

From Mission and Social Justice Division:

Heartland Presbytery respectfully overtures the 223rd General Assembly (2018):

Acknowledges the sovereignty of God in all spheres of human endeavor,

1. Direct the Stated Clerk, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and the Moderator(s) of the 223rd General Assembly (2018) to call upon the President of the United States and relevant Executive and Congressional leaders to promote democracy, good governance, human rights and sustainable development in Madagascar by:
 - a. providing technical and financial support to public agencies and civil society organizations, including faith-based organizations, working in an impartial manner to promote voter education; inclusive and participatory democracy; free, fair, transparent and credible elections; and strong and responsive public institutions;
 - b. promoting consistent respect for fundamental civil and political rights, including the rights of free expression and free association;
 - c. encouraging state and civil society actors in Madagascar working to deal with corrupt practices so that the Malagasy people are not robbed of the benefits of natural resource development and foreign assistance;
 - d. offering increased financial and technical support to international agencies that are working to halt illegal trafficking of natural resources, animals and animal products;
 - e. reviewing and strengthening US laws and international covenants designed to promote transparency in extractive industries and to prevent the payment of bribes or other corrupt transfers to political and business officials;
 - f. urging the Malagasy government to take prompt and effective steps to prevent human trafficking and to prohibit the recruitment of personnel for labor contracts likely to expose workers to coercion or other violations of their human rights;
 - g. expanding US federal development assistance programs designed to increase the capacity of the Malagasy government and other providers to deliver quality fundamental services including health, education and impartial justice and security for all Madagascar's people;
 - h. financing research and analysis aimed at deepening understanding of the root causes of climate change and assisting governments to minimize the impact of climate change on their citizens and the environment;
 - i. supporting consistent application of international law and fulfilling US financial commitments to the peacemaking and sustainable development efforts of the United Nations; and
 - j. encouraging the Malagasy government and people to avert cyclical political crises and uphold the dignity of all of Madagascar's people by implementing national reconciliation processes consistent with the principles of repentance (*fibebahana*), confession (*fiaiken-keloka*), justice (*fahamarinana*), and forgiveness/reconciliation/harmony (*fihavanana*) articulated by the Malagasy Christian Council of Churches (FFKM).
2. Direct the PC(USA)'s Office of Public Witness and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations to:
 - a. monitor social and political developments in Madagascar and assist the Stated Clerk and other denominational leaders to identify opportune moments at which to express effectively the concerns of the General Assembly set out in item 1;

- b. advise Presbyterians on ways to advocate on behalf of democracy and on behalf of our sisters and brothers in Madagascar.
3. Urge PC(USA) congregations and individual Presbyterians to:
 - a. pray for and with the people of Madagascar;
 - b. learn about the history of Madagascar and the FJKM, the current realities faced by the people of Madagascar, and the mission work of the PC(USA) in Madagascar;
 - c. support the ministry and witness of the FJKM and of PC(USA) mission co-workers in Madagascar; and
 - d. engage in advocacy with their respective legislators to support democracy, protection of human rights, adherence to the rule of law, good governance, ethical business practices and good stewardship of natural resources.
 4. Direct the Stated Clerk to
 - a. share this action with our partners in the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM);
 - b. express our thanks to God for the FJKM's holistic ministry and prophetic witness and for the opportunity to walk beside them as partners, and
 - c. inform them of our unceasing prayers for them and for their country.

RATIONALE

In March 2009, a military coup d'état deposed Madagascar's democratically elected president, Marc Ravalomanana, and installed a self-styled "high authority of transition," (HAT) headed by Andry Rajoelina, the former mayor of the capital city, Antananarivo. The coup government shuttered the Parliament, "packed" the High Constitutional Court, and stifled free expression, closing a number of radio stations, including Radio Fahazavana, operated by the PC(USA)'s partner, the five million member Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM). HAT presided over rapid social and economic decline, exacerbated by the withdrawal of foreign assistance by many nations. In a country where more than 90% of the population was already subsisting on less than \$2 per day, many households struggled to make ends meet.

African organizations, such as the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), quickly condemned the coup and called on Madagascar's political leaders to restore democracy. The SADC brokered multilateral talks involving supporters of Rajoelina and Ravalomanana, as well as two previous presidents, Didier Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy. After two initial accords collapsed almost as soon as they were signed, nearly all of the parties signed a "Roadmap for Ending the Crisis in Madagascar" in September 2011. The roadmap identified a series of steps to be taken in preparation for new national elections and the restoration of democracy.

Meanwhile, the Malagasy Christian Council of Churches (FFKM)—composed of the FJKM, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church and the Anglican Church—initiated its own national reconciliation process. The process was based on "the four Fs," four Malagasy words beginning with the letter "F", that summed up essential stages of genuine and durable reconciliation: *fibebahana* (repentance), *fiaiken-keloka* (confession), *fahamarinana* (justice), and *fihavanana* (forgiveness/ reconciliation/harmony). The FFKM held that all of these elements were necessary to begin to repair Madagascar's social fabric at a grassroots level and reduce the risk of future outbreaks of the cyclical political conflict that has prompted several political crises since the island regained independence from France in 1960. In particular, our partners in the FJKM stress that strengthening *fihavanana*, which might also be translated as "kinship," is vital to achieving reconciliation and building a shared future.

Although the roadmap was never fully implemented, the FFKM reconciliation process was ultimately overtaken by the pressure to hold presidential and parliamentary elections, which eventually occurred in late 2013. International observers accepted the outcome of the elections, despite numerous flaws, and Hery Rajaonarimampianana became Madagascar's new president in January 2014.

However, while the new government enjoys more legitimacy than the HAT government did, it is unfortunately beset by many of the same problems. In particular, corruption is rife and public officials have made little progress in curtailing illegal trade in Madagascar's unique precious woods, gemstones and exotic animals. There are frequent reports of summary executions and other violations of human rights by state security forces, particularly in the south of the country where they often occur in the context of ostensible efforts to curb cattle rustling by bandits known as "*dahalo*". In fact, insecurity and corruption are often closely linked as insecurity creates opportunities for corruption and corrupt officials have little interest in promoting social stability and security. Additionally, labor trafficking remains a persistent problem as people—especially women—desperate for income to support their families are recruited for domestic work in the Middle East and other places that turns out to be little more than slavery.

Madagascar is due to hold fresh national elections before the end of 2018. The elections will be critical to the future and well-being of the country's 24 million people. Elections that are seen to be free, fair, transparent and credible can help to entrench and consolidate democratic institutions and build public confidence in and ownership of democratic government. Conversely, a process that is muddied by the exclusion of certain candidates, an electoral commission perceived to be partial, widespread corruption and vote-buying, or other irregularities during the campaigning or polling will undermine the legitimacy of the outcome and invite poor governance.

In 2010, the 219th General Assembly adopted a Commissioners' Resolution calling for the restoration of Democracy in Madagascar and Honduras, both of which had experienced unconstitutional changes of regime in the previous months. The rationale for that Resolution included the following passage, which is equally relevant to this overture:

In 2008, the General Assembly approved a resolution focused on the U.S. political process, "Lift Every Voice: Democracy, Voting Rights, and Electoral Reform" (*Minutes*, 2008, Part I, pp. 977ff). Among the biblical, theological, and ethical foundations affirmed are the convictions that "power is held in trust for the common good" (*Ibid*, p. 984) and that power can also magnify sin. Hence, "we affirm that fundamental basis for checks and balances of power, and the awareness of our ultimate accountability to God and not to other human beings and groups (Peter: 'we must obey God rather than men'). Alongside the awareness of human fallibility is the strength that God gives us: "God alone is lord of the conscience and has set it free from the doctrines or rules of men (human doctrines or rules), or anything contrary to scripture" (*Ibid*).