

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: AFR 35/1137/2019

01 October 2019

### **Madagascar: Announcement of a Presidential Pardon to detainees accused of minor offences a positive step forward**

President Andry Rajoelina's announcement of his intention to pardon detainees languishing in the country's prisons for minor offences is a positive step forward that must be followed by immediate action, Amnesty International said today.

Amnesty International has been calling for an immediate end to all arbitrary detentions, including by releasing all pre-trial detainees being held for minor, non-violent offences and ensuring prompt and fair proceedings for others.

Some pre-trial detainees have been held in prisons for years without facing a court. Some are being held for offences as trivial as the theft of a chicken. The President's declaration indicates that his government has taken note of the severity of the current crisis in Madagascar's prisons, characterised by grossly excessive pre-trial detention, including for minor offences, and inhumane living conditions, including overcrowding.

Some prisons hold nearly ten times the capacity they were built for; as a consequence, detainees often need to sleep on the floor, and share unhygienic and cramped spaces.

Amnesty International has been warning that the unjustified and excessive use of pre-trial detention is keeping thousands of people in life-threatening prison conditions. The organisation's [research](#) revealed the huge number of men, women and children held in detention for minor, non-violent

offences, which do not justify imprisonment or prolonged detention without trial.

President Rajoelina must instruct the relevant authorities to immediately ensure that all those detained over minor, non-violent offences are immediately released. All other arbitrary and prolonged detentions must end immediately, through release or by judicial review of detentions. Where necessary, there must be prompt trials which meet international standards of fairness.

### **Background**

President Rajoelina announced his decision to pardon detainees held on suspicion of having committed minor, non-violent offences, in order to decongest the country's overcrowded prisons during his visit to Fianarantsoa on 27 September. During this visit, he inaugurated the building of a new prison in Volamena, and explained that the new prison is a pilot project, which will respect international norms and include a clinic, areas where prisoners can meet their families, a kitchen, and a training centre.