



## Press release

### **APPEAL TO RELEASE THE LEADERS of VONA ASSOCIATION bringing together the representatives of the local communities opposed to the gold mining project in Soamahamanina - Madagascar**

On 22 September 2016 in Soamahamanina, security forces dispersed a community protest against a mining project with gas tears. Then two leaders of the VONA Association which gathers the representatives of the affected communities have been arrested. We call for the immediate release of these two leaders, Pierre Robison and Tsihoarana Andrianony.

Soamahamanina is a commune of 14,000 inhabitants, located 70 kms from the Malagasy capital, Antananarivo, in the Miarinarivo district of Itasy Region.

The Jiuxing Mines SARL company has been issued a mining operating license for 40 years for gold, zinc, lead and berillium in Soamahamanina and in the neighbouring village of Arivonimamo II, along with an exclusive authorization for a perimeter reservation (AERP) at Morafeno. This has provoked community protests along the National Road #1 since the beginning of 2016.

Indeed, this mining project that involves 7 500 hectares brought about strong opposition from the people who are living in the area and reinforced their determination to defend their land, living spaces, natural resources, livelihoods, tombs, and to protect a church and a school from their planned destruction.

The issuance of an environmental permit – that is the last step before the operating license – on 26 May 2016 for the Andravolobe site highlighted an unacceptable breach of the public consultation principles, as the large majority of the affected population has not been consulted or has refused the mining project. The population points to different aspects of the environmental degradation that would be entailed by the highly mechanized mining process used by the Chinese company.

Despite all this, the Jiuxing Mines SARL company set up in Andravolobe with numerous Chinese employees, vans and machines.

Since 20 June 2016, further to a meeting initiated by the bishops of the Justice and Peace Commission, the Soamahamanina population set up a Refusal Committee that gave birth to the VONA Fitiavan-tanindrazana (*Node of Patriotism*) Association gathering the representatives of the affected communities. This movement receives strong support from civil society organizations, neighbouring communes and a great number of citizens. So much that on 19 July 2016, the China Embassy in Madagascar and the Government Council decided to suspend the activities of the Jiuxing Mines SARL company.

But the VONA movement claims for the definite departure of the company along with its equipment.

In fact, the authorities do not take in account the population's grievances and is rather trying to silence it. It was especially the case on 8 September 2016, during a visit of the President of the Republic to Miarinarivo, the Region capital where the displaying of banners was prohibited: however, the Soamahamanina protesters succeeded in bringing their claim to the President's attention.

Without any attention from the Government who is not listening, this demand expressed during press conferences then displayed on banners through the village during a demonstration, ended up in the form of an "ultimatum" with 21 september 2016 as the deadline. The day after, further to a popular demonstration led by the VONA Association, an unprecedented wave of repression broke over the movement

In the face of this violence against people who defends its rights and property, and of the unacceptable pressure on the Malagasy lands that are dedicated by the laws in force to being only an *el dorado* for the mining investors,

**the Collective TANY calls on citizens all over the world to demand :**

- **the immediate release from prison of Pierre Robison and Tsihoarana Andrianony,**
- **the end of any form of repression against the popular movement,**
- **and satisfying responses to the demands of the majority of the local population.**

Paris, 28 September 2016

The Collective for the Defense of Malagasy Lands - TANY

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