Activists around the world
Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:
Segment Length: 1 day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence
Opponents:
Regime under Teodoro Obiang

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
The Spokesman Government Minister of Equatorial Guinea Republic issued a statement claiming that Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel is an unknown person who is perfectly free to express his views. The Spokesman also said that any claims of "lack of freedom" in Equatorial Guinea are false.

Campaigner violence:
Not known

Repressive Violence:
Ávila left Equatorial Guinea for Spain after claiming that he was "harassed" about his hunger strike. He did not specify who had harassed him.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
1 point out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
1 point out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:
Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's hunger strike received much international attention, but it is difficult to discern how much the recent protests in Equatorial Guinea are a direct result of his hunger strike. The Equatoguinean government has not implemented any reforms.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is a small country in Middle Africa that was a colony of Spain (Spanish Guinea) until 1968. Since a violent military coup in 1979, President Teodoro Obiang has ruled the country with the Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea. In 2008, journalist Peter Maas called Obiang “Africa’s Worst Dictator” due to rampant corruption within the government and accusations from human rights groups of murder and torture.

Protests have been rare in Equatorial Guinea, but on February 11, 2011, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, the Equatoguinean blogger and editor of the magazine Atanga, began a hunger strike to protest against Obiang’s repressive regime. Ávila also wrote a letter to José Bono Martínez, president of the Spanish Parliament, and asked the Spanish government to put pressure on the Equatoguinean government for reforms. Ávila had previously written novels, essays, and more, criticizing the government of Equatorial Guinea, but had never engaged in such a singular and widely publicized campaign before. Ávila was inspired by the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and hoped to encourage change in Equatorial Guinea.

Ávila continued his hunger strike until February 14, 2011, when he announced his departure to Spain after being “harassed” about his hunger strike. Ávila did not specify who had harassed him, but intended to continue his hunger strike in Spain.

On February 16, the Equatoguinean Government Minister Spokesman Jerónimo Osa Osa Ecoro issued a statement that claimed that Ávila was “barely known in this country, and has no followers, nor do his actions have or have had any type of relevance.” Ecoro also pointed out that Ávila was perfectly free to express his views however he wished, and defended the government’s programs, saying that Equatorial Guinea was experiencing a peak in development.

Outside activists did their part to help Ávila. For example, on February 11, one activist formed the Facebook group “Apoyo a Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel” to spread the word about the hunger strike and the general movement for freedom in Equatorial Guinea. The group has over 2,000 members. On February 14, a different activist created a global online petition to the U.S.
government to pressure the government of Equatorial Guinea. The petition has over 150 signatures from several countries.

On February 18, Ávila decided to end his hunger strike in Spain, saying in an interview that it “makes no sense to continue a protest that has lost its essence.” However, the Facebook group and petition are still active, and Ávila continues to advance the movement for freedom in Equatorial Guinea. Protests have broken out in Equatorial Guinea, but it is unclear whether the protests were directly related to Ávila’s hunger strike campaign. The government has banned protests and restricted information from Tunisia, Egypt, and other countries with revolutionary movements.

**Research Notes**

**Influences:**

Ávila was inspired by the revolution in Tunisia (1).

**Sources:**


**Additional Notes:**

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel is broadly working for freedom in Equatorial Guinea, but this hunger strike was a specific campaign that is part of a larger movement.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Jennifer Trinh, 24/04/2011

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A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

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