



Madagascar :

Let's support Ms. BERTHINE ELIGNESOA, A LAND RIGHTS DEFENDER IN THE BAS-MANGOKY REGION, She has been imprisoned since May and received a harsh sentence from the Morombe Court on July 7.

Ms. Berthine Elignesoa, Vice-President of the association *Fikambanana Volirano Tsy Miambany Firaïankina* (FiVoTMF), was arrested by the gendarmes on May 9, 2026, and brought before the public prosecutor on May 12. Her trial took place on June 2, 2026. She was charged with "contempt of a magistrate," and her request for provisional release was denied. On Tuesday, July 7, the Court of First Instance of Morombe handed down a verdict of "18 months of firm imprisonment and a fine of 200,000 ariary," based on the following findings:

- not guilty of defamation,
- guilty of making conditional threats and bringing a judicial decision into disrepute.

What is scandalous is the complete lack of any reference to the peasants' struggle to defend their land—not to mention the near-systematic arrest and imprisonment of those who dare to defend their rights, often on various pretexts.

Ms. Berthine Elignesoa had been targeted by local authorities for months because she led protests and spoke out repeatedly in reports broadcast on national television channels. Among other things, she faced threats of arrest—and imprisonment for over ten years. After the Regional Head and the Prefect once again refused to meet with community representatives—who had traveled to Toliara yet again in April and waited in vain for several days to be received—the peasant representatives asked to appear on the regional television station. During the broadcast, the communities explained their problems related to land and complained that the authorities were not listening to them. While talking about unjust court rulings, Ms. Berthine inadvertently named specific members of the court. Several days after the broadcast, on May 9, 2026, gendarmes arrested Ms. Berthine at her home at 4 a.m.

During the day of the investigation, the gendarmes stated that the complainant is a farmer who frequently harasses Ms. Berthine and ravages her land and rice paddies— just as they were ready for harvest. However, by the end of the day, the gendarmes declared that the charge is "contempt of a magistrate" and that the complainant is the President of the Court (1).

Context: In 2022, the Collectif TANY issued an alert regarding thousands of farmers losing their land rights in the Bas-Mangoky area of the Atsimo-Andrefana region (Southwest) - an area where approximately 8,000 hectares had undergone hydro-agricultural development funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB). Specifically, a Land Allocation Committee (CAT) established under the project agreement between the State and the AfDB allocated land to individuals with no legitimate claim to it, to the detriment of the intended, legally and legitimately entitled beneficiaries.

Communities determined to defend their land protested and organized demonstrations. They were subjected to various threats, and some farmers were arrested. Since 2022, the total number of people arrested and imprisoned - some of whom have since been released - exceeds 100, including Mr. Tsiaro and Ms. Solange in February 2026. (2)

The development project involving the Land Allocation Committee (CAT) concerns 8,000 hectares of land—, according to a local authority—, and involved over 4,000 occupying farmers as of 2014. **Why does this project—funded by a loan that generations of Malagasy people will have to repay—include a clause regarding the allocation of smallholders' land to wealthy Malagasy individuals?** An extension of this project, also located in the Morombe district and funded by the African Development Bank, is currently getting underway. **Which entity championing social justice and farmers' rights will be able to verify and ensure that this new project does not once again entail stripping farmers of their land—, now that we are under a "Refoundation" regime?**

It is essential that all procedures regarding land tenure within the framework of this project be handled with the utmost transparency, respecting the land rights of local communities and ensuring the effective participation of the populations concerned.

8 July 2026

Signatories :

Collectif pour la défense des terres malgaches – TANY

CONCRET-S

Solidarité des Intervenants sur le Foncier – SIF

References :

(1) <https://terresmalgaches.info/collectif-tany-fanambarana-bas-mangoky/>

(2) <https://terresmalgaches.info/collectif-tany-bas-mangoky-arrestations-paysans/>