



ISS Seminar Report

Title: Madagascar – Addressing the Crisis

Place: ISS Conference Room, Pretoria

Date: Wednesday, 27 May 2009

Panel:

- Alain Rakotondrandria, Journalist and specialist in disaster management
- Pierrot Rakotomalala, International consultant
- Olivia Rakotomalala, former Advisor – Madagascar Action Plan

Chair: Richard Cornwell, Research Consultant

Rapporteur: Otilia Anna Maunganidze, Intern, African Security Analysis Programme (ISS)

On Tuesday 17 March 2009, following months of a political crisis marred by civil protests, the former mayor of Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, Andry Rajoelina, acceded to the leadership of a transitional high authority in what has been described by some as a military coup d'état and by others as a peculiar form of a civilian putsch. Whatever classification the events of 17 March are given, what is certain is that the assumption of power by Rajoelina – a 35 year-old former disc jockey – constituted an unconstitutional change in government. The political impasse in the country continues, as the democratically elected president of the country, Marc Ravalomanana, has sought refuge outside the country but continues to assert that he is the president, while Rajoelina heads a transitional government.

On Wednesday 27 May 2009, the African Security Analysis Programme of the ISS hosted a seminar that aimed to unpack the Malagasy political crisis and to provide recommendations for the future. Richard Cornwell, in his introductory remarks, noted Madagascar's situation is a complicated one that can best be understood through a historical examination of the country's politics, noting a cycle of civilian uprisings that stem from the capital Antananarivo. Richard pointed out that Antananarivo is central, not only geographically but also politically, in Madagascar and that the relationship between the capital and the surrounding areas provides an insight into the socio-political dynamics of a society that is 70% rural and mired in poverty. He further pointed out that throughout Madagascar's post-colonial history public protests had ushered in new presidents, thus reinforcing in Madagascar a

non-democratic way of regime transition. He ended his introduction by noting that Rajoelina's accession to power is not particularly peculiar as it mirrors certain aspects of the previous president's means of coming to power, albeit that this followed an electoral process.

The first speaker, Olivia Rakotomalala, began her presentation by noting the importance of "knowledge as empowering Africa" and lamenting the way in which some media reports have distorted the Malagasy political crisis. Ms Rakotomalala has been working on the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP) set up by Ravalomanana in 2007.

In her discussion of the ongoing political crisis in Madagascar, Ms Rakotomalala began by describing the events that led to the 17 March unconstitutional change in government that saw Rajoelina becoming the country's transitional president. On 13 December 2008, Andry Rajoelina's VIVA media company was temporarily shut-down by the government following a controversial interview with former president Didier Ratsiraka (currently exiled in Paris) in which he chastised Ravalomanana, calling him a dictator and urging the people to revolt against him. Days later, Rajoelina made his first call for a revolt against Ravalomanana's regime, however it was not until 26 January that street protests intensified. On what is now known as "Black Monday" thousands of people took to the streets protesting against the government. More than 40 people were killed when the protests turned violent, many stores were looted and one presidential advisor's house was burned down. On 31 January Rajoelina unilaterally proclaimed himself president of the country. He was removed from the office of mayor of Antananarivo three days later. Protests continued throughout the week, but on 7 February -- now popularly known as "Red Saturday" -- the protests once again turned deadly as some 20 people were shot by the presidential guard when a group of anti-government protestors attempted to break through police cordons to march onto the grounds of one of the presidential palaces.

A week after Red Saturday, Rajoelina began naming ministers of his transitional authority and called on supporters to take over control of ministries. Protests continued, despite mediation and negotiation efforts. Then on 5 March security forces made a failed attempt to arrest Rajoelina in the early hours of the day, which ultimately led him to go into hiding, allegedly at a French diplomat's house. On 8 March a mutiny broke out in a military camp outside Antananarivo. Two days later the mutiniers forced the Minister of Defence forced to resign. The days that followed saw dissident soldiers deploying tanks in the capital saying that they were to fight mercenaries allegedly hired by Ravalomanana. On March 14 Rajoelina emerged from hiding to tell his supporters that he was giving Ravalomanana four hours to step down. The following day, Ravalomanana publicly offered a referendum as a possible way out of the political standoff, however Rajoelina rejected the offer and on 16 March soldiers seized the presidential palace and the central bank in a show of force, further isolating Ravalomanana.

On 17 March Rajoelina took power apparently with the support of the army after mutinying soldiers forced Ravalomanana to resign. According to Ms Rakotomalala, the events of 17 March were incorrectly reported in the media and in fact the military directorate to which Ravalomanana passed power was coerced by Rajoelina allies to transfer power to him, thus implying that the army was not entirely behind his accession to power. On March 18, the *Haut Cours Constitutionnelle* (HCC) of Madagascar confirmed Rajoelina's accession to power thus legitimizing his presidency. Hours later Rajoelina suspended parliament.

According to Ms Rakotomalala, the coming into power of Rajoelina was facilitated by the fragility of the state that Ravalomanana inherited in 2002. She argued that the *Tiako I Madagasikara* (TIM) government faced difficult prospects when it came into power because the country was marred by a history of bad governance, corruption and poverty. However, despite this, the Ravalomanana administration launched MAP in 2007 to tackle issues relating to education, rural development, and the economy and to develop the country's leadership capacity in a five-year plan extending to 2012. MAP was, according to Ms Rakotomalala, one of many efforts to transform Madagascar, but she argued that its success was limited by 25 years of misrule and corruption. She argued that Ravalomanana sought to change the political landscape; she noted, however, that the government did not sufficiently publicize these initiatives and this played into the hands of an opposition that accused the government of doing nothing to alleviate the poverty crisis. However, according to Ms Rakotomalala the current regime's cancellation of MAP is an indication that they are not committed to development, but only seek to be in power. She lamented the current state of Madagascar, and argued that a continuation of the crisis would see the country end in ruin. Before turning to her recommendations she urged the international community to put additional pressure on the government to return the country to constitutionality.

According to Ms Rakotomalala what is needed are a neutral transitional government and the removal of the coup-led government. These measures are critical to sustainable development and to achieve a break from the cycle of instability, bad governance and ethnic-based politics. In order to achieve these objectives she recommended that the following be focal points:

1. Promoting national reconciliation
2. Encouraging a dynamic and proactive youth bearing in mind that more than 50% of Madagascar's population is under 18
3. Creating and implementing a strong civic education programme to prevent the manipulation of the public by politicians
4. Encouraging dialogue and political debate to ensure that the public is well informed and when it comes to elections that they make decisions based on factors other than "popularity" and ethnicity, but instead based on issues such as performance and economic policies.

She concluded her presentation by stating that the country needs to be extricated from the constitutional limbo in which it finds itself. She further stated that lessons

need to be learnt from what is going on in Madagascar in order to prevent a recurrence of unconstitutional accessions to power anywhere else.

The second speaker, Pierrot Rakotomalala, opened the second part of the panel's presentation with a Malagasy quote which translated means, "[The Malagasy] crisis is like a boil in the middle of your face, it is not just painful, it makes you ashamed". He highlighted that while the crisis might be considered as political, it is the people of Madagascar who are suffering the most, not the politicians. From the outset he made it clear that the panel had a bias that could be easily construed as being pro-Ravalomanana, but stated that their bias was not towards a specific personality, but that the constitution and the plight of the Malagasy informed their position.

According to Mr Rakotomalala, the ongoing crisis is a clash of personalities and not of political ideologies, thus in unpacking it the emphasis should be on the protagonists. He identified three major players and four minor players in the crisis. The major players are Ravalomanana, Rajoelina and the "power mongering" military. The other players are the Malagasy people, prominent foreign nations on whom Madagascar depends, the international community and Malagasy people abroad.

The third presenter, Alain Rakotonrandria, in analysing the key personalities in the crisis began with a discussion of the "Ravalomanana camp", which he described as consisting of three groups of people, firstly Ravalomanana himself and his supporters, secondly his Prime Minister Manadafy Rakotonirina and his supporters, and lastly a group of Malagasy calling themselves "*Les Legalistes*" – Ravalomanana loyalists who base their support on the fact that he was democratically elected. Noting that the crisis was a war of personalities, Rakotonrandria turned to discuss Ravalomanana, whom he termed an "outsider" because he was different from all the previous Malagasy presidents as well as other African presidents of Francophone countries. Unlike previous presidents, Ravalomanana has a poor education, he is not Catholic, he is a businessman by profession – not a politician, and lastly he is a Merina from the central highlands.

Rakotonrandria noted that his different background made him adopt innovative policies when he was in power. His methods were business and church oriented and he used them to promote his image as well as his policies. According to Rakotonrandria, he was more of a boss than a president, thus he made a number of enemies – both in business and in politics. Ravalomanana believed that Madagascar's development would be better achieved through agricultural and industrial progression. It was no coincidence that these are areas in which his Tiko enterprise holds a great stake, thus the line between his presidency and his business interests was blurred. However, he managed to remain popular among the rural population, who saw his policies as being geared towards them and could relate to him because he was not highly educated – like most of them – and yet managed to rise to prominence. His enemies were predominantly in urban centres, and mostly

in Antananarivo, where unemployment and poverty provoked the people to oppose his regime.

The next key personality discussed by Rakotondrandria was Prime Minister Rakotonirina who is totally different from Ravalomanana in that he is a politician by profession. It is notable that Rakotonirina shifted to a capitalist standpoint in 2003, after over three decades of taking a principled leftist stance. However, he retains a lot of support from his followers, who arguably support him – not because of his policies, but – because of his background and endurance as a politician. On 29 April government security forces arrested Rakotonirina and as of 27 May he was still in detention, though he continues to call for Ravalomanana's return saying that observance of the rule of law involves recognizing Ravalomanana's presidency.

Mr Rakotomalala then discussed Andry Rajoelina, noting the similarities between him and Ravalomanana, especially with regards to their business interests as well as their ability to capitalise on an urban crisis centered in Antananarivo. Both men started off their political careers as mayor of the capital city, however, unlike Ravalomanana, Rajoelina is from the Malagasy middle class and his father is from the military. Rajoelina has used the art of sloganeering and populist discourse to market himself and to garner support. When Rajoelina won the mayoral seat in 2007, he turned the country's ruling party into the "opposition" in Antananarivo and the power tug-of-war has not stopped since then. According to Mr Rakotomalala the political wrangling meant that Rajoelina never actually managed to establish himself as a politician and thus he has nothing to show for his term in mayoral office other than the fact that he has popular urban support. Mr Rakotomalala noted that the urban support that Rajoelina managed to garner combined with the soldiers' mutiny in early March were what allowed him to effectively stage the coup of 17 March.

The next issues that the panel spoke about were those of human rights and international community involvement. According to Rakotondrandria, who dealt with these issues, the continued violation of civil and political rights by the incumbent government is detrimental to the country's image as well as to the Malagasy people whose rights are infringed. He noted that the international community has from the outset condemned the coup but that it what was key to breaking the cycle of violence was an additional condemnation of the authors of the coup. He noted that the reason why the crisis was ongoing is because the matter is being dealt with as if it were a political issue, when matters of unconstitutional changes in government are legal matters. He pointed out that the 2002 election debacle followed the same path and was finally resolved by the Supreme Court, when negotiations had clearly failed.

Summing up the presentations, Richard Cornwell noted that there are disputed narratives of what exactly took place in Madagascar and he urged people to take an in-depth look at the situation in order to unmask the truth. He concluded by reiterating that the international community needs to step up and deal with the Madagascar issue as a matter of urgency.