



COMOROS
 Grand Comore
 Anjouan
 Moheli
 Mayotte (Administered by France, claimed by Comoros)
 Dzaoudzi

MAHAJANGA
 Mahajanga
 Marovoay
 Maevetanana
 Antananarivo
 Ambakireny

ATANANARIVO
 Antananarivo
 Ambatolampy
 Antsirabe
 Mania

TOAMASINA
 Toamasina
 Brickaville
 Moramanga

FIANARANTSOA
 Fianarantsoa
 Ambohimahasoa
 Ambalavan

TOLIARY
 Toliary
 Ithosy
 Farafangana

Other locations:
 Antsiranana
 Nosy Mitsio
 Nosy Be
 Hellyville
 Vohimarina
 Sambava
 Andapa
 Antalaha
 Befandriana
 Maroantsetra
 Andilamena
 Fenerive
 Nosy Boraha
 Ambatondrazaka
 Mamanoro
 Nosy Varika
 Mananjary
 Manakara
 Faradofay
 Ambovombe
 Ampanihy
 Morondava
 Morombe
 Mantirano
 Ankapandra
 Tsiroanomandidy
 Miandrivazo
 Antsiraha
 Nosy Mitsio
 Sosumau
 Ambilobe
 Vohimarina
 Sambava
 Andapa
 Antalaha
 Befandriana
 Maroantsetra
 Andilamena
 Fenerive
 Nosy Boraha
 Ambatondrazaka
 Toamasina
 Brickaville
 Moramanga
 Mamanoro
 Nosy Varika
 Mananjary
 Manakara
 Farafangana
 Faradofay
 Ambovombe
 Ampanihy

Geographical Features:
 Mozambique Channel
 Ile Chesterfield
 Ile Juan de Nova (FRANCE)
 Ile Barren
 Ile Europa (FRANCE)

Neighboring Countries:
 MOZAMBIQUE
 VILA DE MOCIMBOA DA PRAIA
 Pemba
 Nacala
 Lumba
 Moçambique

Other Islands:
 Iles Glorieuses (FRANCE)
 Cap d'Ambre

MADAGASCAR

First test for the African Union

RICHARD CORNWELL

There would be few who could conclude that the African Union (AU) or its predecessor covered themselves in glory during the Madagascan crisis. Indeed, the organisations consistently went out of their way to accommodate the views of the incumbent, refusing to take a strong stand on agreements reached when these were no longer expedient to Ratsiraka. By concentrating on minutiae it diverted its gaze from the bigger picture, in which electoral fraud loomed large. If final proof was wanted of this it came in the parliamentary results a year after the flawed first round of presidential elections. Ultimately the AU found itself floundering in the wake of developments, and was irrelevant to the solution of Madagascar's political crisis. Other international actors eventually played a far more constructive role as they sought to engage and encourage the new government.

Crisis out of nowhere

A year ago not many people would have predicted the political crisis that was to bring the giant island state of Madagascar to the brink of civil war and institutional disintegration. The immediate occasion for the crisis was the disputed result of the first round of the presidential election held on 16 December 2001, yet only a few months earlier there had been a general consensus that, for better or worse, President Didier Ratsiraka was virtually certain to win another term of office.¹

Marc Ravalomanana's announcement on 5 August that he was entering the lists caused some consternation in Ratsiraka's

camp.² The new candidate was largely an unknown factor in political terms, and represented a distinct break with the past in terms of personality and style. At 52, he was 13 years Ratsiraka's junior, with a dynamism that contrasted markedly with the ailing figure of the incumbent. His life story was that of the self-made multimillionaire businessman who had entered politics only in 1999 to campaign successfully for the mayorship of the capital, Antananarivo, at the head of the 'I Love Madagascar Movement', TIM (*Tiako-i-Madagaskara*). He was now able to place before the electorate his successful record as mayor in his campaign to secure the most senior political position in the country.³

By early October 2001 opinion polls showed Ravalomanana to be ahead of Ratsiraka, and by the end of the year a number of other political leaders had rallied to his support.⁴ The election campaign was marred by isolated incidents of violence, and administrative arrangements were unsatisfactory.⁵

The count

On 28 December the preliminary results released by the interior ministry indicated that a second round would be necessary pitting Ravalomanana, who had won 46.49% of the vote to Ratsiraka's 40.64%. These figures were starkly at variance with those produced by Ravalomanana's support committee which claimed 53.32% against Ratsiraka's 35.54%. In essence, they claimed that Ratsiraka's vote count had been expanded by the fraudulent addition of some 400,000 bogus votes.⁶

Even before the High Constitutional Court (HCC) pronounced on the validity of the results, however, the mood in the capital, Antananarivo, where Ravalomanana had won an overwhelming majority, was already one of premature celebration and anticipation.⁷

By 16 January the HCC had still not ratified the election results, but instead chose to ask the National Electoral Council (NEC) to conduct a recount. This option was rejected immediately by Ravalomanana, who insisted that the court itself conduct the recount, claiming that the NEC was under government control.⁸ Ravalomanana's objections notwithstanding, the NEC proceeded with a recount which made minor adjustments to the figures released by the interior ministry. The conclusion remained essentially the same, however, that neither Ravalomanana nor Ratsiraka had received an absolute majority, and on 25 January the HCC ruled that a second round would be held, to be contested by these two candidates. The next ballot was scheduled for 24 February 2002.⁹

This turn of events was greeted with dismay in Ravalomanana's camp and a series

of massive protest rallies began in the capital on 28 January inaugurating an indefinite general strike and culminating in a public demonstration in the central square attended by some 500,000 people.¹⁰ On 4 February Ravalomanana repeated his refusal to contest a second round until the HCC itself addressed the discrepancies between the official figures and those compiled by his supporters.¹¹ By now it was apparent that the continued unrest and work stoppages would cost the country dear and damage its chances of prolonging the remarkable growth rates of the previous few years.¹²

On 7 February Kofi Annan, the UN secretary-general, made a personal appeal for a peaceful and constitutional resolution of the crisis. Entreaties and threats made no impact on the resolve of the Ravalomanana camp, however, and as this became apparent the international community decided to take a hand, with Francophone parliamentarians and the Swiss government offering to play the role of honest broker between the two protagonists.¹³ This attempt at intervention came none too soon, for Ratsiraka's supporters had begun to react to the situation in Antananarivo by establishing an armed blockade on the road linking the capital to the country's major port of Taomasina some 200 km away, thus cutting off the supply of vital imports, especially fuel.¹⁴

Enter the OAU

It was against this background of rising tensions that Organisation of African Unity (OAU) secretary-general, Amara Essy, arrived in Madagascar to hold meetings with the leaders of the rival camps. He found that while Ratsiraka was fully prepared to contest a second round, Ravalomanana was persisting with his demand that the votes of the first round be checked. At this point Essy warned Ravalomanana's camp that the OAU would not tolerate any irregular change of government. He also advised that the second round be postponed to allow for its proper organisation.¹⁵

On 13 February 2002 Essy arranged a direct meeting between Ratsiraka and

Ravalomanana, at which he achieved an agreement in principle that the second round would be postponed, international observers invited and the NEC reorganised. A ten-member joint commission was also established to discuss, in the presence of the UN's representative, those of Ravalomanana's demands on which no consensus could be reached: the verification of the first round votes; the establishment of a transitional government; and the reorganisation of the HCC. Some progress was made in narrowing the gap between the parties, and although large differences remained, the joint committee was prepared to continue talks under the aegis of the OAU.¹⁶

Yet even as diplomatic engagement continued, elements on both sides of the political divide began to agitate for more radical solutions. Since one of those prominent in advising extreme action was one of the five members of the joint committee still supposedly negotiating under the auspices of the OAU, this did not augur well.¹⁷

Two days later, Ravalomanana addressed a crowd of some 500,000 supporters in the capital, announcing that the crisis had gone on too long and that he was declaring himself president. The accuracy of his claim that every possible recourse to justice had been exhausted was open to question; certainly this was not a view shared by Amara Essy, who issued an immediate warning of the implications of such a step, and called for a continuation of the deliberations being conducted under the auspices of the OAU. Ravalomanana's actions flew directly in the face of agreements apparently reached on the postponement and conditions of a second round.¹⁸

The following morning, the 21st, the Ratsiraka government at last reacted to condemn Ravalomanana's stated intentions, having been strangely silent in the face of the mounting popular challenge. Others among the defeated first-round candidates also appealed to Ravalomanana to reconsider, and for a day it seemed that prudence might

prevail. On the 22nd, however, urged on by hundreds of thousands of his supporters, and in front of a crowd of tens of thousands in the national stadium, including judges and church leaders, Ravalomanana took the fateful step, declared himself president and had himself sworn in.¹⁹

The OAU now moved swiftly to attempt a resuscitation of dialogue. A contact group was formed to visit Madagascar and propose to the two protagonists ways in which a peaceful solution to the crisis might be found. At the heart of these proposals lay the idea of forming a government of national reconciliation to prepare the ground for a return to normality and the holding of a second round of presidential elections in six months time.²⁰

By the time the OAU contact group arrived in Madagascar only on 6 March, however, attitudes on the ground had hardened considerably.

Civil war?

By the end of February the population of Antananarivo had rallied behind Ravalomanana with an almost desperate intensity, impatient to defy Ratsiraka's edict. Ravalomanana, protected by a massive crowd around his house, told interviewers that he was eager to legalise his position as president by means of a referendum.²¹ In the meantime, however, he appointed as his 'prime minister' Jacques Sylla, a lawyer and former foreign minister. Other 'cabinet' appointments would follow shortly. Ratsiraka's camp appeared to be forced on to the defensive by the persistent boldness of his opponent. Prime minister Tantely Andrianarivo fled the capital and the ministers of posts and telecommunications and of foreign affairs submitted their resignations. On the streets of the capital, however, Ratsiraka's supporters were showing rather more resolve, which resulted in bloody clashes and running battles.²²

The embattled president now made a rash attempt to retrieve a deteriorating situation by declaring martial law in Antananarivo and appointing General Raveloarison as

military governor, with instructions to enforce the curfew. The general showed admirable sense by attempting no such thing, being fully aware that this would have led to a bloodbath. The net effect of Ratsiraka's actions was merely to demonstrate his failing power, and on 1 March Ravalomanana emphasised this by naming the remainder of his 'cabinet'.²³ The immediate question now was whether the new 'ministers' would be prevented by the military from occupying their offices in the capital. As it happened there was a sudden deployment of large numbers of troops, but these made no effort to confront the thousands of demonstrators who accompanied the new appointees to their places of work.²⁴

The army having been conspicuous in its moderation, Ratsiraka's principal hope now lay in the continued loyalty of the governors of five of the six autonomous provinces who, on 5 March signed an agreement designating the eastern port city of Taomasina as their capital. They added that they would maintain the blockade of Antananarivo to cut off vital supplies.²⁵ Despite all the talk of war, however, the army remained remarkably quiescent, and on 7 March Ravalomanana's supporters took over the defence ministry without opposition. Ratsiraka's defence minister promptly resigned and, the blockade excepted, the initiative seemed to have passed to Ravalomanana, a situation that did little to assist the OAU mediators.²⁶

This, then, was how matters had developed by the time the OAU contact group made their appearance on the island on 6 March.²⁷ During the week the OAU mission spent in Madagascar it formulated proposals for the establishment of a government of national reconciliation, which would restore normality and prepare for new elections. By the time the group left on 13 March, however, neither party had responded to this proposal.²⁸

Ravalomanana now proceeded to appoint his own defence chiefs, and on 15 March Jacques Sylla occupied the prime minister's palace, though not without violence.²⁹ This

incident led the army to make its first call for direct dialogue, an appeal that Ravalomanana felt strong enough to reject.³⁰ He also felt sufficiently assured to call off the two-month strike, though many businesses found it difficult to resume operations in the face of the continuing blockade.³¹ And though his dismissal of the five provincial governors loyal to Ratsiraka went unheeded, on 29 March General Raveloarison resigned as military governor of Antananarivo, admitting that his mission had been futile.³²

The beginning of April saw important developments on the legal front: six of the nine judges on the HCC had their nominations annulled by the Supreme Court, rendering the rulings of that body null and void. This opened the way for the reinstatement of those HCC members replaced by Ratsiraka on the eve of the December polls. The Supreme Court's administrative chamber now issued an order for the results of the first round of voting to be re-tabulated.³³

Dakar I

With the encouragement of Amara Essy, Senegal's President Abdoulaye Wade issued an invitation for the rival presidents to meet in Dakar, where a summit was being held to discuss the financing of the New Partnership for Africa's Development. Eventually the two were induced to meet on 18 April in the presence of Essy, Wade, the presidents of Mozambique, Benin and Côte d'Ivoire and Ibrahima Fall of the UN. At the end of the meeting the two signed what became known as the Dakar Agreement. This consisted of five articles, and took into account the order of the HCC regarding an audit of the first round results. The parties agreed that in the event of there not being an outright winner in the recount, a popular referendum would be held to decide between the two leading candidates, organised by the UN, the OAU and the European Community within six months. Also, in the event of the first round being indecisive a transitional government of national reconciliation would be installed,

largely by mutual agreement. A High Transition Council would be established to oversee the process, with Ravalomanana at its head, second in protocol only to the president. An independent electoral commission would replace the existing national body.³⁴

On returning to Madagascar on 28 April, Ratsiraka announced that he was opposed to a recount, and wanted to proceed directly to a referendum, since he continued to deny the legal competence of the HCC to re-examine the votes.³⁵ His five governors also began to talk of secession should the recount go against their candidate, though this may have been more a reflection of their desire to retain their positions of power than out of loyalty to the incumbent.³⁶ The following day the HCC declared that Marc Ravalomanana had won the first round with a clear majority of 51.46% to Ratsiraka's 35.9%. The latter immediately rejected this ruling, citing a number of legal objections to the constitution and competence of the HCC, not least because four of its members had attended Ravalomanana's 'inauguration' on 22 February. At this juncture, and admittedly with the benefit of hindsight, the OAU might have reminded Ratsiraka that his signature of the Dakar Agreement implied his acceptance of the role and competence of the HCC. Thus might further difficulties and complications have been avoided and organisational embarrassment spared. Yet no such pressure seems to have been applied, and Essy publicly expressed doubts about the way in which the recount had been conducted.³⁷ To some observers it appeared that the OAU was unnecessarily, even if unwittingly, undermining the Dakar Agreement it had helped broker.³⁸

Re-enter the OAU

These public concerns notwithstanding, an OAU ministerial delegation flew to Madagascar from 2 to 4 May to consult the rival presidents and urge their compliance with the agreement. In discussions with Ratsiraka they adopted the curious position that since the first phase of the Dakar

Agreement—the recount—had not resulted in a solution, the next phase should be implemented: the institution of a transitional arrangement to organise a referendum. By implication they seem to have accepted Ratsiraka's technical and legal objections to the recount.³⁹

The following day the OAU delegation met Ravalomanana and his principal lieutenants.⁴⁰ The leader of the delegation, Senegal's foreign minister, Cheikh Tidiane Gadio, expressed to him their concern at the damage being done to the country by the protracted political crisis, and then proceeded to make several remarks, the interpretation of which is problematic. On the one hand, he urged Ravalomanana to respect the constitutional provisions for a change of government, but then added that the legal and judicial aspects of the case were not central to the accord reached in Dakar. The primary objective of the Dakar Agreement, according to him, was finding a comprehensive political solution, and he went on to say that since the execution of the recount had not been acceptable to both sides that issue should have fallen away. In the circumstances, the delegation argued, it was necessary to move on to the second phase, an internationally monitored referendum. Certainly they hoped that Ravalomanana would take no action to affect the process, and in particular that his presidential investiture would be postponed.⁴¹

Not surprisingly, Ravalomanana's camp was inclined to a different interpretation of what had been agreed at Dakar. They were of the opinion that the first phase of the agreement had been concluded with the comparative recount and the announcement of the new results at the end of April. This made redundant the second phase of the agreement. They urged that pressure be brought to bear on Ratsiraka's supporters to dismantle the barricades isolating the capital in compliance with article five of the Dakar Agreement. They also requested that the OAU recognise the new government, and that it should oppose any attempt by the governors of the autonomous provinces to secede, as they were now threatening.⁴²

The delegation left Antananarivo on 4 May and two days later, their express request notwithstanding, Ravalomanana was sworn in as president for the second time, at a ceremony attended by foreign diplomats, including representatives of France and the US. Regardless of these signs that the international community, despite the OAU, was beginning to shift its weight slowly behind the new man, Ratsiraka's camp immediately refused to recognise Ravalomanana and also rejected the government sworn in a week later under the premiership of Jacques Sylla.⁴³ Further indications that Ratsiraka's position was weakening came as more than 20 parliamentarians from his AREMA party attended the first session of the National Assembly on 7 May. The following day Ratsiraka's defence minister announced that he recognised Ravalomanana's presidency and that he was resigning in favour of his appointed successor.⁴⁴

Following the return to Addis Ababa of the OAU's ministerial delegation it was decided to convene a summit of the Central Organ, with a view to supporting the Dakar process, and sending a message to the international community that it should do nothing to undermine the organisation's efforts, in particular by recognising Ravalomanana's regime. Yet on 10 May Norway became the first country to do precisely that, followed shortly by Switzerland.⁴⁵

Dakar II

The Central Organ summit scheduled for 22 May was, however, postponed at the last minute, the relevant heads of state being unable to consider the issue at such short notice. President Wade also preferred to continue with efforts to revive the Dakar talks. His efforts were supported now by President Bongo of Gabon who invited his Senegalese counterpart to Libreville for a meeting on 4 June with Amara Essy and the French foreign minister, Dominique de Villepin. These discussions culminated in a serious appeal to Ravalomanana and

Ratsiraka to attend another meeting in Dakar on 8-9 June.⁴⁶

By then the situation had deteriorated further, as both sides began to calculate the military forces they could muster.⁴⁷ Probably recognising the increasing danger of full-scale civil war, and unwilling to yield the international initiative to his rival, both men arrived in Senegal for what became known as Dakar II.⁴⁸ Yet on the ground the balance of power had undergone a significant shift, for on Friday 7 June General Rajaonson, the army chief of staff, formally handed over control of the armed forces to Ravalomanana's appointee General Rawafimandy.⁴⁹

The following day the presidential claimants arrived in Dakar. President Wade and his team held protracted but separate meetings with the two men. Ravalomanana indicated that he rested his case on the decision of the HCC, which had given him popular legitimacy. Ratsiraka, for his part, indicated a willingness to stand by the Dakar I agreement, which he interpreted as calling for new presidential elections, a position totally unacceptable to Ravalomanana. In a desperate effort to break this deadlock the OAU facilitators proposed a new strategy. This suggested that legislative elections be held, preferably before the end of the year but by May 2003 at the latest. Should Ravalomanana's party win, then Ratsiraka would have to recognise his legitimacy; should Ratsiraka win then a referendum should be held to choose between the two men as president.⁵⁰

Ravalomanana and Ratsiraka headed home the following day, without agreement having been reached, but with the former now confirmed in a stronger position, especially as his armed forces began to increase their pressure.⁵¹ Apparently heedless of his rapidly weakening position, Ratsiraka adopted a defiant stance, allowing Ravalomanana to seize the moral high ground by promising to consider the OAU proposal. On 11 June Ratsiraka declared that his camp would go on the offensive, as the best means of defence, yet within days it had become apparent that the military tide

was moving inexorably against him, as Ravalomanana's forces seized a third province without resistance.⁵²

On the 13th, Ratsiraka suddenly flew to France with his immediate family, ostensibly to seek a solution to the crisis, but probably in the hope of activating the nascent goodwill of President Chirac. Madagascar state television, firmly under Ravalomanana's control, announced the former president's departure into exile and claimed that the crisis of the past six months was finally over. While this assertion was certainly premature, Ratsiraka's absence played havoc with morale among his supporters on the barricades, and many simply gave up the fight.⁵³

Ravalomanana, sensing the chance to capitalise on Ratsiraka's apparent abandonment of the field, wrote on 15 June to President Wade in his capacity as co-ordinator of the OAU facilitation to thank the OAU for its assistance and indicate his agreement with the substance of the Dakar II resolution plan. In particular he agreed with the idea of early, internationally monitored legislative elections, and indicated that he intended to establish an inclusive government of national reconciliation. To demonstrate that he was in earnest, the following day he dissolved his government, and asked Jacques Sylla to form a new administration.⁵⁴ When the new cabinet ministers were named two days later, however, it became apparent that this was a unity government in name rather than substance. Few changes had been made, and though a handful of erstwhile Ratsiraka supporters were included these were from the margins of AREMA.⁵⁵

But by this stage Ratsiraka had committed a mistake so grave as to place him beyond the pale and relieve Ravalomanana of the necessity of offering amnesty. On 19 June reports began to surface about a small group of mercenaries intercepted in Tanzania en route from France to Ratsiraka's last stronghold in Madagascar, Taomasina. International condemnation followed quickly, though an OAU meeting convened in Addis Ababa to consider the situation

failed to address the new developments, simply reiterating the need for a political solution to the crisis and falling in with Ratsiraka's demand for new presidential elections.⁵⁶ Ratsiraka, who can hardly have expected so generous a lifeline, was now emboldened to return to Madagascar on 23 June claiming that the OAU decision vindicated his claim that until new elections were held he remained president.⁵⁷

This proved too much for President Wade, who had followed closely the unhappy saga as it developed. He argued that the situation had moved on, and that such an exercise was likely to prove a waste of time and effort. Accordingly, he indicated on 25 June that Senegal would recognise Ravalomanana as head of state in Madagascar, though formal recognition was delayed until 18 July.⁵⁸

On 26 June the US gave its recognition and unfroze the country's assets in the Federal Reserve. In a further sign that isolation was ending, diplomats from a number of non-African countries also attended the country's independence celebrations.⁵⁹ On the military front, too, Ravalomanana's forces were going from strength to strength, taking a series of strategic towns in quick succession as Ratsiraka's militias dissolved into rapacious and vengeful groups of marauders.⁶⁰ Too late, Ratsiraka now appealed for a ceasefire as his resistance crumbled, and it became evident to those observing events that his military gambit had failed.⁶¹

The OAU meanwhile seems to have determined not to allow its position to be affected by this reality, apparently still imagining that the island state would continue to be dangerously divided until new elections were held under international supervision.⁶² On 2 July Ambassador Saïd Djinnit told journalists that, as recommended by the organisation's Central Organ on 22 June, Madagascar would be barred from attending the first AU summit in Durban in terms of the OAU's principles on unconstitutional changes of government and the "principle of unity and the territorial integrity of Madagascar". "Neither of the

two opposing governments in Madagascar qualifies to sit in the AU”, he was reported as saying. “The seat of Madagascar will remain vacant until a government is established in Madagascar in conformity with the principles of the OAU/AU.”⁶³

By now, Japan, Australia and the People’s Republic of China had all joined those states already recognising Ravalomanana’s administration, and as preparations were made for an official visit by the French foreign minister on 3 July, the OAU/AU position was looking distinctly odd.⁶⁴ De Villepin’s visit not only signalled the end of France’s procrastination over Madagascar, it brought with it a number of promises of financial support.⁶⁵

African disunity

Despite these developments Madagascar remained banned from the OAU summit in Durban. Speaking at the opening of the OAU Council of Ministers on 4 July, South Africa’s deputy president Jacob Zuma said that the decision was “a clear indication of a new way of doing things, and Africa’s commitment to good governance”. He also played up the mechanisms for peer review and conflict resolution, which he said showed Africa’s commitment to democratisation and good governance.⁶⁶

On 5 July Ratsiraka flew into exile, landing in Seychelles, where he stayed for two days before proceeding to France.⁶⁷ On the 7th, Ravalomanana’s forces entered Taomasina, without meeting resistance, signalling the end of military confrontation, apart from some small pockets of recalcitrants.⁶⁸ The following day, Germany followed the US and France in recognising Ravalomanana.⁶⁹ These developments notwithstanding, and despite appeals for sanity from President Wade, on 9 July, the first day of the AU’s existence, the organisation decided not to recognise the new government saying it had taken power unconstitutionally. Fresh elections would have to be held as a precondition for recognition. The decision followed a lengthy and extremely heated debate, with Senegal,

the principal mediator, registering its dissent. Mauritius also took issue with the decision.⁷⁰ In July, however, Mauritius, Burkina Faso and Libya joined Senegal in breaking ranks with the rest of Africa over the question of recognition.⁷¹

Better was to come for Ravalomanana, for on 26 July prime minister Jacques Sylla attended a special donors’ meeting convened by the World Bank in Paris to receive pledges of \$2.3 billion over four years to assist in recovering from its recent travails.⁷² Still the AU pressed on with its efforts to ‘resolve’ the Madagascar crisis, carefully turning a blind eye to a reality that others were quite happy to deal with, and apparently oblivious to the manner in which it was drawing attention to its own irrelevance. On 13 August an AU delegation led by South African foreign minister Dr Zuma actually arrived on the island, and left with a message to Ravalomanana that recognition would not be long in coming.⁷³

Not a week later Ravalomanana received a personal invitation from UN secretary-general Kofi Annan to address the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, which he did on 3 September.⁷⁴ The secretariat of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) also indicated that despite the AU’s stance, Madagascar would participate in all its technical meetings.⁷⁵

On 16 October the interior ministry announced that parliament, where AREMA held 66 of the 150 seats, would be dissolved ahead of new elections on 15 December. This action was directly related to the request of the international community that any doubts as to Ravalomanana’s popular legitimacy be removed as soon as possible. In particular Ravalomanana was at pains to stress that this represented his commitment to the principles of Dakar II, a point he made in Pretoria on 29 October in consultations with an AU group consisting of presidents Mbeki and Mwanawasa and Mozambican premier Pascal Mocumbi.⁷⁶

At this juncture, with Ravalomanana’s TIM party forming a broad-based alliance with other longer established political

organisations, Ratsiraka's AREMA began to show signs of strain. The wave of enthusiasm for the new president was by now palpable, and opposition redoubts had proven so fragile that some elements within the old ruling party feared extinction if they should contest the election. Others argued that by breaking with Ratsiraka and the past, AREMA might begin to forge a new future for itself as a loyal and responsible opposition. Splits now emerged between those within AREMA calling for a total boycott of the polls and those arguing that they needed more time to prepare.⁷⁷

Straining after a gnat

By early December the AU was beginning to listen to the protests of Ravalomanana's opponents, and was asking whether the polls should not be postponed in the interests of 'freedom and fairness'.

This peace of special pleading apart, which also drew adverse comment about the AU's partisan tendencies throughout the entire affair, the AU failed to send observers to monitor Ravalomanana's overwhelming victory on 15 December, in which he and his allies took 132 of the 160 seats.⁷⁸ Instead the organisation dispatched an information mission from 8 to 20 December, which concluded that, by and large, the elections had been free and fair. In his report of 4 February the interim chairperson came to another convoluted conclusion, which is worth quoting in full:

This posed a dilemma for the AU. Should the AU reconsider its position *vis-à-vis* the government of President Ravalomanana based on the outcome of the legislative elections, even though these elections were not held in strict conformity with the AU Summit decisions? Alternatively, should the AU maintain its position *vis-à-vis* the same government, thus ignoring the outcome of the elections, which to some extent, went beyond electing members of the National Assembly, but also signified support for Mr Ravalomanana, and which were

declared by the rest of the international community as free and fair?

During a meeting held in Sun City on 21 January 2003 to discuss conflict situations in Africa in general, the ministers of foreign affairs of the troika and the chairman of the commission concurred that a delegation should be dispatched to Madagascar to engage the new government and the political class in general, including the opposition, on all aspects pertinent to the implementation of the Durban Summit Decision, including the conditions for national reconciliation and unity, the situation on human rights and the role of the opposition, and make recommendations on the basis of which the AU chairman could undertake consultations and advise his peers accordingly.

The AU delegation comprising of representatives of the troika and commission visited Madagascar from 24 to 27 January 2003 and held meetings with a wide range of leaders and parties including the opposition. It was also received in audience by President Ravalomanana. At the time of finalising this report, the AU delegation was still preparing its report.⁷⁹

On that same day, however, the Central Organ of the AU decided to recommend to the Assembly of the organisation that it recognise the government of Marc Ravalomanana, though it suggested, too, that a roundtable be convened of Madagascan parties to address issues relating to human rights, the rule of law and political detainees. Madagascar can expect to be admitted to the next summit of the AU in July 2003.⁸⁰

Notes

- 1 Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Madagascar: Country profile 2001, London, EIU, 2001, pp 5-11; EIU, Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles: Country report March 2001, London, EIU, 2001, pp 27-29; EIU, Mauritius, Madagascar, Seychelles: Country report September 2001,

- London, EIU, 2001, pp 25-28.
- 2 Popular mayor in race for Madagascan presidency, *Reuters News Service*, Antananarivo, 6 August 2001.
 - 3 Madagascar: Life is getting better, but voters have begun asking for more, *The Economist*, 22 December 2001.
 - 4 Madagascar coalition partner quits before polls, *Reuters News Service*, Antananarivo, 6 October 2001.
 - 5 *Africa Research Bulletin (ARB), Political Series*, 1-31 December 2001, p 14663.
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