

MADAGASCAR

Part 1

The Republic of Madagascar is a multiparty democracy with a population approaching 19 million. President Marc Ravalomanana, who was elected to a second term in December 2006. His party, Tiako-I-Madagasikara, dominated political life, but other political parties operated without restriction or outside interference. The legislative and municipal elections held in September and December 2007 respectively were generally free and fair, although international and domestic observers noted the need for a number of electoral reforms. The country has many elements of a modern democracy but its institutions are weak and subject to executive influence. The government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, the following problems persist: extrajudicial killings; harsh prison conditions that resulted in deaths; arbitrary arrest; lengthy pretrial detention; official corruption; societal discrimination and violence against women; trafficking of women and girls; and child labor, including forced labor.

Part 2

As Madagascar makes advances towards a pluralistic society, the U.S. strategy to promote democracy, governance, and human rights focuses on strengthening key governmental and civil institutions. Encouraging all parties to pursue free, fair, transparent, and peaceful elections and to consider electoral reforms is a key component in improving the political process. U.S. programs also work to bolster the government's capacity to address corruption; raise governmental transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs; strengthen civil society; and increase all parties' access to information. The embassy plays a leading role in promoting open discussions on a range of human rights issues.

Part 3

U.S. officials continue to engage actively in dialogue, advocacy, and programming with government officials, civil society, and members of the press. U.S. programs focused on a wide range of activities to enhance prospects for a more transparent and credible political process throughout the six nationwide elections from December 2006 through April 2008. The United States funded the nationwide deployment of hundreds of civil society election observer teams, provided financial and

technical support to build the capacity of the National Consortium of Election Observers (CNOE) and its branches throughout the country, and facilitated the creation of a civil society coalition of five civic groups to conduct civic education and advocacy for electoral reform both at the governmental and grassroots level. U.S. officials collaborated with CNOE and organized a series of roundtables to engage members of civic society and government in developing strategies to implement electoral reform measures.

The United States also provided technical assistance to CNOE in their television and radio media outreach campaigns that advocated for electoral reforms. The ambassador publicly called for electoral reform in a speech at the University of Antananarivo and, both independently and in conjunction with international donors, raised the issue with the prime minister, election administrators, and a number of other government officials. These advocacy efforts collectively played a role in the government's agreement to launch electoral reform discussions in May 2008.

To assist the country in its commitment to good governance and ruling justly, the United States continues to provide financial and technical assistance to government institutions and civil society. As part of the Africa Anticorruption Initiative, the United States conducted a Mainstreaming Governance, Transparency and Accountability Workshop for government officials, the anticorruption agency, BIANCO, and its policy arm, the Committee for the Safeguard of Integrity (CSI). Additionally, the United States provides technical assistance to develop BIANCO's capacity, particularly to improve the rate of processing corruption complaints. To improve public knowledge of corruption complaint procedures, the United States funded the production of 1,000 educational anticorruption booklets for dissemination to schools and universities. This program is also providing short films on the National Police to a number of schools in Antananarivo and Andoharanofotsy. The United States is working to increase oversight of local public finances and support greater transparency and accountability in resource management, including the rapidly growing mining sector. The ambassador demonstrated his personal commitment to good governance by chairing and participating in a public debate on anticorruption alongside high-level BIANCO and CSI representatives, as well as by raising concerns about conflict of interest with government officials.

In order to promote public dialogue on human rights, the United States coordinates and chairs the monthly Madagascar Human Rights Working Group, which remains one of the main public forums for government officials, 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 fight against corruption as a tool to protect human rights, and prisoners' rights. In December 2007 the embassy worked with the government, international organizations, and civil society partners to organize a week-long celebration of International Human Rights Day, which included free legal counseling on human rights cases. The embassy also sends local leaders to the United States under the International Visitors Leadership Program to study issues such as journalism, transparency and good governance, women and the law, women as political and economic leaders, and combating trafficking in persons.

The United States continues to pursue a number of actions to address the deplorable prison conditions in the country. Namely, the ambassador makes strategic interventions with the president's governance team and Ministry of Justice, has publicly called on the government to ensure a speedy and fair-handed justice system. The U.S. government funds workshops and documentary and photo exhibits to raise public awareness of prisoners' rights. U.S. programs support a legal clinic to prevent victims of human rights abuses from being wrongfully sent to prison. Women and children's rights also remain a special focus of U.S. awareness raising, advocacy, and protection activities. U.S. advocacy with government contacts at all levels contributed to the adoption of a comprehensive law addressing several forms of exploitation, including sexual tourism and trafficking in persons. The U.S. antitrafficking program provided assistance to four "welcome centers" in coastal areas that reported high sex tourism. Through U.S. efforts, authorities assisted 39 persons with medical treatment and 97 persons with psychological counseling. The United States funded police training for the investigation and prosecution of child abuse and exploitation cases to build capacity among law enforcement offices and to strengthen police recognition. The United States organized a public discussion on "Women of Influence" featuring six women leaders from different sectors; sent two local representatives to the Pan-African Summit on Women's Leadership; facilitated public participation in a Web chat on women's suffrage; and organized a cooperative television program on women in politics and the media. The United States

also funded psychological counseling services for battered women, as well as activities to raise awareness among Muslim women regarding their rights.

The United States government undertakes a number of activities to promote media freedom and freedom of speech, namely by broadening journalists' access to information and strengthening their professionalism. The United States organized a weekly discussion group for English-speaking journalists, as well as Web chats for journalists on various democracy-related topics. World Press Freedom Day activities included a digital video conference on "Press freedom, Impunity and Safety of journalists," as well as participation in a Web chat on "U.S. Efforts in Support of Journalists Worldwide." Journalists benefited from the inauguration of a new press center in the northern city of Diego Suarez and journalism training around the country conducted by both local and American trainers. The American Press Center in Antananarivo assists local journalists in their efforts to increase their professionalism and sharpen their journalism skills by providing access to media resources.