# More Problems for Madagascar

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Fresh crisis looms in Madagascar as the international community reacts angrily to the recent change of government in the country

While the new government in Madagascar, is striving to find its footing amid allegations of illegitimacy and increasing sanctions, Marc Ravalomanana, the former president who disappeared for some days, has resurfaced in Swaziland. Ravalomanana met with King Mswati III of Swaziland last week Tuesday and they discussed the need to restore the erstwhile president to the leadership of his country. Swaziland wields significant defence, political and security influence in the Southern African Development Community, SADC. On March 30, the 15-member countries of the SADC will converge in Johannesburg, South Africa, to deliberate on imposing sanctions on Madagascar, among other issues. Leaders of Southern African countries have expressed disapproval of the new government. They warned Andry Rajoelina, the new leader, that unless he returns the presidency to Ravalomanana, they would dish out stiff sanctions on his country. Since the inauguration of Rajoelina on March 21, members of the international community have either tightened sanctions or imposed new ones. This will not augur well for Madagascar. The African Union, AU, acting independently of other nations, slammed its hammer on Madagascar. Bruno Nongoma Zidouemba, chairman of the AU’s Peace and Security Council, announced the suspension of the country from AU on March 20. He said following the unconstitutional takeover of power in Madagascar, “the council decided to suspend the participation of Madagascar in the bodies and organs of AU.” Madagascar’s suspension from the AU means that another member country of the union will be hosting the next AU summit. The summit was initially scheduled to be hosted by Madagascar in July but this will no longer be possible except the new government in the country complies with the demands of the AU by restoring the constitutionally elected government. The United States of America was the first to severe political ties with Madagascar when it halted the flow of non-humanitarian aid materials there. The monetary equation of US aid to Madagascar runs into hundred of millions of dollars in the areas of economic growth, education, health, and anti-corruption efforts. Until the recent strain in relations, the US had worked with the government of Madagascar for 18 years to help develop the country. The Madagascar Action Plan, MAP, is heavily supported by the US. Norway, which has also been very supportive in providing aid to Madagascar, especially during natural disasters, has halted its humanitarian programmes in the country. Madagascar receives grants from Norway estimated at 14 million dollars annually. About 70 percent of government funds are from foreign aids. With such hostile reactions from the international community to the recent political developments, Madagascar is certainly in for bad times. Madagascar has certainly embarked on self-destruction. US, Norway, and France, described the action of Rajoelina and the military as a coup. Nicolas Sarkozy, French prime minister, said: “Of course, it’s a coup d’etat.” Despite the rejection of his leadership, Rajoelina has remained unshaken, dismissing the criticisms with a wave of the hand. Roindefo Monja, transitional prime minister, said it is only a matter of time before the US, France and AU realise the motive behind the takeover. “We are confident the international community will understand. We will explain to the whole world our cause,” he argued. At Rajoelina’s inauguration on March 21, Monja defended the military’s action in coercing Ravalomanana to resign from office. “The people demanded liberty,” he said, alluding to citizens’ clamour for improved conditions as the basis for the incursion, adding that “the military rallied to the popular movement but it did not seize power.” In spite of the January protests by Madagascans which eventually resulted in part, in Rajoelina’s rise to power, many citizens were not in favour of his becoming the country’s leader. About 6,000 people in a show of solidarity with the ousted leader protested publicly. They said: “We do not want a hooligan in government” and “do not terrorise the population.” Madagascar became mired in political disturbance and was on the edge of anarchy in January when its citizens, frustrated by the dwindling economic conditions and standard of living in the country took to the streets protesting rising food prices. About 100 people lost their lives in the protests which degenerated into violence. The protesters accused Ravalomanana of being dictatorial. Rajoelina, after taking over power, sacked the parliament and begun moves to alter the country’s constitution. He announced that he would conduct presidential elections in 2011, after the adoption of a new constitution, the date when Ravalomanana’s mandate was due to expire. Protesters believe that Rajoelina’s underlying motive in constitutional amendment was to legitimise his hold on power. Rajoelina, 34, is not eligible to contest for presidency until the next six years because Madagascar’s constitution only allows persons who are 40 years and above to run for presidency.