**Protect Madagascar’s National Parks from pillage**

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A top priority for Madagascar’s new president should be to tackle the rampant exploitation of the country’s globally important protected areas. Illegal activities such as mining for gems and gold are out of control. They are wrecking the island’s irreplaceable biodiversity, overwhelming conservation management efforts and threatening national revenue. The security of protected areas needs to be urgently stepped up and the law enforced.

New President Andry Rajoelina campaigned on improving the country’s economy. Besides being a priceless national treasure, Madagascar’s biodiversity attracts international tourists, most of whom visit the protected areas and indirectly contribute almost 14% of the nation’s gross domestic product. Fewer tourists will visit if the charismatic lemurs, for example, are driven to extinction. Found only in Madagascar, these primates are among the most threatened mammal groups on the planet.

Given Madagascar’s extreme poverty, the international community should continue to support the nation in conserving its biodiversity. However, little can be achieved without the commitment of the government, which must recognize the importance of the national parks to Madagascar’s future.

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