

Rep. Chris Smith
2373 Rayburn House Office Building
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Rep. Smith:

I am writing to express my concern about the ongoing crisis in Madagascar and the United States' surprisingly muted response to the suffering of Madagascar's people.

As you are undoubtedly aware, the democratically elected government of Madagascar was deposed by a coup d'état in March 2009. Since then, the de facto government has abolished the elected parliament, suppressed freedoms of speech and assembly, intimidated members of the judiciary, jailed numerous opponents, and driven others into hiding. As a member of the Presbyterian Church (USA), I am particularly concerned about the harassment of church leaders and journalists, including the fatal shooting of Pastor Ranaivo Rivo Arson by security forces and the assault and detention of other pastors.

Madagascar enjoyed strong economic growth for six years prior to the coup. Now it faces economic collapse. The majority of Madagascar's people are extremely poor – 90% live on less than \$2 a day – so for many the intensified economic pressures are proving disastrous. Already, the International Food Policy Research Institute says that Madagascar is facing one of the world's ten most severe hunger crises. Many families are no longer able to afford school fees, so children have had to look for work instead. In September 2009, UNICEF and the ILO found that the number of child laborers in Madagascar had increased by 25% since the beginning of the crisis. Sometimes, the only form of work available to them is prostitution.

Madagascar is also experiencing environmental disaster. Given that as much as 90% of Madagascar's plant and animal life is not found anywhere else on the planet, this poses a huge threat to biodiversity. National forests and UNESCO World Heritage Sites are being pillaged for valuable hardwoods, such as rosewood and ebony, and rare species of turtles and lemurs are being sold or eaten by desperate people. There is growing evidence that members of the de facto regime are not only enabling this destruction, but also profiting personally from it. Moreover, the current regime has begun to hold talks with countries such as Iran, China, Pakistan and Turkey concerning their potential exploitation of Madagascar's minerals, including uranium and oil.

To date, the US response to Madagascar's crisis has been muted and muddled. In the days following the coup, we failed to speak out strongly to

condemn the military takeover and to urge other nations to do likewise. In fact, US officials seemed, at times, to suggest that Madagascar's President had merely resigned. We have been silent on events such as the 20 May 2010 shooting of Pastor Rivo or the validity of the August 2010 trial that sentenced exiled President Marc Ravalomanana in absentia to life in prison. Only recently has Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Karl Wycoff stated clearly the United States' rejection of the electoral timetable proposed unilaterally by the de facto government in violation of the transitional arrangements agreed to in the Maputo Accords.

I would encourage you to speak out strongly against human rights violations in Madagascar and for a restoration of democracy. In addition, please:

- Urge your Congressional colleagues and State Department officials to join you in this effort.
- Encourage the State Department to work with other nations to adopt and implement a global moratorium on the sale of arms and the provision of military assistance to any Malagasy regime that does not enjoy an electoral mandate.
- Ask the Department of the Interior to ensure that the Lacey Act, banning trafficking in illegally obtained plant and animal products, is rigorously enforced.
- Work to prevent the Rajoelina regime from ceding Madagascar's mineral wealth, including uranium, to Iran and China without transparent mining contracts or effective mechanisms to assure that the people will benefit appropriately.

Thank you for your attention in this matter. I look forward to learning how you intend to respond to this crisis.

Sincerely yours,