



## **Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice**

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### Observations from Visit to Madagascar 7/14/02 - 7/21/02

#### Goal of visit to Madagascar

The goal of my visit was to provide some perspective on the recent crisis in Madagascar that stemmed from the December 16 presidential elections. I am grateful to the many people I met with for honestly sharing their views of the situation, to the U.S. embassy staff for arranging my visit, and especially to Ambassador Nesbitt, for her vision and actions in assisting the Malagasy people during this important transition period.

#### Meetings

During the week I spent in Antananarivo, I met with more than 100 people from different sectors of Malagasy society – from the government, military and police, nongovernmental organizations, the university, religious leaders, former officials, and students. Unfortunately, due to security constraints, I was unable to travel outside of the capital. Clearly, this limited my ability to gain a broader view of national needs and interests. These issues notwithstanding, I hope that this brief summary report will be helpful.

#### Observations

What follows is a synthesis of what I heard from my meetings. People may not agree with the information provided below, but this represents my observations from discussions with many different people. This is not intended to convey the “truth,” but rather is a synthesis of the views I heard expressed.

1. Personalization of politics: Political life in Madagascar appears centered on people, not on political parties. Thus, the December 2001 elections were apparently focused on President Ratsiraka against opposition leader Ravalomanana, not on political platforms and ideologies. Many people expressed concern about whether, with the election of Marc Ravalomanana, they now had instituted democracy in Madagascar or whether they had just “changed the man, not the system.” There was great hope that the system had been changed with the election, but many doubts that this was so.
2. We are all the same: I heard repeatedly that all Malagasy people were the same, even though they might look different, be from different regions, have different political views, different backgrounds, etc. This so-called unity may be dangerous in limiting political space for those who do not agree with the current government. It may be

difficult for those who are different to speak out, to exercise their democratic rights as citizens. There appeared to be a tangible fear of differences. This “we are all the same” phenomenon (*pensée unique*) makes it very hard for those who are not “one with Marc” to say anything contrary to popular views. This phenomenon may be a temporary consolidation, a coming together against Ratsiraka’s attempt to divide and conquer. The hope would be that as the threat diminishes, differences will re-emerge.

5. National reconciliation: There was much talk about “reconciliation.” It quickly became apparent that people were reacting to the African Union’s proclamation that Madagascar needed “a government of national reconciliation.” Many of the people I met with raised this by asking me whether I thought they needed “reconciliation.” This may have been a means of trying to gauge, from an outside perspective, just how bad what they had just gone through really was. Or for someone from outside to give them permission to admit that they had gone through a period of serious divisions. A surprising number of people assumed reconciliation was only appropriate in cases of ethnic conflict or civil war, neither of which they said had occurred there. There was no sense that political reconciliation could be useful in cases of non-violent cleavages in a society.

The question of reconciliation was directly at odds with the “we are one” phenomenon – why would there be so much discussion of reconciliation if they really believed they were one? I suspect there is a need for political reconciliation, despite most people’s claims that they didn’t need to be reconciled.

It was disturbing to hear a number of influential people refer to the acts of Ratsiraka supporters as “terrorist acts,” with one person calling the attempted blockade of the capital “genocide.” I cannot think of one case in which this kind of rhetoric serves a peaceful purpose. This use of language to re-frame and re-dramatize events may be done to draw attention to the situation in Madagascar, especially since the Malagasy want a closer relationship to the U.S. and know of our “war on terrorism.” Some of the more sophisticated people may believe that association with terrorism may bring the U.S. government closer. I noted in the press clippings I was given while in Madagascar that came from the State Department in Washington that they were clearly searching on the word “terrorism” and picking up some stories on Madagascar because of the use of the term.

6. “We are unique”: In addition to wanting to believe that all Malagasy are the same, it was notable that the Malagasy do not seem to have a “role model” for what they want to become. They do, however, have a clear view of who they don’t want to be like – their African sister countries. Almost everyone I met with wanted me to understand that they were not like Africans. I am not sure what they identified as “African,” but it would seem to be civil war and under-development. Although Madagascar does not look like any African country I have seen, it is geographically Africa, and the Malagasy people, by dissociating themselves from their continent, lose the sisterhood that comes with identification with another, larger group. Additionally, based on work elsewhere, as with individuals, countries seem to benefit when they have a country to look up to. Thus

Estonia, regaining independence in 1991, looked to Finland, across the Baltic Sea, which had gained its independence from Russia after World War I. The Balkan countries sought to become more “European” by joining the European institutions they’d been cut out of as part of Yugoslavia. In Madagascar, the only realistic reference I heard was to Singapore – that Madagascar should become an economic “tiger,” or, as they said in French, a dragon. Problematically, Singapore provides the example of a “benevolent” dictatorship with the total personalization of politics. So it is probably not the best model, except economically.

### **Recommendations**

1. Democracies are born in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> elections, not in the first.

U.S. recognition of the Ravalomanana government as the democratically-elected government in July 2002 represented a huge breakthrough in U.S. – Madagascar relations, at least in the view of the Malagasy. For good or bad, the Malagasy now see the U.S. as their savior and expect great things from the Americans, including massive investment (the supposed \$2 billion). This fantasy of the U.S. as savior will be difficult to live up to given what I suppose to be the reality of Madagascar’s importance to the USG. However, U.S. recognition made a substantial contribution to the avoidance of armed conflict in Madagascar. The Malagasy are at a crossroads, it would appear, wanting to move into the American sphere of influence and out of the French. A surprising but touching exhibition of this desire to turn towards the U.S. occurred during the radio talk show I did at Radio Antsiva. I think about half of the callers spoke to me directly in English, despite the fact that the show was in French.

This new love of all things American provides several opportunities. The moral, political, and cultural clout the U.S. has right now may be able to be used to maximum advantage even with minimal resources.

### **Recommendations for the Ravalomanana government:**

1. Create presidential (or prime ministerial) roundtable that would function as an advisory body on a number of issues (e.g., education, social and economic development, integration with international community). The roundtable could include representatives of the Indian community, haut plateau and cotier people, teachers, women, religious organizations, and civil society organizations. The goal of a roundtable is to provide a forum for discussions that lead to actions that ensure fair governance for all groups in a society.
2. Seek support for judicial and police training and make public the priority of the government to ensure fairness in its police and judicial processes. Rather than setting up a truth and reconciliation commission as some people suggested, it would seem that justice would be better assured if Madagascar could begin a transparent judicial process that would try those people accused of crimes and not detain people without charge. The security people I met with seemed competent and very engaged with the future of Madagascar, perhaps they and/or their peers could receive some additional training in

setting up systems that are more responsive and transparent. I do not know if the U.S. Embassy has had any requests from the Government of Madagascar to provide assistance with judicial or police training or with the prison system, but if so, it seems a good idea to bring in some experts to assist with this. In Eastern Europe, there is a very fine organization, CEELI, a program of the American Bar Association that has dealt with judicial training throughout that region. Their website is <http://www.abanet.org/ceeli/home.html> (see appendix for printout of information).

3. Continue to encourage openness and tolerance of different viewpoints, recognizing that the country is coming out of a difficult and polarized period (as Ravalomanana did in his “appel au peuple malgache” in June). Public appearances (on TV or radio) by high level government officials giving the message that Madagascar is a country big enough to include all people and all views, as long as these are expressed in a peaceful, nonviolent manner.

4. Encourage the creation of a “literacy corps” of people who volunteer to help children and adults learn to read and write. People who are illiterate are easy to manipulate and this will undermine the establishment of a democratic state. Illiteracy is the enemy of economic and social development.

#### Recommendations for the media:

1. Looking for opportunities for exchanges of journalists and training in the roles and responsibilities of media in a free society.
2. Having a media committee consisting of reporters from different media (and different political perspectives) that would create and produce a regular radio or TV show on developments in the country with commentary from reporters/journalists with different perspectives. The idea is not only to have such a show, but to have people creating the show who come together to work on the joint project from different political, ideological, professional positions.
3. Focus on stories that highlight common ground between different people in the country. For example, a story could be done on how parents in Diego have coped with the recent instability and how parents in Antananarivo have done the same. Talking to children is always good because it shows that no matter the divisions, kids are much the same. These kinds of human interest stories promote tolerance and understanding and can help educate people about “the other,” whomever that might be.

#### Recommendations for the U.S. Embassy:

1. As noted above, Madagascar may be in a consolidation phase where it is important for people to feel the country is unified and not about to break apart. Even Ratsiraka supporters are willing to suppress their opinions for the greater good of the community (i.e., the country). At this stage in its history, identification as a Malagasy means supporting the government. It may be a very healthy way of displaying the much-vaunted solidarity (fiavalomanana?). As healthy as this tendency to show a single face to the world may be, it is important to provide space for people to speak openly, but with

the understanding that speaking openly does not have to mean speaking against the government. Because the U.S. is known as a free and open society, Americans have the reputation for being able to say anything. Providing the American Cultural Center or the Embassy as a safe space may encourage the Malagasy to feel more comfortable speaking out about issues of importance. The Human Rights task force provides a model for other such fora which could be held under the auspices of the Embassy – e.g., non-threatening roundtables on topics of interest – such as on entrepreneurship, on literacy education, etc.

2. It might be helpful for the Malagasy to see how the U.S. has dealt with its ethnic, racial, religious, linguistic, and cultural differences by bringing people into the fold rather than keeping them at arm's length. People from around the world are welcomed as U.S. citizens; the Malagasy apparently do not welcome their Indian neighbors as citizens. Cultural exchanges, which include bringing in African Americans, Asian Americans, Latin American Americans, etc. so that the Malagasy can see and hear the issues around diversity in a free society, may be useful. This may help them get a sense of how difficult it is to integrate everyone under one roof, so to speak, but that in the end, it benefits us all. They might also gain a better understanding of how differences can be spoken of without losing unity. If there are such exchanges planned with musicians, artists, etc., it would be useful to have these people speak of their experiences as Americans – whether they see themselves as “different” and what that has meant for them in the U.S.

3. If it is possible, it might be useful to encourage exchanges in the private and public business/economic sectors with Singapore, if Singapore is viewed as a possible model. Whatever the embassy can do to open the world to the Malagasy would be useful. You may already have a film series through the Cultural Center, and showing films that have a message that Malagasy people might learn from would be good – e.g., “Mr. Smith goes to Washington,” showing how even a “common” man can make a difference.

## Appendix A: Presidential Roundtable

1. See the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities website on the roundtable, e.g., <http://www.osce.org/hcnm/documents/recommendations/estonia/1996/41hc17.html>

2. News item from 1999:

Baltic News Service

February 17, 1999

**LENGTH:** 203 words

**HEADLINE:** ESTONIAN **PRESIDENT'S** ROUND TABLE TO FOCUS ON EDUCATION

**DATELINE:** TALLINN, Feb 17

**BODY:**

The Estonian **president's** round table has decided to continue its activities and to turn more attention to the educational system.

**President** Lennart Meri met with representatives of the ethnic minorities' round table on Tuesday and discussed with them the round table's activities and results so far, the **president's** spokesperson told BNS. Representatives of the round table found that its activity has to be carried on, because it represents very many parts of the society. Also the **president** said he is interested in that the round table would continue.

It was decided at the meeting that more than before, attention must be paid to the educational system and young people. Different educational strategies and the role of non-Estonian education in them will be discussed by the round table at its next meeting this month.

In a comment on the language law, the **president** said that as a former teacher, his experience is that if some people have to be compelled to acquire knowledge, the majority come along by themselves, in case of sufficient motivation. It is the same with language, the **president** added.

The next meeting of the **president's** ethnic minorities round table will be on Friday.

**LOAD-DATE:** February 17, 1999

## Appendix B: Judicial training

Perhaps the ABA has something comparable for other parts of the world. This is from the CEELI website.

The Central and East European Law Initiative of the American Bar Association (CEELI)

Mission:

The Central and East European Law Initiative (CEELI) - a public service project of the American Bar Association (ABA) - advances the rule of law by supporting the law reform process in Central and Eastern Europe and the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union (NIS).

Through its volunteer legal liaison program as well as its training Institute in Prague, CEELI makes available American and European legal expertise and technical assistance for these emerging democracies in modifying and restructuring laws and legal systems.

CEELI has approximately 30 offices in 23 countries across Central Europe and Eurasia. Since its founding in 1991, more than 5,000 judges, attorneys, law professors and legal specialists have contributed over \$150 million in pro bono assistance to promoting the rule of law in the region.

## Summary

This report of my visit to Madagascar July 14-21 is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to reflect the main themes that I heard expressed in my meetings with governmental, nongovernmental, and academic representatives. My visit was sponsored by the U.S. State Department at the invitation of the U.S. Embassy in Antananarivo. I would like to thank the many people with whom I met for giving of their time and offer special appreciation to the many Embassy staff persons who made sure that my trip was such a pleasant experience.