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Mozambique's Chissano: Seeking a solution in Madagascar

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Thirty-five years after he played a key role in negotiating the Lusaka Accord which helped end the decade-long war between Portugal and the *Frente de Libertação de Moçambique* and led to Mozambique's independence, and fifteen years after he won the presidency in his country's first democratic multi-party elections, Joaquim Chissano finds himself in a new position at the negotiating table as he attempts to secure a peaceful resolution to the political turmoil that has been gripping Madagascar since the spring.

The crisis began with the military-backed ouster of Madagascar's democratically-elected President Marc Ravalomanana on 17 March by Andry Rajoelina, the mayor of the capital, Antananarivo, who received the endorsement of the country's high court and was sworn in as the new president on 21 March. Tensions between the two lead-

ers and their supporters had been building for months. In December 2008, Ravalomanana's government attempted to silence criticism from Rajoelina by shutting the television and radio stations he owns, leading Rajoelina to begin holding weekly protests in the center of Antananarivo, demanding that Ravalomanana step down. At the end of January, the protests became violent and at least 100 people were killed. Then in February, Ravalomanana attempted to fire Rajoelina as mayor, leading to further protests during which the Presidential Guard killed at least 28 demonstrators.

Events accelerated in early March with Ravalomanana ordering Rajoelina's arrest, driving him into hiding. Military units mutinied and dissident soldiers began issuing statements challenging Ravalomanana and saying they had deployed tanks around the capital. On 14 March Ra-



joelina came out of hiding and said that Ravalomanana had only four hours to step down. In an attempt to forestall further conflict, Ravalomanana offered a referendum as a possible compromise, but this was rejected and the military seized the presidential palace on 16 March. Offers to mediate by the Pope's representative in Madagascar and Senegalese president Abdoulay Wade were fruitless and the next day, after opposition protests and further deaths, Ravalomanana was forced out, resigning in spite of his stated resolve to "fight to the death". Ravalomanana officially transferred control to a troika of loyal military officers, but the officers, under duress, quickly agreed to abdicate their new power and turn it over to Rajoelina. Rajoelina institutionalized the coup by creating the *Haute Autorité Transitoire* (HAT) as a transition leadership body, with himself as the head.

International condemnation of Rajoelina's coup was swift and forceful. A subcommittee of the regional Southern African Development Community (SADC), of which Madagascar is a member, condemned "in the strongest terms the unconstitutional actions that have led to the illegal ousting of the democratically elected president," further stating that it would not recognize Rajoelina's rule as legitimate "because his appointment not only violates the Constitution of Madagascar and democratic principles, but violates the core principles and Treaty of SADC, the African Union and the United Nations Charters". The African Union suspended Madagascar and demanded that Rajoelina return the country to a constitutional government within six months or the group would consider imposing sanctions. Rajoelina argued in response that his takeover

was constitutional and that he had democratically liberated the country from dictatorial oppression, pledging to hold elections within two years.

Rajoelina's statements failed to appease the international community, though. Madagascar is dependent on foreign aid for up to 70 percent of its national income and donor countries began almost immediately to suspend aid programs. Norway and the United States halted non-humanitarian aid to Madagascar. France, the former colonial power in Madagascar, condemned Rajoelina's ascent to power as a coup d'état,

as did the rest of the European Union, and while both initially continued to provide aid, they did not begin any new development projects and as dissatisfaction with Rajoelina grew, funds were frozen.

For his part, Ravalomanana, who came into office after a disputed election and unrest in 2002, continued to argue that he was wrongfully deposed and encouraged supporters who protested in Antananarivo. Some political allies claimed they were forming a new government, but this attempt was dismissed by Rajoelina and quickly aborted.

Ravalomanana received a significant boost, though, when a special SADC summit in Swaziland on 30 March suspended Madagascar from the organization and called on Rajoelina to step down. Unfazed, Rajoelina responded in April by pushing through a trial of Ravalomanana on corruption charges related to allocation of public funds for the purchase of a jet, with Ravalomanana being convicted in absentia and sentenced to four years in prison.

As instability crippled Madagascar's vital tourism industry and Rajoelina continued to resist compromise, SADC slowly took action, culminating in a joint statement on

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20 June in which the group reiterated its call for a return to constitutional rule and “urged all stakeholders to commit themselves to peaceful negotiated settlement through dialogue and desist from any violent solutions and inflammatory statements which may jeopardize and undermine current efforts in bringing constitutional normalcy”. Joaquim Chissano was appointed to lead a mediation team to seek a resolution to the crisis.

Chissano was an inspired choice for the mission. Since declining to seek reelection as Mozambique’s president in 2004, he has worked on humanitarian causes and was active in a United Nations mission to try to craft a peace agreement between the government of Uganda and the rebel Lord’s Resistance Army in 2007. Chissano also achieved greater international recognition as the inaugural recipient of Mo Ibrahim’s Achievement in African Leadership award, given to former African heads of state for promotion of good governance.

Chissano was initially successful in setting a reconciliation process in motion, but the early progress was not easy, with Chissano forced to shuttle back and forth across the Mozambique Channel to pressure both parties just to engage in talks. On 22 July, Chissano achieved a breakthrough, gaining an agreement that the two sides, along with representatives of influential former presidents Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy, would meet on 5 August in Maputo, but Chissano remained frustrated with the lack of progress, saying “the lack of dialogue has so far been an obstacle to any solution”.

After haranguing the four parties to make sure all would attend the Maputo talks, on 9 August an agreement was

reached for a power-sharing arrangement between Rajoelina and Ravalomanana’s parties, with elections to be held in 15 months and amnesty granted to all four leaders for any crimes, alleged or committed. Until the elections, the country is supposed to be ruled by a transitional unity government, whose membership was to be decided in a second round of talks in Maputo on 25-26 August.

For Chissano, the achievement of a lasting settlement would further increase his standing as one of Africa’s greatest contemporary statesmen. It also could help raise the stature of Mozambique within the region. Mozambique has been the rare country blessed with peace and stability following its brutal civil war, and it can now take advantage of this to contribute to greater regional security and growth.

The “Maputo II” talks were extended an extra day, but still concluded without a resolution, as discussions deadlocked over who would be the transitional prime minister under a Rajoelina presidency. The leaders are expected to consult with their respective sides, and it is hoped that a compromise will be reached quickly, as mediators have ruled out a third round of talks in Maputo.

Whoever emerges as the president after the new elections, he will face an even graver economic situation than usual, and this in a country where 85.1% of the population live on less than US\$2 per day and 59% are chronically malnourished. After taking office, Rajoelina promised to reduce food prices and improve health care, but any social programs are dependent on the resumption of foreign aid spending. For the Malagasy people, the freeze on aid spending could not have come at a worse time, as the country is trying to recover from a devastating cyclone and an extended drought, in addition to the man-made political disaster. Establishing basic food security for the population will remain the most pressing



priority, one which will require increased aid and foreign investment.

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Madagascar will come out of this political crisis with a more equitable distribution of political power among Rajoelina and Ravalomanana's parties. However, while this may please the political elites, it remains to be seen whether poverty reduction and economic growth will occur under the new government. If Rajoelina and Ravalomanana are unable to accomplish these socio-economic goals, the politicians' rivalry will have done nothing more for

tries to develop its mineral and petroleum resources. their countrymen than deepen their suffering.

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