

## **TI-France re-files complaint targeting assets held in France by five African heads of state**

TI-France and the SHERPA Association have reported that a law suit was filed at the Court of Paris on Wednesday 9 July, relating to the circumstances under which huge real estate and financial capital was acquired in France by Denis Sassou Nguesso, Omar Bongo, T  odoro Obiang, Blaise Compaor  , Eduardo Dos Santos and their close associates or families.

The law suit was jointly filed by TI-France and nationals of Gabon and Congo, represented by Barrister William Bourdon. It communicates the same facts as those contained in another law suit jointly filed last year by SHERPA (ibid), SURVIE and the Federation of Congolese nationals of the Diaspora. In spite of the convincing nature of findings produced by the preliminary investigation, the matter was classified.

Pursuant to provisions of the new Law of 5 March 2007, new plaintiffs - who secondly want to ask for reparation of their damage - must lodge a new complaint. Hence, the plaintiffs are expecting that a legal inquiry will be opened in the shortest possible time. The findings of the first police investigation revealed the existence of a huge fortune and many of the facts contained in the initial law suit have been confirmed.

There is little doubt that the fortune under scrutiny could not have been obtained through the salaries and official benefits of the persons concerned. Even more serious, some of these people are highly suspected of masterminding a huge embezzlement of public funds. It is for the examining judge to determine how the real estate was acquired and how the numerous bank accounts detected by the police were being run. It is equally necessary to consider the contributions made by some intermediaries in the course of the criminal operations.

TI-France considers it absolutely essential that the rights of victims of corruption to reparations are upheld. The recovery of stolen assets embezzled by unscrupulous leaders is one of the foremost priorities of Transparency International, which played a major role to ensure that such a principle is enshrined in the United Nations Convention against Corruption (the so-called Merida Convention, 2003). The most disadvantaged populations are often the first victims of these misappropriations.

The recovery of stolen assets constitutes one of the subjects of the Convention on which there is a strong consensus among signatory countries, both in the Southern and Northern hemisphere. France, which repeatedly gave its support to this principle, has to ensure that corrupt money is not recycled through investments on its territory.

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