

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

November 10, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20451

Dear Secretary Rubio:

I write concerning a \$7.5 million payment made directly to the Government of Equatorial Guinea by the U.S. State Department in exchange for the country agreeing to accept third country nationals removed from the United States. This highly unusual payment—to one of the most corrupt governments in the world—raises serious concerns over the responsible, transparent use of American taxpayer dollars.

According to Transparency International, Equatorial Guinea ranks 173rd out of 180 countries for corruption. The State Department's *2023 Human Rights Report* states that "the president and members of his inner circle continued to amass personal fortunes from the revenues associated with monopolies on all domestic commercial ventures..." and that "corruption at all levels of government was a severe problem" in Equatorial Guinea. This includes the President's son, Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, who currently serves as the Vice President. In 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice pursued a civil asset forfeiture case against Obiang Mangue alleging that he amassed more than \$300 million worth of assets through "corruption and money laundering in violation of both U.S. and Equatoguinean law" including through purchasing a jet, a Malibu mansion and Michael Jackson memorabilia.¹ In a settlement with the United States, Obiang Mangue was forced to relinquish assets worth approximately \$30 million.² In its *2025 Freedom in the World Report*, Freedom House assigned Equatorial Guinea 0 out of 4 for whether "safeguards against official corruption [are] strong and effective." The prevalence of corruption raises questions about the decision to provide a direct payment from the United States to Equatorial Guinea.

There are also serious concerns about human trafficking and human rights abuses in Equatorial Guinea. The State Department's own *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report* raises as a "significant concern" the "corruption and official complicity in trafficking crimes" by government officials in Equatorial Guinea. The report states: "Multiple credible sources alleged senior officials were involved in human trafficking crimes, particularly by exploiting women and girls in domestic servitude in their own households or in sex trafficking. Lower-level officials reportedly took

¹ U.S. Department of Justice Press Release, October 25, 2011, "Department of Justice Seeks to Recover More Than \$70.8 million in Proceeds of Corruption from Government Minister of Equatorial Guinea."

² U.S. Department of Justice Press Release, October 10, 2014, "Second Vice President of Equatorial Guinea Agrees to Relinquish More than \$30 Million of Assets Purchased with Corrupt Proceeds."

bribes from undocumented foreign nationals and judges were accused of taking bribes and accepting goods in exchange for favorable rulings.” Based on these documented instances of trafficking in Equatorial Guinea by your team, I have serious concerns over whether, without appropriate oversight mechanisms and guardrails, a direct payment to Equatorial Guinea’s government could be used to facilitate human trafficking. I am also concerned about what protections are in place to ensure that third country nationals removed to Equatorial Guinea are themselves not vulnerable to human trafficking, smuggling or human rights abuses.

This payment is also a stark departure from prior U.S. foreign assistance provided to Equatorial Guinea in both its size and direct delivery to the government. Over the past two administrations, the U.S. Government has not provided more than \$2 million annually in foreign assistance for Equatorial Guinea; the highest the first Trump Administration provided was \$780,000. The current proposal to provide \$7.5 million represents an increase of 275 percent and would far exceed the amount of U.S. foreign assistance provided over the last 8 years combined.³ Further, with the exception of limited medical supplies, prior U.S. foreign assistance was provided only to trusted and vetted implementing partners, such as nongovernmental organizations or the United Nations—not the government of Equatorial Guinea directly—to carry out programs related to countering human trafficking, strengthening civil society or providing humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, this payment used funding from the Migration and Refugee Assistance account making this the first ever government-to-government transfer of such funds, which are intended to respond to global refugee and humanitarian crises.⁴ The nature of this payment raises questions about how it came about and how it is justified.

Given Equatorial Guinea’s history of corruption, the State Department’s own concerns about government officials’ complicity in human trafficking and prior guardrails on U.S. assistance, I have serious concerns over the decision to provide such a substantial sum to Equatorial Guinea, and I request that you promptly respond to the following questions:

1. How is the \$7.5 payment to the government of Equatorial Guinea a permissible use of funds under the Migration and Refugee Assistance account, which is meant to assist refugees overseas?
2. Is there an agreement (including a non-binding instrument or exchange of notes) between the government of Equatorial Guinea and the United States regarding this payment in exchange for the transfer of third country nationals? Was such an agreement brokered with Vice President Obiang Mangue—an individual under visa restrictions by the United States?
3. How will the State Department ensure that none of the \$7.5 million provided to the government of Equatorial Guinea will be used to facilitate corruption by government officials or enable human trafficking?

³ According to publicly available data on [ForeignAssistance.gov](https://www.foreignassistance.gov/).

⁴ According to publicly available data on [USASpending.gov](https://www.usaspending.gov/).

4. What protections will be put in place to ensure that third country nationals removed to Equatorial Guinea are not vulnerable to human trafficking, human smuggling or human rights abuses? Did the U.S. Government receive credible assurances from the Government of Equatorial Guinea that third country nationals will not end up in the Black Beach Prison or Oveng Ansen Prison, known for serious human rights abuses?

I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jeanne Shaheen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jeanne" and last name "Shaheen" clearly distinguishable.

Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member

CC: Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau