

2010 - Advancing Freedom and Democracy Report

MADAGASCAR

Introduction

The following information reports U.S. government priorities and activities of the U.S. mission in Madagascar to promote democracy and human rights. For background on Madagascar's human rights conditions, please see the *2009 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* and the *International Religious Freedom Reports* at www.state.gov.

Part 1: U.S. Government Democracy Objectives

The top U.S. priority in country is promoting a return to a democratic government. The United States will focus on promoting credible, consensual elections in the shortest practical time frame, and will continue strengthening civil society and media freedom in order to increase voter participation, foster democratic debate, and promote good governance. In addition, the United States will continue to place a priority on other human rights issues including prison conditions, child labor, and trafficking in persons.

Part 2: Supporting Top Priorities and Other Aspects of Human Rights and Democratic Governance

U.S. efforts to promote the return to a democratic government in the wake of the March 2009 coup include the suspension of all non-humanitarian assistance, and also a suspension of assistance that directly benefits the government, public statements and advocacy for an immediate return to democracy, and coordinated diplomatic efforts with other governments and multilateral entities. The United States continues efforts to promote good governance by lending support to civil society organizations working on food security and health in key areas of capacity building, advocacy, networking, dissemination of information and strategy development. The U.S. Government advances the goal of good governance at the grassroots level by promoting civil society involvement in planning and implementing development initiatives in communities, which is done in dialogue and consultation with local authorities.

U.S. efforts also promote media freedom and freedom of speech, particularly by broadening journalists' access to information and strengthening their professionalism. The United States continued to organize a regular discussion group for English-

speaking journalists. Video conferences and Internet chats are used to provide journalists with information on a full range of democracy-related topics, including U.S. politics. The U.S.-run American Press Center in Antananarivo provides a platform for Malagasy journalists to improve their professionalism by providing access to media resources, the Internet, journals, periodicals, and other sources of information. In the last year, the Press Center has hosted U.S. speakers on topics including women's issues and civil rights and will continue to host such events in 2010.

In order to promote public dialogue on human rights, the United States coordinates and chairs the monthly Madagascar Human Rights Working Group, which remains an important public forum for the diplomatic community and civil society to discuss a broad range of issues including trafficking in persons, child labor, religious freedom, women's rights, the rights of the disabled, the right to choose one's government, media freedom, and reproductive rights. The United States continues to pursue a number of actions specifically to address the deplorable prison conditions in the country. The U.S. ambassador made strategic interventions regarding prisoners' rights with the president's governance team and Ministry of Justice prior to the 2009 coup, after which time U.S. officials have refrained from public meetings with the de facto regime to avoid bestowing recognition upon the illegitimate government. The U.S. ambassador has, however, frequently called on all political actors involved in the crisis to refrain from violence and intimidation. Local leaders participate in U.S.-funded programs to visit the United States to study issues such as grassroots and multi-party democracy, good governance, and the challenges for emerging Muslim leaders.

The United States continues efforts to improve respect for women and children's rights through raising awareness, advocacy, and protection activities.