



Submission to the Universal
Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council

4th Cycle – 42nd Session

Country Review: Gabon

June 2022
by Ivan Evstatiev

Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 and focused on raising awareness and minimizing human rights violations in the educational field.

Together with our international sponsors and partners, we encourage and support the following activities/projects: removing obstacles in education; contributing to the achievement of peace and tranquillity in society through adaptation studies in an environment of intercultural tolerance; preventing radicalism and polarization, and eliminating the opportunity gap in education for all. Our goal is to work with global partners to remove barriers to education and take concrete steps to ensure universal access to education.



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Introduction

1. Broken Chalk is a non-profit organization with one main goal - To protect human rights in the world of education. The organization started with a website and articles, and currently, it is working on multiple projects, each aiming to fight human rights violations in the educational sphere. As the UPR is related to human rights violations, inequalities, human trafficking, and other violations, Broken Chalk prepares this article for the fourth Cycle and the specific country – Gabon.
2. During the last Cycle, the delegation put forward 166 recommendations, Gabon supported 143 of them, and the rest they noted. Section B32 is the one that stands out as it is related to the "Constitutional and legislative framework", and Gabon supported all of the recommendations given. The recommendations propose different approaches to how the European country can deal with racism. The recommendations given in 2017 will help Broken Chalk evaluate the performance of the specific country. This report will provide an update on the previous issues related to education, plus recommendations on how to deal with new ones. ⁱ

Costs of education

3. Concerning education, Gabon has significantly improved a lot of aspects since its liberty in 1960. Making education free and compulsory was an essential step in building a mechanism that gives children the opportunity to develop themselves and become an equal part of society. Even though the system aims to have all kids at school, the reality is much different than the expectations. Primary school enrolment is 90%, but by the time learners reach secondary school, the enrolment rates drop to 57% of girls and 48% of boys. Such low rates can be caused by numerous factors that apply to most African countries, such as school bullying, poverty, child prostitution, child trafficking, or family-related matters. Although education is free, learners need to provide for their supplies which may be a challenge for numerous households in the country. ⁱⁱ

Access to water, sanitation, and hygiene

4. In September 2021, Gabon gathered information about water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools for the first time ever. To protect the students from infections, in March 2020, all schools were closed because of COVID-19. Before the reopening, the Government supplied 757 schools with handwashing devices as part of the "Water Support project". The results of the survey show that around 3 out of 10 public schools (27%) do not have improved water points, 1 out of 5 public schools (19,9%) do not have toilets, and 1 out of 3 schools (36,5%) there are signs of defecation in the open because of lack of infrastructure. 15% of the schools have still no handwashing devices on their territory, and 29% of the public schools have no supply of water or soap.
5. As mentioned, access to clean water, toilets, and safe infrastructure are far from acceptable; therefore, they require great attention. A significant commitment is that a survey was executed. Now, the problem can be tackled specifically, as the Gabonese Government is aware of the schools that lack certain mandatory supplies. ⁱⁱⁱ

Trafficking in Gabon

6. The Government of Gabon does not fully meet the minimum standards to eliminate human trafficking in its country. Gabon managed to convict more traffickers than before and identified more child victims of trafficking. However, there is still room for improvement as the Government failed to adopt the anti-trafficking plan for the second consecutive year.
7. Traffickers exploit girls in forced labour, domestic service, markets, or roadside restaurants. Boys are mainly forced on more physical work such as mechanics, street vendors, and also in the fishing sector. Criminals may exploit child labour in gold mines or wildlife trafficking. Roadside bars are also an area where owners use children in sex trafficking. Some criminals give false documents to child trafficking victims, identifying them as older than 18 years old, to avoid prosecution in child trafficking law. ^{iv}
8. UNICEF helped 36 girls, victims of child trafficking, to overcome physical and mental damages. For six months, they received special treatment and support so that they could still be a valuable part of the community. However, child trafficking is still a significant problem in Gabon, and many kids suffer from lifetime damages, which prevent them from having an everyday life. ^v

Three detained Turkish professors from Gabon

9. Police had detained school principal Osman Özpınar, director of pedagogy İbrahim Akbaş, his spouse and school accountant Fikriye Akbaş and school employee Adnan Demirönel. These people and their families were detained in Libreville, the capital of

Gabon because they were associated with working in a school related to the Gulen movement. The professors were accused of document forgery. There was no basis for the allegations, and after they collapsed, the three men should've been released, but they were not. A new allegation was created, this time "posing a threat to the internal security of Gabon". The passports of the professors and their families were taken and never returned. After their passports were taken, the professors and their families were deported back to Turkey. The truth behind this case is that the Turkish president Recep Erdogan is chasing followers of the Gulen movement around the globe and has succeeded in some countries with problematic fundamental rights and politics. The goal of the Turkish president is to bring back Gulen followers and to put them in prison for their beliefs. In this case, unfortunately, this is exactly what happened.^{vi}

10. In 2021, The court sentenced Osman Özpınar to 10 years, Ibrahim Akbaş to 8 years and nine months in prison and Adnan Demirönel to 6 years and three months in jail for "membership of an armed terrorist organization". The reality is that Turkish professors were only trying to help and improve the education in Gabon, as they had run away from Turkey for being Gulen followers.^{vii}
11. The Turkish Government has managed to take over 217 schools in 18 countries where the rule of law and democratic principles were problematic –Gabon is among those countries. The Turkish Government has been trying to pressure foreign governments to hand over schools affiliated with Erdogan's arch-foe, Fethullah Gülen, to the Maarif Foundation. Gülen has revealed that he rejected Erdoğan's demand to tap schools operated by businesspeople aligned with his movement for use in promoting the Turkish president's political goals, which prompted the Turkish Government to establish Maarif to compete with and take over Gülen schools.^{viii}

Recommendations

12. Give support to children in need who cannot pay for their school supplies
13. Work towards minimalizing poverty
14. Improve hygiene in schools
15. Provide clean water, soap, and toilets for every school in the country
16. Fight child trafficking and corruption in the police department
17. Consult with UNICEF for the creation of centres to help victims of trafficking
18. Help teachers improve their knowledge and skills so they can provide children with better education

19. Prevent human rights violations in school institutions

20. To hand over back the Turkish schools to their actual owner. Apologizing to the families of those extradited to Turkey, restoring their dignity and paying compensation. Those who committed this unlawfulness should be held accountable before the judiciary.

ⁱ OHCHR. (2017, October 7). *OHCHR | Universal Periodic Review - Gabon*. Retrieved July 2, 2022, from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ga-index>

ⁱⁱ Paulin, M. E. J. (2021, March 22). *Reforms of the Gabonese education system: What challenges?* | Paulin | *Open Science Journal*. Osjournal.Org. Retrieved July 2, 2022, from <https://osjournal.org/ojs/index.php/OSJ/article/view/2712>

ⁱⁱⁱ UNICEF. (2021, September 21). *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene | UNICEF Gabon*. Retrieved July 3, 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/gabon/en/topics/water-sanitation-and-hygiene>

^{iv} Ramsey, W. (2021, August 5). *Gabon*. United States Department of State. Retrieved July 3, 2022, from <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/gabon/>

^v UNICEF. (2021a, July 30). *36 girls saved from black migration in Gabon are sent home for a new start*. Retrieved July 4, 2022, from <https://www.unicef.org/gabon/en/stories/36-girls-saved-black-migration-gabon-are-sent-home-new-start>

^{vi} S. (2018a, April 10). *3 detained Turkish educators and their families handed over to Turkey by Gabon*. Stockholm Center for Freedom. Retrieved July 4, 2022, from <https://stockholmcf.org/3-detained-turkish-educators-and-their-families-handed-over-to-turkey-by-gabon/>

^{vii} M. (2021a, February 5). *Gabon'dan getirilen üç FETÖ sanığına örgüt üyeliğinden hapis cezası*. Son dakika haberleri – Sözcü. Retrieved July 4, 2022, from <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2021/gundem/gabondan-getirilen-uc-feto-sanigina-orgut-uyeliginden-hapis-cezasi-6245627/>

^{viii} <https://nordicmonitor.com/2019/08/erdogans-long-arm-maarif-trains-30000-students-in-34-countries/>



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