

US Equatorial Guinea-Corruption, US government seeks \$70M from African official
LOS ANGELES (AP) The son of Equatorial Guinea's president plundered his country's natural resources through corruption, spending more than \$70 million in looted profits on a Malibu mansion, a Gulfstream jet and Michael Jackson memorabilia, the U.S. government said Tuesday.

Teodoro Nguema Obiang Mangue, a government minister in the West African country, used his position to siphon millions of dollars for his own personal use, authorities said in two civil forfeiture complaints filed in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. The complaints say Mangue's assets can be forfeited because he engaged in misappropriation and theft of public funds for his benefit.

The U.S. government is seeking to recover \$70 million in stolen funds from Nguema for "the benefit of the people of the country from which it was taken."

"We are sending the message loud and clear: The United States will not be a hiding place for the ill-gotten riches of the world's corrupt leaders," said Assistant Attorney General Lanny Breuer.

An email message left for Purificacion Angue Ondo, Equatorial Guinea's ambassador to the U.S., was not immediately returned.

U.S. authorities believe Nguema, son of Equatorial Guinea President Teodoro Obiang Nguema, amassed more than \$100 million through various schemes while he served as the country's forestry minister. Among them were demanding companies to pay a "tax" for doing business in Equatorial Guinea as well as providing Nguema with gifts and free services, according to court documents.

The country of about 680,000 people has become a major oil, gas and timber producer, resulting in billions of dollars in revenue.

Nguema is accused of tapping into that wealth and indulging in a lavish lifestyle, despite a government salary of about \$6,800 a month, officials said.

Nguema spent \$30 million on a Malibu mansion, \$38.5 million on a Gulfstream jet and about \$3.2 million on Michael Jackson memorabilia that included a crystal-covered glove from the "Bad" tour and a basketball signed by the singer and Michael Jordan, authorities said.

Among the other items purchased by Nguema, according to federal officials, was a 2011 Ferrari automobile valued at more than \$530,000. Nguema also stored 24 luxury cars worth nearly \$10 million at the Petersen Automotive Museum in Los Angeles and shipped them to France.

Nguema would give various stories to banks that questioned where he received large sums of cash, authorities said. When Nguema opened an account at a California bank in 2007, he claimed that he acquired money from a family inheritance and from trading expensive and custom automobiles, court documents show.

The U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations issued reports in 2004 and last year regarding possible corruption by Equatorial Guinea government officials.

The 2010 report found that powerful foreign officials and their families used attorneys, real estate agents and lobbyists to circumvent anti-corruption laws.

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