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Madagascar: Time to Make a Fresh Start

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Madagascar's presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for 2013 (possibly May). These elections could herald a fresh start for Madagascar which had been hindered by the intense rivalry between the country's two leading political protagonists: Andry Rajoelina, president of the incumbent transitional regime, and Marc Ravalomanana, the ousted head of state. Both men have finally indicated they will not run for office in the 2013 elections: keeping to their word is vital.
- Regional and international partners are already coordinating their management of the crisis. They must now step up their efforts to steer Madagascar's political class and military towards the implementation of a settlement that maintains civil peace and delivers credible elections. Then, with renewed donor support, the country can hope to revive exports, investment and a sustained drive for poverty reduction.
- Madagascar may not show levels of violence and traumatic disruption to compare with those in 'hot' crises elsewhere, but it is a slow-burning social and economic disaster. The overthrow of constitutional rule in 2009 provoked cuts to external aid and the exclusion of Malagasy exports from vital access privileges to the important US market.
- Despite donor efforts to maintain a drip feed of support for critical services, the UN reports that deprivation has deepened, particularly among children, in a country where incomes were already among Africa's lowest. The crisis has also hurt a once vigorous manufacturing sector and threatens lasting damage to a natural environment of global importance.
- Madagascar's economic development depends on full access to international aid, investment and confidence. If political manoeuvres or administrative failings undermine the democratic credibility of the elections, the international community and the African Union will need to refresh their strategy. They will need to reconcile the credible defence of democratic principles with reviving the development and growth denied to Madagascar's people over the past four years of political deadlock.

BACKGROUND

The current crisis in Madagascar has already lasted almost four years and is the worst since the arrival of democracy in the early 1990s.¹ It is principally one of poor governance: an extended stand-off between elites and their close supporters over the fruits of power while the country treads water, the population watches helplessly and Madagascar's unique natural resources come under ever more pressure.

The dilemma for the international community has been how to help Madagascar regain democratic constitutionality, without legitimizing the 2009 coup – but also without penalizing the poor and weak by allowing the vacuum in governance to continue indefinitely.

The background is deep and complex. Madagascar has many potentially unifying qualities, shared throughout the 'Great Island', including a single Malagasy language, a general caution when it comes to foreigners, common cultural beliefs including respect for the ancestors, pragmatic respect for authority or *le pouvoir* (those holding office have usually had an advantage over the challenger), and an instinctive dislike for overt confrontation. However, it also has many ingredients for tension, dissatisfaction and – in the last analysis – some conflict.

Madagascar's pre-colonial and colonial history has left its mark on modern attitudes. The majority coastal people (known as *côtiers* who came from a mix of Polynesian, African and Arab descents) resented their 19th-century subjugation by the Merina plateau kingdom (of Polynesian descent), and this influenced the general trend after independence for coastal areas to gang up electorally to prevent a Merina presidency. Nevertheless in the last decade the tale has been different, with two Merina political leaders (Marc Ravalomanana and Andry Rajoelina) at each other's throats, indicating that other factors such as control of central resources, institutions and security may matter more. France's forcible control of Madagascar in the colonial period also laid the basis for further layers of difference – between Protestant and Catholic and between the Malagasy elite and the modern French business class, said to own 'over 80% of all medium and large scale firms'.² Within the Malagasy political elite there has always been competition for control of natural resources. Modern discoveries of minerals and hydrocarbons have raised the stakes. And within the general population there have been differences between the urban population, with generally more access to industrial jobs, services and imports, and the isolated rural population.

These cleavages were suppressed to a degree under authoritarian colonial and post-colonial rule and to an extent papered over by a patronizing neo-colonialism. However, in the last 20 years they have been exposed under the rising forces of democracy and economic liberalism. As in mainland Africa, the fall of the Berlin wall led to democratization, signalled by the institution of a Third Republic in 1993 when Albert Zafy defeated the long-standing autocrat of the Cold War era, Didier Ratsiraka.

Madagascar's messy democratic 'merry-go-round'

Since 1993 there has been a messy democratic 'merry-go-round' in Madagascar, the main features of which have been:

- difficult and sometimes unconstitutional political transitions, often marked by disputed election results, confrontation and some violence;
- regular revision of the constitution and use of institutions and security forces by the winner to penalize political opponents retrospectively and consolidate power;
- leaders who have all blurred public and private interests for personal gain;

¹ The detailed political, social, economic and cultural history of Madagascar has been analysed well in, for example, Solofo Ranrianja and Stephen Ellis, *Madagascar: A Short History* (London: Hurst, 2009).

² Oliver Jütersonke and Moncef Kartas, *Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment, Madagascar* (Geneva: Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding, 2010).

- the general personalization of politics, weakness of institutions and of democratic culture;
- some bursts of political/economic reform and engagement with the international community (under Prime Minister Norbert Lala Ratsirahonana in 1996–07 and Ravalomanana's first term in 2002–06, followed by periods of stagnation; and
- the general decline of the middle class and of the quality of life and rule of law for the average Malagasy, despite some private-sector growth.

Difficult democratic transitions: Ravalomanana vs Ratsiraka, 2001–02

The first shoots of democracy sprang up after the Cold War ended and the Ratsiraka regime fell – a period marked by violence following the killing of opposition demonstrators in 1991 by the president's guards and his loss of the subsequent election. His successor Zafy's ineffectual leadership squandered the democratic dividend he had been handed, although his time was made difficult by excessive political factionalism, with a plethora of political parties based around personalities and factional jealousies rather than policies. Ironically, Zafy was impeached by parliament in July 1996 under the constitution introduced by the new democratic movement to bring better checks and balances. There followed a brief reformist period of better governance under Prime Minister Ratsirahonana. However Ratsiraka was subsequently voted back into office in 1994. He unsurprisingly passed constitutional amendments to restore the overwhelming authority of the executive and return to the traditional subordination of parliament and the judiciary to presidential political influence.

The next major controversy came when Marc Ravalomanana, the mayor of Antananarivo, the capital city, who had used his milk/yoghurt commercial empire to gain country-wide recognition, won the first round in the 2001 presidential election but declined a run-off against Ratsiraka, saying he had won an outright majority and calling for review by the High Constitutional Court (HCC). The ensuing stand-off led to Ratsiraka's supporters blockading the capital, the mobilization of Ravalomanana's supporters and the spectacle of rival 'governments' and economic disruption, with Ratsiraka controlling the provinces from the coastal city of Toamasina. Ravalomanana rejected mediation attempts by the African Union (AU). Following a recount that found he had won over 51%, his presidency was confirmed by the HCC and took office, thereafter gaining the upper hand and international recognition. Ratsiraka went into exile in France.

Although Ravalomanana won parliamentary elections in 2002, he also resorted to political manipulation of the judicial system to intimidate past or potential opponents. Ratsiraka was prosecuted and sentenced to five years in prison *in absentia*. A former prime minister, Tantely Andrianarivo, was jailed and then finally allowed to travel abroad for health treatment. Ratsiraka's nephew, Roland, the popular mayor of Toamasina, was politically hobbled through a questionable persecution. Despite signs of discontent from the military, Ravalomanana won the 2006 presidential election convincingly. In subsequent parliamentary polls, questionable management of the voting process delivered an easy victory to his ideology-light Tiako y Madagasikara (I love Madagascar) political movement, whose cadres were largely drawn from executives of his TIKO business group (a movement thus vaguely reminiscent of Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party model.)

However, supported by international financial institutions and donors, and espousing market-economy slogans, Ravalomanana had some success in his first term, advocating economic reform and development, and opening Madagascar to more foreign investment and global markets; foreign direct investment rose from \$86 million in 2005 to \$1.47 billion in 2008.³

3 UNCTAD WID Country Profile: Madagascar, http://archive.unctad.org/sections/dite_fdostat/docs/wid_cp_mg_en.pdf; US Department of State, 2012 Investment Climate Statement: Madagascar, <http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2012/191189.htm>.

Yet, as time went on, he showed political naivety by failing to win over some key interest groups, including the Francophone Malagasy political old guard and some parts of the army. He became increasingly vulnerable when showing signs of favouring his own business empire and spending excessively (e.g. for a new presidential jet), blocking business rivals and intending to lease a large bloc of land to South Korea.

France was slow to accept that Ravalomanana should replace Ratsiraka. Its relations with Ravalomanana's government were initially cold. Although they improved over time out of pragmatism, they remained ambivalent. For his part Ravalomanana was perceived to retain a generally anti-French agenda.

There is a plethora of political parties in the country but four have dominated elections in the multi-party era: Association for Rebirth of Madagascar (AREMA-Ratsiraka), the National Union for Development and Democracy (UNDD-Zafy) and, more recently, I love Madagascar (TIM-Ravalomanana), and Young Malagasy Determined Party (TGV-Rajoelina). Small reform-inclined parties have often occupied the political centre between larger blocs, helping to form governing majority coalitions. Prominent regional politicians have also developed their own local political movements. As a rule, parties have tended to revolve around personalities and interests rather than policies.

Difficult political transitions: Ravalomanana vs Rajoelina, 2009

To some extent history repeated itself in 2009 when Ravalomanana closed down the television station owned by Andry Rajoelina, the mayor of Antananarivo, which had broadcast an interview with Ratsiraka. Rajoelina was able to buy the support of some demonstrators and elements of the military, helped by Ravalomanana's grant of a pay rise to the police rather than to the army. Tension escalated, with more than 100 deaths and the harsh suppression of a demonstration outside the presidential palace. This led elements of the military to step in, forcing Ravalomanana to stand down. They then conferred the presidency on Rajoelina. He described himself president of a *Haute Autorité de la Transition* (HAT) and pledged elections by October 2010. These have never been held. Instead, Rajoelina held a unilateral constitutional referendum in 2010, the result of which enabled him to stand for election as president, since the age limit was lowered from 40 to 30 years, and to continue in power until elections at an unspecified date. Ravalomanana left for South Africa, where he remains to this day though insisting he will return. He has since been charged *in absentia* with murder and attempted murder for the killings of protesters outside his palace in 2009 and sentenced to forced labour for life. There is also an on-going legal case against Ravalomanana in the South African courts, instigated by Malagasy litigants and relating to alleged crimes against humanity for the same incident. This may have been a politically motivated attempt to prevent him from being free to campaign abroad against Rajoelina.

A DIVIDED SOCIETY

The current crisis has deeply divided Madagascar's political class and has increasingly frustrated ordinary citizens. The latter have low expectations of politicians but the current hiatus, a virtual absence of government, has left most feeling particularly helpless.

Rajoelina and Ravalomanana seem to dislike each other personally. Their very different policy approaches have also contributed to the malaise in the body politic. Polarized visions have created divergent views, dividing many families, communities and churches – Ravalomanana is a prominent lay member of the Protestant church – as well as the business (local and international) community and donors. This should not be overstated, however, as the vast majority of the people probably feel excluded from the Antananarivo political game: they will rather be hoping for tangible improvements in their daily life, which require a return of normality, confidence, security and economic prospects. Moreover, both Rajoelina and Ravalomanana are from the Merina ethnic group from the central highlands.

Competing interests

Ravalomanana offered a vision that moved beyond French influence and 'neo-colonialism' to a globalized world, tapping into some neo-nationalist instincts, such as of those who resented the assumption that if children were not educated in French they lacked a proper education. In 2005 he brought Madagascar into the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and accessed \$110 million from the US Millennium Challenge Corporation. He attracted significant World Bank finance (\$38.6 million by 2007).⁴ His 'Madagascar Action Plan' of 2006 emphasized the rebuilding of roads, governance, education, rural and environmental reform, family planning, economic growth and use of the English language as a tool for engaging with global and southern African markets.

In contrast, Rajoelina offered youth,⁵ a partial return to the French and Catholic Church sphere of influence, and escape from Ravalomanana's domination of politics and the economy. Rajoelina scrapped plans for English to be taught in all primary schools and called for French to be the language of education.

Blurring of public and personal interests

As well as using the executive powers to undermine opponents (for instance, by closing down media outlets judged to be acting against government interests), both men blurred national and personal interests, although similar accusations could be made against previous leaders.

Ravalomanana gave his businesses preferential treatment across the board, including in the context of liberalization, which in some cases hurt the economic interests of opposition figures. His Tiko Group grew to become a principal government supplier and it was at times difficult to distinguish it from his TIM party since political advisers and many ministers were former Tiko directors. Tiko companies received many contracts, tax reductions and exemptions, although the largest winners of public contracts were the French Colas group and the Sino-Malagasy company SMATP.

The ability to grant patronage and contracts also benefited Rajoelina and his regime, one illustration being the increase in approved rosewood exporters from 13 to 23 in 2009.⁶ Statements have allegedly been made by Chinese traders (and denied by him) appearing to implicate Rajoelina in the illegal Malagasy rosewood trade. Illegal logging continues despite a 2010 decree

4 'Madagascar: Trends in Conflict and Cooperation', SwissPeace, Fast Update, No. 2, April–May 2007, http://www.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/Media/Projects/FAST/Africa/Madagaskar/FAST_Update_Mad_07_02.pdf.

5 At the time Rajoelina was 33 years old and Ravalomanana 60.

6 Illegal logging within the Sava and Analanjirifo regions that year amounted to 52,000 tonnes of precious wood from approximately 100,000 rosewood and ebony trees. About 36,700 tonnes were shipped, almost all to China.

prohibiting all exports of rosewood and other precious timber for two to five years; and it seems a ministerial order can allow such exports.⁷

Churches as rivals not mediators

Churches play a large part in the life of the Malagasy. Whereas in previous crises the Malagasy Council of Christian Churches (FFKM), which incorporates the Protestant FJKM, Catholics, Anglicans and Lutherans, acted with moral authority as mediator between political groups, the FFKM and Christian followers in general were split in 2009. For some this meant an ethical vacuum. Not only were Ravalomanana and Rajoelina Protestant and Catholic respectively (the former being FJKM vice president), but Ravalomanana had created a legal partnership between his administration and churches, in the process raising perceptions of favouring the FJKM. Catholics kept their distance for various reasons, including the closure of a phone-in programme on Catholic radio, the expulsion of a priest and Ravalomanana's educational reforms. The fact that the Vatican was at one time one of only four states to present ambassadorial credentials to Rajoelina (France being one of the others) further undermined ecumenical unity and perceptions of neutrality.

The Protestant and Catholic leaders have since reconciled in theory, urging mutual forgiveness between their flocks. But various incidents, including the closure of a FJKM-supported station and arrests of some journalists in 2010 for allegedly threatening state security, indicate that the HAT may well continue to see denominations in political terms.

Economic development and business rivalries

While Ravalomanana opened the economy to the wider world of SADC, North America and Germany, eating into French commercial dominance, the current crisis has brought economic instability. Growth dropped from 7% in 2008 to 0.6% in 2009.⁸ Many foreign companies reviewed their engagement and levels of operation given the uncertainty of trying to operate in a legally insecure environment. Some foreign investors moved to a watching brief, putting new investment on hold, monitoring the political situation and suspending operations, Exxon (with an off-shore oil and gas interest) being a case in point. The United States, the EU, Japan, the World Bank and the African Development Bank withdrew support (except humanitarian aid), which had previously accounted for about 75% of government spending.⁹ The United Kingdom cancelled debt relief and British aid to Madagascar fell from £15 million in 2007 to £2.5 million in 2010. Some businesses closed as a result of the international sanctions.

However, the finance ministry and the central bank have managed to maintain basic fiscal and monetary stability. The national currency, the ariary, has mostly maintained its value. This has been achieved through tight monetary discipline at the central bank and through a strategy of austerity in public expenditure. Now reliant mostly on domestic fiscal revenue, the finance ministry has prioritized the payment of current obligations such as salaries, while cutting back dramatically on capital investment and development schemes.

The sharp decline in aid and preferential trade agreements, coupled with the drop in tourism and a global downturn in markets for Madagascar's main food exports (vanilla, cloves, coffee and shrimps) led to 228,000 job losses in 2010, according to the World Bank.¹⁰ In the Free Trade Zone half of the 350 export companies closed. The 2009 suspension of the agreement under the US African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), which allowed the export of duty-free goods to the United States, caused textile factories to close or lay off workers. Madagascar had been one of the

⁷ David Brown, 'Madagascar Logging Crisis: Separating Myth from Fact', *National Geographic News Watch*, 20 May 2010, http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2010/05/20/madagascar_logging_crisis/.

⁸ 'Madagascar 2012', African Economic Outlook, African Development Bank, <http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Madagascar%20Full%20PDF%20Country%20Note.pdf>.

⁹ Lauren Plock and Nicolas Cook, 'Madagascar's Political Crisis', Congressional Research Service, 18 June 2012, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R40448.pdf>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

big successes of Washington's AGOA strategy, which was designed to encourage sub-Saharan African countries to build up a competitive manufacturing base. There were previously 50,000 people in AGOA-related employment (25% of the jobs in the formal economy) and a further 100,000 had benefited indirectly.¹¹ But exclusion from AGOA has pushed the development of manufacturing into reverse.

Regulation has weakened since the crisis and business has slowed generally. Exports have fallen (down by 50% between 2008 and 2010 according to the World Bank).¹² Nevertheless the agricultural sector, although vulnerable to climatic conditions, has performed reasonably well; and fiscal and monetary policies have helped keep the macroeconomic framework under control.

Mining production has grown thanks to the development of two major new projects: Rio Tinto's ilmenite project at Taolagnaro in the far southeast is already in production, while Canadian group Sherritt (with Japanese and South Korean partners) is well advanced in the development of a new mine at Ambatovy, east of Antananarivo, which will become one of the world's major sources of nickel and cobalt. Local community concerns over the impact of Ambatovy have attracted little national public attention – a sign of how the normal processes of scrutiny, policy control and dialogue with international partners have been marginalized during the prolonged political crisis and the HAT's stand-off with donors.

The World Bank's *Africa Competitiveness Report 2011* cites the top five constraints for doing business in Madagascar as government instability/coups, policy instability, corruption, access to finance, and crime and theft.¹³

The instinct of some competitors marginalized by actions taken by Ravalomanana and his companies was to back Rajoelina even before 2009, and a number profited by his accession to power. For example it has been alleged that Edgard Razafindravahy, owner of *L'Express* newspaper, 'became an anchor for both Rajoelina's public and business interests.'¹⁴ Many in the business community now speak of an 'Anglo-Saxon'/French divide that developed under Ravalomanana and revealed itself more fully in the 2009 crisis, accompanied by street rumours that French business interests such as Total funded the coup,¹⁵ The sense of exclusion was also felt by those members of Ravalomanana's own party not closely associated with Tiko. Hence after the crisis TIM split into two factions opposing or favouring his return to contest elections.

One of the early acts of supporters of the new regime was to vandalize Tiko stores and any others deemed to be associated with the old regime. The threats, lootings and hijackings brought operations to a halt. At least 5,000 people reportedly lost their jobs and faced threats because of their association with Ravalomanana's business empire.

China's economic engagement with Madagascar has grown rapidly since 2000. Chinese investment was encouraged by Ravalomanana; for example, Sunpec secured offshore oilfield concessions and other construction and mining companies signed contracts. The HAT in turn has tried to compensate for the suspension of international aid by increased efforts, such as lifting Chinese customs dues for Malagasy exports, to encourage Chinese and Asian companies. One such has been WISCO, which had shown interest but had not received a permit under Ravalomanana, for exploration of the large Soalala iron deposit; it was finally awarded the concession by the HAT regime, a deal for which it paid a \$100 million signature bonus. Probably reflecting declining standards of governance and regulation, another company apparently now present in the country (probably reflecting declining standards of governance and regulation) is the

11 One worker reported in June 2011: 'I worked six years in this free trade zone. But now our garment factory has shut and the Chinese left. So we no longer have work there and we keep ourselves busy with household jobs.' Mariama Diallo, 'Clinton to Attend US-Africa Trade Forum During Visit to Zambia', *Voice of America*, 5 June 2011, <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/africa/Clinton-to-Attend-US-Africa-Trade-Forum-During-Visit-to-Zambia-123282123.html>.

12 Plock and Cook, 'Madagascar's Political Crisis'.

13 The Africa Competitiveness Report 2011, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/The_Africa_Competitiveness_Report_2011.pdf.

14 Richard Marcus, 'Marc the Medici? The Failure of a New Form of Neopatrimonial Rule in Madagascar', *Political Science Quarterly*, 125 (2010), 1: 122.

15 Susan Zakin, 'Why Madagascar Matters', *Huffington Post*, 24 November 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/susan-zakin/post_1327_b_788119.html.

China International Fund, which has attracted international attention in Angola and Guinea for its opaque business practices.¹⁶

The long-standing Indian-linked business community (*karan*) has also continued to pursue opportunities, sometimes in competition with China. The head of the Indian-owned industrial group SIPROMAD encouraged Saudi investment in the hotel sector, a commercial opportunity that had previously been rebuffed by the Ravalomanana government. Varun Madagascar, an offshoot of the Indian parent company and an early investor in agribusiness, has bought substantial tracts of land for rice, maize and lentil cultivation. The company assured the local population that it would not follow the Daewoo example and that land deals would be negotiated under fair contracts.¹⁷ However, prices reportedly negotiated with the HAT (\$15 per hectare for 50-year contracts) seem significantly lower than in the Punjab.¹⁸ Another arm of the company made a significant rare-earths find, a business area of traditional interest to China.

Mining and extractive industries

Although not yet operational, in recent years a large number of companies have been negotiating and setting up hydrocarbon production sharing agreements and joint ventures. Madagascar has 20 oil/gas blocks onshore and 246 offshore.¹⁹ It was accepted as a candidate country for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2008 but the current crisis led to its suspension in 2011 'until the international situation was resolved'.²⁰ Although the unity government Prime Minister Jean Omer Beriziky appointed under the SADC roadmap (see below), asked in 2012 for the suspension to be lifted, this was not agreed to, although it was noted that there had been 'impressive progress in EITI implementation'.²¹ A multi-stakeholder group has developed a 2013–14 work-plan for implementation.

Although mining production has grown, Rajoelina and his mining ministers have made various statements about large-scale extractives industries, along the lines that they wish to raise company taxes, to renegotiate the Mining Code of 2000, and to raise licence fees, port fees and customs dues. They have also spoken of possible nationalization or of the state taking significant stakes in companies. In some cases auditors have been sent to 'review' companies and NGOs, and there have been concerns that discrepancies arising from non-adherence to old rules or new interpretations of old rules may result in non-transparent 'rent-seeking'.

Some large companies, whose operations have a significant regional impact, had made large investments before 2009 and were either fully or nearly operational by time the crisis began. For example, Sherritt International, the Canadian-registered nickel/cobalt conglomerate, began operations in eastern Madagascar in 2012 – although remaining under government 'review' – with the aim of converting to a life-of-mine operating permit after six months. Rio Tinto's Qit Madagascar Minerals ilmenite operation, which has 20% state equity, started mining ilmenite in southeastern Madagascar in 2009.

16 'The Queensway syndicate and the Africa trade', *The Economist*, 13 August 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/21525847>; Markus Weimer and Alex Vines, 'China's Angolan Oil Deals 2003–2011,' in Marcus Power and Ana Christina Alves (eds), *China & Angola: A Marriage of Convenience?* (Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2012), p. 98.

17 Daewoo Logistics was to rent 3.2 million acres – a large proportion of the country's arable land and an area half the size of Belgium – to grow maize and biofuels.

18 Rivo Andrianirina Ratsialonana, Landry Ramarojohn, Perrine Burnod and André Teyssier 'After Daewoo? Current status and perspectives of large-scale land acquisition in Madagascar', International Land Coalition, January 2011, http://www.landcoalition.org/sites/default/files/publication/905/CIRAD_OF_Mada_ENG_web_16.03.11.pdf.

19 Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 'Madagascar', <http://eiti.org/Madagascar>.

20 Ibid.

21 'Madagascar Governance and Development Effectiveness Review: A Political Economy Analysis of Governance in Madagascar', Report No. 54277-MG, December 2010, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTMADAGASCARINFRENCH/Resources/ESW_Gouvernance.pdf.

Growing poverty

While there had been some progress in economic and social indicators between 2002 and 2008 (despite continuing problems of governance, employment creation and environmental protection), poverty has increased significantly since the 2009 crisis, reaching 77% of households in 2010, the highest in Africa, with an estimated average income of \$400 per capita.²² Madagascar ranks 143rd in the UNDP's Human Development Index and is unlikely to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

External factors are significant. The suspension of most official aid, which accounts for an estimated 40% of the budget and 75% of public investment, has brought a dramatic drop in access to education and health, and an increase in social tensions. Over 30,000 workers were laid off from textile and garments firms after AGOA access was removed in 2010, thus increasing tension in the informal sector.²³ School entry levels have dropped and teachers have been on strike seeking salary increases. Donors have tried to soften the impact of aid sanctions by channelling some pay direct to teachers, bypassing normal government treasury channels. Growing differences in living standards between the urban rich and poor have also increased social tensions.

The 2009 crisis also brought a sudden drop in official revenue with a plunge in tourist figures. According to the National Tourism Office, the number of visitors declined by 56% in 2010.²⁴ This had rebounded considerably by 2012, however, and some new community-run projects have also emerged.

In 2011 the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, called on donors and foreign governments to reconsider the sanctions because they were aggravating an already severe level of deprivation.²⁵ He said levels of child malnutrition were now among the highest in the world, comparable with those in Afghanistan and Yemen; that the suspension of AGOA trade privileges had cost at least 50,000 jobs in Antananarivo; and that many female former textile plant employees had been forced to become sex workers to survive. De Schutter acknowledged that donors had sought to maintain large aid flows through non-governmental channels, but he added that this had not maintained sustained action to combat poverty. He also pointed out that if donors had remained supportive, Madagascar could have moved further towards self-sufficiency in rice (the basic staple), instead of importing 100,000–150,000 tonnes a year.

In July 2011 the World Bank decided that the damage caused by suspending all new aid to Madagascar was too great. It approved a new credit of \$52 million for measures to protect biodiversity in the national parks system.

Environment under ever-greater pressure

Madagascar has perhaps 5% of the world's plant and animal species, of which 80% are endemic. Its unique environment has been under pressure for centuries but this has accelerated in the last 50 years as the population has grown rapidly and more forested areas have been made available for rice and other crops through 'slash and burn' agriculture. In 1990 Madagascar had 11 million hectares of forest and 11 million people; currently there are 9 million hectares of forest and 20 million people.

There seems to be a cycle to the illegal logging of rosewood.²⁶ This may begin with legislation protecting forests that is not enforced owing to a lack of resources and/or political will. Loggers accumulate stocks while awaiting an opportune time for export. A cyclone, an election (requiring

22 The World Bank, 'Madagascar: World Development Indicators', 2011, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/madagascar>; and 'Madagascar', Country Brief 2011, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/madagascar>.

23 The World Bank, 'Madagascar Overview', <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/madagascar/overview>.

24 'Madagascar 2012'.

25 'Economic sanctions worsening hunger in Madagascar, UN expert warns', UN News Centre, 22 July 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39117&Cr=Madagascar&Cr1=#.UPw42Sd96Ck>.

26 Hery Randriamalala, and Zou Liu, 'Rosewood of Madagascar: Between Democracy and Conservation', *Madagascar Conservation & Development*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2010).

funds) or a political crisis may provide such an opportunity to lobby for an 'exceptional' export such as those that took place in 2000, 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2009.

Ravalomanana made some progress in his expressed vision to triple the amount of land with protected status and to protect endangered biodiversity. Nevertheless during his presidency forests were opened to exploitation.²⁷ The sudden rise in the export of rosewood during the last weeks of his government in 2009 – under a decree authorizing export under 'exceptional' circumstances for 13 registered exporters – was a case in point.

The crisis, with the associated weaker governance and regulation and loss of security control, has increased the threat to endangered species. A range of reports detail the poaching of lemurs, rare tortoises, amphibians and chameleons.²⁸ Thailand appears to be a major destination for their illegal export, with animal-traffickers keen to exploit Madagascar's political chaos and lack of law enforcement. In 2011 TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, reported that in a 15-day survey of 32 vendors in Bangkok and eight Thai provinces, it had found 591 specimens of Madagascar's reptiles and amphibians for sale. In one week more than 800 protected reptiles were seized by Thai authorities at Bangkok's airport.²⁹

Law and order

The HAT regime has had general support from the military. That support has probably been nurtured by granting many of their requests, including a range of promotions and a 30% pay rise (in stark contrast to the attitude to teachers and others). In June 2011 the army's chief of staff said it would 'take all measures necessary' to prevent Ravalomanana's return as it could threaten 'public order and security'.³⁰ But not all officers supported Rajoelina, as shown by periodic unrest in the ranks.

The crisis has seen a general deterioration of law and order and security, linked partly to politics and partly to the declining governance, human rights and economic situation (with criminals perhaps feeling more licensed to break the law given the corruption or other questionable behaviour of those in power). Different parts of the security forces (military, gendarmerie, police) are factionalized. Some senior officers probably remain neutral but others seem to have varying political affiliations, whether national, regional or local. Given that military leaders have their own spheres of influence, security or support is sometimes 'contracted' in return for payments.

The crisis has seen judicial judgments that are influenced by the executive, as when the HCC laid down rulings favouring the handover to Rajoelina in 2009. New institutions have also been set up with the intent to undermine existing ones, including the judiciary and police; this has led to the release of some detainees condemned for human rights violations and an increase in politically linked detentions. A new Special Investigation Force was established partly to control demonstrations and to pursue high-profile targets.

Misuse of power and of state force has been a feature of many Malagasy governments, however. Since the return to democracy, military guards have been accused of killing protesters under different presidents. There have been mutinies of various scales, some successfully tipping the balance against the president (as in 2009), others violently put down (as in July 2012.)

In addition to an increase in petty crime, muggings and robberies, there has also been an upsurge in cattle-rustling and larger-scale violence by significant groups of bandits, possibly using arms obtained from the military on the black market. A particularly serious episode of cattle-rustling and gangsterism took place in 2012 in Amboasary, in southeastern Madagascar. It reportedly involved

27 This happened on three occasions: in September 2004 after cyclone Gafilo; in September 2006 before the presidential elections, and just before a referendum held on April 2007.

28 Andriatahina Manantsoa, Rakotondrabe François Bernard, 'ONESF, Mission dans la SAVA du 18 au 21 Juillet 2009'.

29 PRWeb, 'Threatened Madagascar Reptiles and Amphibians Being Sold in Thailand', 15 June 2011, <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2011/6/prweb8577484.htm>.

30 Plock and Cook, 'Madagascar's Political Crisis'.

several hundred well-armed bandits, some of them apparently former convicts or soldiers, whose threat seems only to have been finally removed by citizens taking up arms themselves.

Rajoelina's search for legitimacy through *de facto* control

Despite international criticism and sanctions, Rajoelina has held on to power. And until a surprise January 2013 announcement that he would not contest this year's presidential poll he gave every sign of a determination to prolong his rule by securing victory in that election. Repeated diplomatic efforts were made to influence him and other politicians to restore constitutional rule through a roadmap to credible elections. Analysts following the various international efforts at diplomacy and mediation could certainly have been forgiven for mostly concluding that Rajoelina's ultimate objective was to legitimise his power – in the hope that this would lead to a restoration of international aid and support; his tactic for achieving this was to play for time – hoping that the international community would accept the *de facto* situation – while preventing his predecessor from returning to the country.

INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

Madagascar merits international attention for three reasons:

- Its geo-strategic position, rich minerals, natural resources and commercial potential;
- Its unique environment and biodiversity, which is highly vulnerable to human pressure and climate change; and
- Its erratic performance in governance, human rights and tackling poverty.

The 2009 coup was a clear breach of constitutionality. A day after Rajoelina took power, the African Union's Peace and Security Council (PSC) invoked Article 30 of the Constitutive Act and the Lomé Convention and suspended Madagascar from participating in AU activities. The Southern African Development Community and *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) also suspended Madagascar, while the UN, EU, United States and others condemned the coup and called for a settlement based on negotiations between the two parties.

Over the last years there has been a range of views expressed within the international community, particularly on whether, and if so how far and how fast, to compromise with Rajoelina and the *de facto* situation on the ground.

The UN position has been careful. In 2009, in the aftermath of the coup, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Haile Menkerios declared that 'The [Security] Council members expressed serious concern about the unconstitutional means of taking power by [Andry Rajoelina] and urged that there be a quick return to constitutional order through a transitional process that is based on consensus reached through wide participation of all stakeholders in Madagascar'.³¹ The UN's Credentials Committee avoided the issue of acceptance or rejection of Rajoelina's *bona fides* as president, but SADC member states initially voted against his appearance before the UN General Assembly. The signing of the SADC roadmap in September 2011 opened the way to his appearance (see below).

South Africa's foreign policy opposes unconstitutional changes of government, which no doubt influenced its offer of temporary asylum to Ravalomanana and his subsequent invitation to President Jacob Zuma's inauguration. In turn this probably increased Rajoelina's suspicions of South African neutrality, at least initially. There have also been pressures within the ruling African National Congress to offer an African alternative to Western intervention in Africa's crises, in this case to French manoeuvring in Madagascar. France, with which South Africa worked closely to draw up the original SADC roadmap, nevertheless appeared willing to accept Zuma's leadership in taking it forward. In the roadmap, the return of the former president to Madagascar without threat of imprisonment has been a red line for the mediators.³²

The refusal of the EU, alongside African actors, to recognize Rajoelina and its readiness to reinforce this stance with sanctions as necessary probably influenced the position of France. The EU also anchored its relationship with Madagascar to Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement, an instrument for enforcing essential governance elements of the agreement such as human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

France has traditionally had the largest foreign interests in Madagascar, with nearly 25,000 citizens and 700 companies in the country. There was allegedly close French involvement during the crisis when Rajoelina took power. Indeed France's first response to the coup seemed to be to work for early normalization, building on the *de facto* situation, by calling for quick elections. As time went on, however, there were signs of French disappointment with Rajoelina's broken promises and poor performance. France's ambivalent position was probably dictated by its national interest. On the one hand it was pragmatic, encouraging the international community to take account of realities on the ground and calling for the continuation of some development aid to address the declining

31 United Nations calls for fair elections in Madagascar, People's Daily Online, 8 April 2009, <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90777/90856/6632022.html>;

UN News Centre, 'Madagascar: dialogue necessary to end "untenable" situation, says UN official', 7 April 2009, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?Cr=madagascar&Cr1=&NewsID=30422#.UPfkK6DkXMA>;

32 'SADC wants Ravalomanana to go back', *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, No. 1311, 18 June 2011.

socio-economic conditions. On the other hand France supported SADC efforts to exert pressure on the key political protagonists, in the hope of moving towards credible democratic elections.

France's position was also confused by the management of foreign policy under President Nicolas Sarkozy, in which political dealings with some African countries were largely entrusted to the president's own Africa team at the Elysée palace, marginalizing the foreign ministry (which was more closely aligned with mainstream EU policy). Some Sarkozy advisers were initially viewed as sympathetic to Rajoelina and hopeful this would revive close relations with Antananarivo. However, France moved gradually into the mainstream international community stance towards Rajoelina's continued non-constitutional rule. François Hollande, the Socialist president elected in 2012, has been determined to position France in support of African management of crises in Africa. His main focus has been the crisis in Mali, but his broad approach is likely to reinforce French commitment to the mainstream international community support for SADC's handling of the Madagascar issue.

Although the United Kingdom controversially closed its embassy in Antananarivo in 2005 as part of a cost-cutting exercise, the current government reopened it in November 2012. This can be seen partly as a signal of Britain's wish to use its influence on the ground in initiatives aimed at securing a democratic return to constitutional rule as envisaged by the SADC roadmap.

The OIF policy has not strayed far from that of France. The OIF called for prompt presidential and legislative elections as a solution to the political impasse. Indeed it offered material assistance to facilitate such polls together with the Indian Ocean Commission, to which France also belongs through its overseas department of Réunion. At one stage it also envisaged a rapid timetable although the UN considered that updating the electoral roll, the essential prerequisite for fair polls, would take a minimum of 10 months.

The US position uncompromisingly rejected Rajoelina's unconstitutional assumption of power and Washington still regards the HAT as illegitimate. Following the coup, it swiftly ratcheted up available diplomatic responses. Non-emergency aid was suspended in the immediate wake of the coup, in keeping with the position adopted by most European and African states. Perhaps the action with the greatest impact was Madagascar's suspension from AGOA trade privileges and the termination of the MCC programme. The United States has also supported the mediation efforts of the AU and SADC.

Chinese interests primarily rest on potential access to vital commodities, trade, cultural links and developmental concerns rather than geopolitical or strategic rationales.³³ The community of 60,000 citizens is one of the oldest and largest in Africa. China's official line has reflected its usual policy of non-interference, but in practice accepting the international position that unconstitutional change of government must not stand while keeping channels open with the regime, including by maintaining technical and humanitarian assistance. In contrast to most other external actors Beijing has been less concerned to put pressure on the HAT than to preserve Chinese economic interests.

India's interests are also significant, both in geopolitical terms and through its well-established diaspora. There is an ethnic Indo-Pakistani community of between 15,000 and 30,000 in Madagascar. Since independence Indian entrepreneurs have penetrated the commercial sector to the extent that a report compiled for India's Ministry of External Affairs in 2000 claimed that business people from this community owned 50–60% of the economy – a figure at variance with estimates of French commercial dominance.³⁴ There are allegations that some Indian business interests favoured Rajoelina during the crisis and have profited since 2009, including from lower regulatory standards. The opening in Madagascar of India's first overseas military listening post in 2007 signalled the country's geopolitical importance to India within the western Indian Ocean for countering piracy and terrorism in the Mozambique Channel, as well as for India's relations with Pakistan and China.³⁵

33 Mathieu Pellerin, 'Le nouvel essor des relations entre la Chine et Madagascar', *Note de l'Ifri*, March 2011, <http://www.ifri.org/downloads/ifripellerinchineamada.pdf>.

34 L.M. Singhvi, 'Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora' (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 2000), pp. 106–07.

35 Alex Vines, 'India's Security Concerns in the Western Indian Ocean', in Emma Mawdsley and Gerard McCann (eds), *India in Africa: Changing Geographies of Power* (Oxford: Pambazuka Press, 2011).

International and regional diplomacy

From 2009 to 2011 there were successive efforts by the UN, AU and SADC, sometimes supported by the OIF and IOC (which are part of the International Contact Group on Madagascar (ICG-M)) to mediate and find a roadmap, but these were sometimes hindered by imprecise mandates or dividing lines (e.g. between the AU and SADC). Although some progress was made by involving all former presidents (see below), most initiatives eventually foundered or came to little because they were seen by one side or the other as leaning too much against or towards Ravalomanana's right to return to contest elections. Over time there have been signs of 'mediation fatigue'. AU sanctions against key HAT individuals were introduced.

Initially, the reaction of SADC to Rajoelina's unconstitutional takeover was hardline, with talk even of military intervention. However, the organization gradually softened its stance to position itself as a mediator, acting with the support of the AU, the UN and the wider international community.

A central role in this focus on mediation was played by Mozambique. As a Lusophone country it may have been sensitive to the risk that a hardline stance by the mainly Anglophone and mainland SADC would simply fuel nationalistic resistance to outside pressures in Madagascar, a Francophone island with relatively slight cultural and economic ties to mainland southern Africa. (There was also a risk that SADC would be viewed by the Malagasy as hypocritical, given its lenient treatment of the hugely more repressive regime in mainland, Anglophone Zimbabwe.)

The former president of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano, played the central initial role in the mediation, and this led to the first attempt at a settlement with the August 2009 Maputo Accord. Subsequently, much of the day-to-day mediation work has been entrusted to Leonardo Simão, a Mozambican appointed as SADC's mediator. But a key role has also been played by President Zuma of South Africa, who has sought to exert pressure in favour of dialogue and compromise. In late 2012, with Zuma preoccupied by domestic politics, President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania took over the mediation role. After Ravalomanana announced that he would not contest the 2013 presidential election, Kikwete received Rajoelina in December 2012 and sought to persuade him also to pull out.

Rajoelina then announced on 15 January 2013 that he would not stand in the country's upcoming election. Paradoxically, his transitional regime's hardline refusal to contemplate allowing the return of Ravalomanana as a free man appears to have broken the political logjam. Late last year Ravalomanana finally concluded that he would never be allowed to stand and campaign effectively, and therefore announced in December 2012 that he would not take part. This increased the pressure on Rajoelina, because international partners felt that the government had acted undemocratically by preventing Ravalomanana's participation.

If Rajoelina had insisted on standing, this would also have breached the AU's principle that power gained by force cannot be legitimately retained. There was a substantial risk that Rajoelina's probable victory would not have been accepted internationally and would leave the country crippled by continuing aid and economic sanctions. Rajoelina could still change his mind, however, and is continuing to seek ways to retain power. He wants to lead his party through the legislative elections as transitional president and hopes to win a parliamentary majority, which would give him continued political weight.

It remains to be seen who will emerge as credible candidates for this year's election. Rajoelina maybe positioning himself for a 'legitimate' bid to be elected president at subsequent elections.

A tortuous negotiation path

Under the auspices of the ICG-M, the Maputo Accord and the Addis Ababa Additional Act of November 2009, Rajoelina and the three former presidents set out an initial roadmap for returning the country to normalcy, comprising a Charter of Transition, a Charter of Values promoting non-violence, tolerance, reconciliation and mutual respect, and an agreement to annul criminal charges against the former presidents. Although the four protagonists agreed to an elaborate power-sharing the power-sharing formula, they failed to reach consensus on who would run the transitional

government. Rajoelina then distanced himself from the power-sharing agreement, unilaterally declaring a government of national unity and setting his own timetable for elections.

In the subsequent efforts to move Madagascar out of its seemingly interminable political impasse, SADC became the key negotiator, with South Africa leading the way within a 'Troika'. In September 2011, after the earlier roadmap was rejected by Ravalomanana, Ratsiraka and Zafy, an amended roadmap negotiation by SADC was signed by the representatives of nearly all key Malagasy political leaders and seen as the path to normalization.³⁶

This new deal stipulated the unconditional return of and an amnesty for Ravalomanana and the formation of an interim cabinet in the run-up to elections. A new prime minister was appointed (Omer Beriziky, a former diplomat and academic) and a new 'national union' transitional government formed, although it ran into early trouble with opposition leaders who objected to the HAT's control of key portfolios. In August 2012 the council of ministers suspended the five members of the Ravalomanana camp who had yet to take up office. A parliament was appointed and the restructuring of the Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) – which had conducted the unilateral referendum called by Rajoelina – got under way, with its replacement by a new CENI of the Transition (CENIT), whose members were drawn from civil society, the administration and signatories of the roadmap.

SADC leaders met in Maputo in August 2012, following two inconclusive meetings between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana in the Seychelles in the presence of that country's President James Michel and President Zuma. They endorsed the calendar proposed by the UN and CENIT for holding a presidential election in May 2013; 'took note' of the proposal that 'for both leaders not to stand would offer the best route towards ensuring peaceful elections'; called for implementation of an amnesty for Ravalomanana; and, mindful of the potential for violence, asked the SADC Secretariat to send security experts to work out with Malagasy security chiefs the modalities for a secure environment for Ravalomanana's return.³⁷

The signing of the SADC roadmap led to more official contacts between the transitional government and the EU and its member states, including a meeting in Brussels between Beriziky and EU Development Commissioner Andris Piebalgs. The former announced that the EU had committed €17 million to support elections and the accreditation of some new ambassadors. EU aid programmes would also resume with the promise of €100 million in support of programmes of health and education, food security and civil society efforts to help the disadvantaged.³⁸

In September 2012 Rajoelina confirmed to the UN General Assembly that a presidential election would be held on 8 May 2013.³⁹ However, his speech contained some language conveying apparent warnings to the international community. He asked for help to build a more promising future for Madagascar but 'without stifling' the country, and urged it to 'trust us and honour your commitments'. Rajoelina also emphasized the need for 'non-interference' and awareness of the 'reality on the ground'. He said the UN system 'cannot just be police'.⁴⁰

The UN Secretary-General has welcomed the roadmap and called 'for its full implementation in order to pave the way for peaceful and credible elections'.⁴¹ The UN has meanwhile contracted experts to assess the legal and technical framework for the elections.

36 SADC, 'Press statement of the SADC Organ Troika', 17 September 2011.

37 Joseph Ngwawi, 'SADC forges ahead with its common agenda', Southern African News Features, 12, No. 31, 24 August 2012, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201208240619.html>.

38 European Union, 'Rencontre entre le Commissaire Piebalgs et M. Omer Beriziky, Premier Ministre de Madagascar', MEMO/12/512, posted 02/07/12, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-12-512_fr.htm?locale=en.

39 UN News centre, 26 September 2012, www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43052&Cr=general+debate&Cr1=#.UJpJsY5978s.

40 General Assembly of the United Nations, Madagascar, H E Mr Andry Nirina Rajoelina, President, 26 September 2012, <http://gadebate.un.org/67/madagascar>.

41 UN, 'Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General on the signing of a roadmap to end the crisis in Madagascar', 21 September 2011, www.un.org/sg/statements/?nid=5552.

CONCLUSIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

The SADC roadmap provides the basis for a transition to democratic elections in Madagascar, which if peaceful and credible could mark a return to constitutional rule. This approach has the support of the AU, the UN, the EU and key bilateral partners including France and the United States.

Presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for 2013 (with the presidential poll anticipated in May). Until recently implementation of the roadmap was hindered by the intense rivalry between the two leading political protagonists, Andry Rajoelina and Marc Ravalomanana.

For more than two years the confrontation between the two men prevented the country from moving forward to a new presidential election in which both could take part on a fair and open basis.

Having been convicted *in absentia* of corruption and human rights crimes in a politically motivated and questionable trial, Ravalomanana refused to sign up to a political settlement unless he was allowed to return to Madagascar and campaign for the presidency, unimpeded by the risk of arrest.

Rajoelina claims the question of Ravalomanana's return is up to SADC, but he has failed to overrule the HAT hardliners virulently opposed to the former president's presence on the island in the run up to the 2013 election. Although both men have now stood aside from the 2013 presidential polls, Ravalomanana's TIM party could be disadvantaged in the legislative contest by the enforced absence of its founder – especially if Rajoelina leads the TGV legislative election campaign. SADC and the wider international community therefore need to decide how they can apply pressure to ensure that the legislative contest is fair and allows all parties to campaign on the same basis.

There are three ways in which the international community might help reinforce the democratic fairness of the electoral process:

- Increasing international coherence and coordination between the UN, the AU, SADC, the EU, the United States, the IOC and the OIF;
- Supporting the SADC process, provided key principles are not compromised; and
- Effective and coordinated observation of the democratic process and elections, including an EU observation mission.

Against a background of deep division and distrust between Malagasy politicians, the international community should also consider an approach designed to bring about 'a new beginning' for constitutional democracy based on the following approaches:

- All politicians and media signing up to and abiding by a democratic code of conduct based on the highest African and international standards, including mutual respect, peaceful policy-based dialogue, accountability and transparency supported by civil society;
- Including all political parties in the democratic process – i.e. all led by their founding leaders if they wish, or with all founding leaders excluded from campaigning;
- Ensuring that Rajoelina and Ravalomanana keep their word that they will not be candidates in the presidential elections;
- The international community providing capacity-building and other support to ensure the independence of institutions such as the High Constitutional Court and the Independent National Electoral Commission for the Transition;
- A commitment by political and military leaders to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms; and
- Launching security-sector reform, including a commitment by the military to abide by the constitution and not to get involved in politics.

The withdrawal of Ravalomanana and Rajoelina from the presidential race has broken the fundamental political deadlock. However, optimism must be tempered by caution – and by a recognition that serious challenges still lie ahead. Awkward dilemmas remain.

Such an approach, if it led to real commitment by all Malagasy stake-holders, resulting in credible elections, would need to be sustained. Credible elections, if they transpired, might logically encourage the international community to build on such a 'new beginning' through constructive engagement, including by reviewing current aid and trade constraints. That in turn could bring positive benefits for Malagasy citizens through improved confidence, growth, social services and employment. Such an outcome of credible elections, if they transpired, would again emphasise the validity of the efforts of SADC, the AU and other international bodies in promoting democracy and better governance. And it would encourage increased Malagasy trade and investment with foreign partners who seek good standards of governance and rule of law, rather than the reverse, thus helping prospects for a virtuous cycle of growth and development.

Thus the international community needs to exert a strong diplomatic effort now. It should press for elections to be held on a genuinely fair and inclusive basis and to international standards, welcoming the agreement by Rajoelina and Ravalomanana not to stand but ensuring that all parties can engage freely in politics in the country. After four years, Madagascar has the chance of a fresh start. This is the moment for engagement, as these efforts could help Madagascar return to stability and prosperity.

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