

# Imprisonment of Church Journalists in Madagascar Pasteur Lala Rasendrasahina, président de la FJKM

Du Président de la FJKM

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Imprisonment of Church Journalists in Madagascar

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. I write this letter to share with you a very troubling event in the life of the FJKM.

This afternoon the director of the FJKM church radio (Radio Fahazavana), Mr. Didier Ravohangiharison along with Lolo Ratsimba, a journalist from the same radio station, were imprisoned by the HAT government at Antanimora prison in Antananarivo. The two journalists have been accused of collusion with an attempted army mutiny that took place in late December. A third Radio Fahazavana journalist, Jaona Raoly, was given temporary liberty. A respected blog (<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/01/07/the-year-that-was-in-madagascar-part-iii/>) has described this attempted mutiny as a potential fake in order to accuse an opposition parliamentarian of being behind it.

The detention of the FJKM journalists follows a long series of actions taken against Radio Fahazavana by the HAT coup d'Etat government, including the kidnapping and holding as a hostage of Mr. Ravohangiharison's wife for about 48 hours on 25 June 2009 to get her husband to turn himself in to the gendarmerie for questioning. The HAT government recently prevented Lolo Ratsimba from returning to Madagascar from a meeting in Maputo and then from Johannesburg. Recently, on 21 December, the HAT minister of communications ordered Radio Fahazavana to take its news and call-in programs off the air for a month. The minister accused the radio's journalists of calling on people to bring rocks to a protest when in fact it was an anonymous caller that suggested the people come with rocks in their pockets. The journalist immediately shut off the caller and said that violence was not appropriate.

The FJKM in general has also been subject to violations of human rights and various acts of persecution by the HAT government. On 17 March 2009, I and our protocol officer Luc Andriamalala were detained and beaten in custody by soldiers loyal to Andry Rajoelina, the president of the HAT government. Recently the HAT has tried to steal building materials belonging to FJKM church schools. On 15 December the HAT government imposed business taxes on the FJKM, a move which in effect revokes the church's tax exempt status. I personally have been threatened with arrest since few days now.

A number of pastors have decided to speak out against injustice. On December 28, they held an ecumenical worship service calling for justice and denouncing human rights violations and persecution of the church. Several pastors who took part have been slandered in pro-HAT press and are on alert in case action is taken against them. This same group of pastors is planning to have a similar worship service tomorrow 9 January. Didier Ravohangiharison was to have testified about the persecution of Radio Fahazavana at this worship service.

We ask you, our brothers and sisters in Christ, to join us in prayer for Didier and Lolo's swift release from jail. Please do what you can to get pressure put on the HAT government to release these men and stop targeting the church and its radio station. Please encourage human rights organizations (Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch ...) to take up their case and

campaign for their release. Please also contact officials of your government to ask them to help get Didier and Lolo released.

We appreciate your prayers and support in this time of crisis. May the church truly shine as a light in this time of darkness to offer people hope.

In Christ,

Rev. Lala Rasendrasahina  
President  
FJKM