

commentary

from other pens...

No Bush red carpet for African leader

By George Gedda

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Leaders of Japan, Israel and China are here this week, getting an Oval Office welcome. But there is no White House invitation for Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo.

Obiang is the president of Equatorial Guinea, a country which, judging by the State Department's human rights report, ranks as one of the world's most repressive. "Torture" appears 23 times in the report.

Obiang, who seized power in 1979 in a coup against his uncle, is in town on what is described as a private visit but is meeting with administration officials and members of Congress. He is trying to convey the notion that his country is not the repressive backwater that it once was. The State Department is not convinced.

Its report called prison conditions in Equatorial Guinea "harsh and life threatening. There were reports prison authorities tortured, beat, and otherwise abused prisoners, and that such abuse, combined with a lack of medical care, resulted in the deaths of prisoners."

Try running for office in Equatorial Guinea. The report said in legislative elections in March 1999, "roadblocks impeded the opposition's ability to travel; and opposition leaders were detained intermittently, sometimes with mistreatment, torture, or stiff fines."

Equatorial Guinea is a geographical oddity. Part of the West African country is connected to the mainland just north of the equator and the rest is a nearby island where the capital is located.

There has been an off-an-on American diplomatic presence since the Equatorial Guinea gained independence from Spain in 1968.

On a steamy late August day in 1971, amid signs of a homosexual relationship gone sour, a U.S. diplomat plunged a pair of scissors into a colleague inside the embassy compound, killing him.

Some officials believe the conditions in the tiny country were at least partly to blame. Not long thereafter, the embassy was shut down.

Eight years later, the embassy was reopened, only to be shut again during the 1990s for economics. Obiang believes American diplomats should come back, and the primary reason is the discovery of oil.

Obiang talks about his country becoming "the Kuwait of Africa." Production levels average about 120,000 barrels a day but not much of the bonanza has filtered down to the country's 470,000 citizens.

An Obiang aide says that between 500 and 1,500 Americans are in Equatorial Guinea at any given time, most of them living in walled compounds with little contact with the local community.

Annual U.S. investment is estimated at \$5 billion and oil companies are signing new exploration deals. State Department officials are thinking about reopening the embassy.

During a meeting with reporters on Monday, Obiang dismissed State Department criticisms of his rule as "the opinion of an individual."

"There is no abuse with respect to human rights," he said, responding to allegations about use of torture. He agreed there may be "excesses" by security officers at times but said guilty parties are dealt with.

In response to the allegation the press is "severely restricted," Obiang said, "The press is free."

Given the country's "great effort in democratization" and its emergence as a major oil source, Obiang said he believes an official visit, as opposed to the current private one, is in order.

But first, the U.S. must be convinced a genuine change has taken place.

Eight years ago, the last U.S. ambassador, John Bennett, received a death threat from a man he believes was an official of the Equatorial Guinean government. The threat was thrown out of a passing vehicle near Bennett's residence. "You will go to America as a corpse."

Officials believe the threat was related to Bennett's strong pro-human rights stand.

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Gedda has covered foreign affairs for The Associated Press since 1968.



Plan's success in measurements and weight loss

I have received so many comments and question about the low-fat way of eating. The scales can seem to be tricky with this new way of eating.

At the beginning, you can expect some tremendous weight loss. However, if you get off to a slow start, do not be alarmed. As long as you are following the Freedom in Eating plan, the weight will come off! It has no choice. We all respond to low-fat eating differently. For this reason, I ask you to not only weigh, but to measure as well.

With the Freedom plan, you are going to be feeding your muscle, not your fat cells. Muscle weighs more than fat, but fat takes up more space than muscle. So the result will be that your inches will go down (at times) faster than your weight. That is why you may feel your clothes starting to get baggy without the scales going down at a corresponding rate. Keep in mind that your success is not measured by the scales. Your success is measured by what is happening on the inside of you.

We have all been on one of those starvation diets. The scales went down quickly. We were thrilled; however, this thrill would be short-lived, and we would soon lapse back into old ways. On the other side of the diet, we would binge. This way of "dieting" has worked against us! In fact, what you did was starve your muscle while you fed your fat cells. You can't fool a fat cell. They won't let you, at least at first. Later, you can begin to out smart them.

Fat cells have a built-in protective mechanism that ensures their survival. Women have an enzyme that wants to store calories of fat for protection and survival whereas men have enzymes that want to



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release calories for energy. God created men and women differently right down to our fat cells! Starvation dieting puts your fat cells into a defensive mode. Women already have more "storage" enzymes than men, and in the process of starving ourselves we double them. While dieting, your fat cells are threatened and become more efficient at storing fat. With each diet, you lose some to the fat-releasing capability of your cells but gain more fat-storing capabilities.

Because of this, you may reach a plateau, and you honestly may not know why. This is the time that most of us just throw up our hands and quit. If this happens to you this week, just hang tight until next week. I have a story that will add new life to you. You will love it and we have all learned from it.

Here's a great recipe for soup that was sent to me this last week.

As it is written, one serving has 8.7 grams of fat. However, if you substitute skim milk and no-fat cheese, you can cut it down considerably. This is a great cold-weather soup and I am sure we will still have a chance to enjoy it on a cold day.

Betty's Broccoli Chowder

1-1/4 pounds broccoli, broken into florets and stalks, cut into 1/4-inch slices

1/2 pound unpeeled red-skinned potatoes, diced
1 small onion, chopped
3/4 cup canned chicken broth diluted with 3/4-cup water
2 cups low-fat (1 percent) milk
1/4 cup flour
1/2 teaspoon tarragon
1/2 teaspoon thyme
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
3 ounces Monterey Jack cheese
1/2 cup minced red bell pepper

In a large saucepan, combine the broccoli, potato, onion and diluted broth. Cover and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low, and cook until tender (about 6 minutes).

In a small bowl, whisk the milk into the flour. Add this mixture to the soup, along with the tarragon, thyme, salt and pepper. Stir constantly until the mixture comes to a boil and is thick (about 7 minutes).

Ladle into bowls, and sprinkle with cheese and red pepper. Makes 4 servings.

We have been getting an influx of orders for our weight-loss plan and the recipe book. I am getting orders out as soon as I can. So if has been over a week for you, it is on the way and will be worth the wait. If you are one of the ones that haven't ordered yours, there is still time for you to make some positive changes by summer. Just send \$20.00 to "Freedom Package", 400 10th. St., Canyon, Texas, 79015.

Be sure and tune-in next week for the story of Jean!

E-mail me at gosally@netwest.com

Dad could be like teller machine for allowance

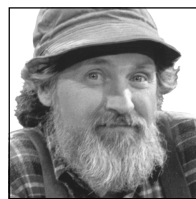
I know a lot of parents out there are giving their teen-agers allowances, and I'm all for it. It gives them a little freedom and teaches them about money — and prepares them for the welfare system, which is such an important part of our society. It's like they've worked at being a kid for 12 years and as soon as they turn 13, they get to collect unemployment.

The trouble starts when they abuse the system by asking for a raise or an advance against future income. These problems can be avoided by Dad changing into a human ATM. Give the kid a card that he has to present prior to withdrawing his allowance. Dad looks at the card and asks him to give his PIN verbally. (This also serves as a sobriety test — for both of them.) Then they punch in their request for the full \$10 allowance. ATM Dad checks his records to see whether they've already withdrawn the maximum for this week.

If everything is fine, he forks over the money. If it's not, he rips up the card and refers them to the account manager: Mom.

PLAY ME OR TRADE ME

Friends are great to have, but if you want to sustain a group of friends for a lifetime, you really need to manage them. Like a baseball team. You need a mix of veterans and rookies to keep it interesting. It's the veterans who'll see you through when the game's on the line because they've been there before. But you need to rest them from time to time because, after this many seasons, everybody's seen



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- north of forty

their stuff, and their high hard one isn't what it used to be.

And never lose sight of the importance of a good farm system. You need new potential friends coming to the spring tryouts on a regular basis. Most of them will go by the wayside, but then there'll be the newcomer who instantly becomes one of your best friends. What we call a "natural." Old friends are the best friends, but new friends keep everybody honest.

DANGEROUS ASSUMPTIONS

Sometimes when we reach mid-life, we have an inflated opinion of how good we are at reading our surroundings and making behavioral choices based on that evaluation. Here's a short list of dangerous assumptions to watch out for:

- This company will never fire me.
- Everyone likes ethnic jokes.
- That young, attractive woman is giving me the eye.
- I don't need to shave today.
- I'm younger than that old-looking guy.
- A card is as good as a gift.
- Tonight's the night.



ADVICE FOR THE AGES

If I had to give one piece of advice to a man just moving into adulthood, I would say that you should pretend to be stupid every chance you get. I've never seen any percentage in having a reputation for being smart. People will expect you to know things and will turn to you whenever there's a problem. Where's the fun in that?

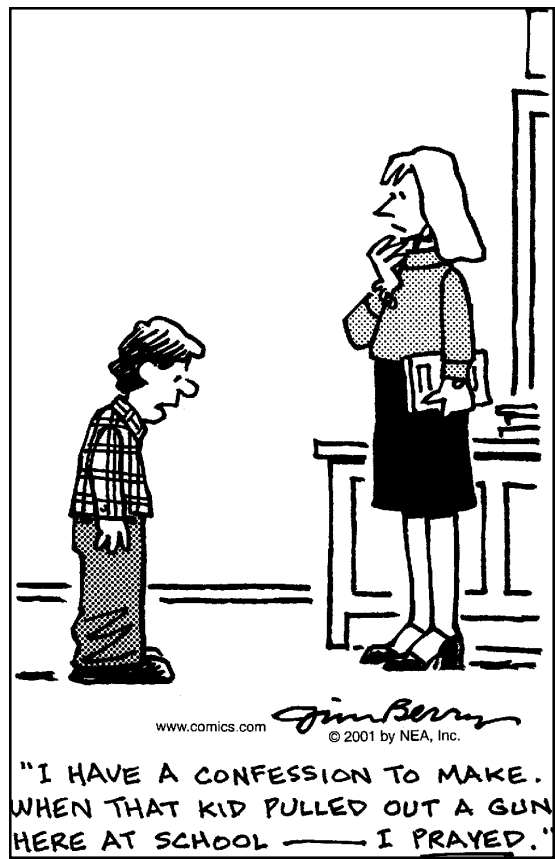
I say you're better off if they think you're a little slow. They'll be nice to you and will leave you alone. Over time, that becomes a man's top priority.

I'm not telling you to be stupid - just pretend you are. Meanwhile, in a subtle, quiet, unobtrusive way, be just smart enough to stay married and employed.

Quote of the Day: "Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way, when you criticize them, you're a mile away and you have their shoes." - Red Green

Red Green is the star of "The Red Green Show," a television series seen in the U.S. on PBS and in Canada on the CBC Network, and the author of "The Red Green Book" and "Red Green Talks Cars: A Love Story."

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