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LETTER DATED 22 MAY 1979 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF GABON
TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to send you herewith a press release dated 22 May 1979 concerning the article by Jon Bradshaw transmitted by a letter dated 7 May addressed to you by the Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of Benin.

The Bradshaw article, among a mass of purportedly accurate facts, refers to certain events which allegedly occurred in Gabon and which are nothing more than evidence of a real lack of information.

I shall be very grateful if you will circulate this press release as a Security Council document.

(Signed) Leon N'DONG
Ambassador, Permanent Representative
of the Gabonese Republic to the
United Nations

ANNEX

Press release

The Gabonese delegation has carefully studied the article by Jon Bradshaw entitled "The man who would be king" transmitted by a letter dated 7 May 1979 addressed to the Secretary-General by the Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of Benin and circulated at his request as a Security Council document (S/13304) dated 8 May 1979.

Among other things, the article by Jon Bradshaw contains three principal assertions which, by reason of their mendacious, libelous and defamatory character vis-à-vis Gabon, its illustrious Head of State and its history, inevitably prompt the most forceful protests on the part of the Gabonese delegation.

On page 2 of annex II to document S/13304 it is stated "Foccart's activities in Africa was centred in Gabon. Foccart and the Gabonese President Albert Bongo had long been allies. Foccart helped Bongo foment a military coup in February of 1964. He was instrumental in the death of Léon Mba, Bongo's chief political opponent."

One wonders what meaning Jon Bradshaw ascribes to the term "political opponent". It is well known that the first President of the Gabonese Republic, Léon Mba, and the current Gabonese Head of State, His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, were members of the same political party - the Bloc Démocratique Gabonais (BDG) - at the time when the Union Démocratique et Socialiste Gabonaise (UDSG) was the opposition party. At an early stage, President Bongo became not only the intimate friend of President Léon Mba, but also his principal confidential associate, his Minister and subsequently his Vice-President. Thus, at the time of the attempted coup d'état in February 1964, President Bongo was already the deputy director of the office of President Léon Mba. This close collaboration between the two men, which would cease only with the death of President Léon Mba, was formally sanctioned when the political officers of the Bloc Démocratique Gabonais (BDG) designated His Excellency Mr. Bongo as the running-mate of President Léon Mba in the March 1967 presidential election. By an open and overwhelming vote - almost 99 per cent of the ballots - the Gabonese people elected Mr. Léon Mba and Mr. Bongo President and Vice-President of the Republic respectively. After the death of President Léon Mba, His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo assumed the presidency in accordance with the Constitution of the Gabonese Republic.

Thus, the use of the term "political opponent" in connexion with these two distinguished Gabonese reveals not only bad faith, but above all intellectual dishonesty and an exceptionally malignant imagination.

On page 2 of annex II to document S/13304 it is stated "Bongo was kidnapped while leaving a movie house in Libreville in 1968 and never seen again. It was said that Denard killed Mba personally, slashing him to pieces with a machete." This statement is both gratuitous and scandalous; it is completely untrue and in flagrant contradiction with the actual facts.

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The Gabonese delegation simply wishes to recall that President Léon Mba died in France on 28 November 1967, stricken by an incurable disease from which he had suffered for several years. After lying in state in our former embassy, situated in the Rue Greuze in Paris, his mortal remains arrived at the Libreville airport, which now bears his name, at 6 p.m. on 30 November 1967. On 4 December 1967 a state funeral was held at Libreville in the presence of the delegations of many friendly countries.

At this stage two questions can be posed: is Mr. Jon Bradshaw really writing about Gabon, President Léon Mba and President Bongo, or simply about the figments of his fertile imagination?

On page 2 of annex II to document S/13304 it is further stated: "On Sunday morning, January 16, 1977, Denard and ninety-one mercenaries were aboard a four-engine, unmarked DC-7 en route from Libreville, in Gabon, to Cotonou, in Benin ...". The Gabonese delegation wishes to repeat here that the DC-7 aircraft which allegedly transported mercenaries to Benin did not take off from Gabon. This can be confirmed by reference to the statements made by the Gabonese delegation during the various Security Council debates on this matter.

The Gabonese delegation, which vigorously condemns the use of mercenaries, greatly regrets that, in an article which should have been devoted to the perpetrators of this international crime, and for reasons for which he alone understands, Jon Bradshaw distorts such important facts to this extent. This strange and equivocal attitude does not redound to the credit of Bradshaw himself or to that of the profession he is supposed to represent, and even less to that of the periodical which agreed to publish this article.

Lastly, this attitude of the author, which cannot be deemed commendable, simultaneously calls in question the accuracy of all the facts he has reported.

New York, 23 May 1979
