

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

Index: AFR 35/6841/2017

30 July 2017

Madagascar: A Damocles sword on environmental activist's head

Clovis Razafimalala was arrested on 16 September 2016, on politically motivated charges of rebellion, destruction of public buildings, and arson of administrative documents.

He was accused of having organized and taken part in a protest that turned violent, despite a blatant lack of proof. He was forced to spend ten months behind bars, almost 400 kilometers away from his home in Maroantsetra.

Clovis is a well-known environmental activist in Madagascar, and has on many occasions spoken out against the illegal trafficking of rosewood and other timber, as part of his role coordinating the Maroantsetra Lampogno coalition.

On July 24th 2017, at the Tamatave Tribunal, Clovis was acquitted on the charge of rebellion, and finally released from jail. But the fight for his freedom continues.

Clovis was found guilty on the two other charges of destruction of public buildings, and arson of administrative documents. He was given a 5 years suspended sentence, a suspended fine of 100 000 ariary, as well as the amount of 50 million ariary to be shared with the other defendants for damages – a conviction he has immediately appealed.

The 5 years suspended sentence is a Damocles sword, which still threatens Clovis' rights to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly. It is an attempt to intimidate and harass him, and sends a threatening message to those willing to speak out against the illegal trafficking of Madagascar's natural resources.

Our fight for Clovis' freedom will continue until the authorities quash the unfair conviction.

According to his lawyers, the charges of destruction of public goods and arson are unjustified as Clovis was not even at the scene where the protest took place.

While his release and return to his wife and young children is a relief, the 5 years suspended sentence and fine fall short of the unconditional dropping of all charges that should have been granted in the first place.

Human and environmental rights defenders play a critical role in promoting and protecting the rights of individuals and groups in Madagascar and around the world. The government of Madagascar must uphold its obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights

including the obligations to respect, protect, promote and fulfil the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly, as well as the right to liberty. By failing to protect human rights defenders in Madagascar, the government is shrinking the space for work which is vital in promoting accountability and a society where everyone's rights are protected.

Sadly, Clovis's case illustrates how threats and harassment are used to silence defenders purely for speaking out on what they believe is right.