



## CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AND DEFENCE POLICY

### **BRIEFING NOTE**

### **FOR INFORMATION**

**SUBJECT:** Illegal Sapphire Mining in Madagascar

---

The illegal sapphire mining industry in Madagascar has been a major issue for the country, contributing to a number of different security issues that are of concern to public and private interests. The continual growth of the illegal industry is often attributed to a lack of sapphire mining regulation, inadequate enforcement mechanism, and institutional corruption. Extractive companies need to be aware of the illegal sapphire trade and its effects, especially in regions of Madagascar that potentially have deposits of the precious mineral.<sup>1</sup>

Sapphire mining in Madagascar accounts for an estimated 50% of the world's supply, with sapphire deposits located in all regions of the island. The government has instituted reforms which seek to enforce and curb the informal trade by designating sapphire rich areas as conservation zones. This technique was originally implemented in Northern Madagascar, and has been adopted in other regions with the migration of informal sapphire miners, however has faced issues in terms of enforcement. There have been increasing reports of illegal sapphire miners moving into these protected areas, with government security forces having trouble effectively responding or deterring these incursions. The size of Malagasy public security forces makes it difficult to police the growing number of conservation zones, especially considering that their primary mandate is centered on community policing.

The largest threat that the illegal sapphire industry poses to Malagasy security comes in the form of the large migrations of informal miners from region to region, largely dependent on the discovery of sapphire deposits. These migrations can pose a variety of security issues, including increased tension in local communities, construction of large informal settlements, and environmental degradation from unforeseen population traffic. A large influx of migrant workers into a Malagasy community increases policing, housing, and infrastructure requirements for the community, which are often unattainable given the lack of available resources. These migrant workers often prefer not to invest into the infrastructure of these communities, and will rely on informal settlements to meet their basic needs while in the area. The migrant nature of these populations and their settlements can have negative environmental consequences for the community in the short and long term, including improper filtration of wastewater, contamination of land, deforestation, and the endangering of local species.

Corruption plays an important role in allowing for the sustainability of the illegal sapphire industry, both in the public and private sphere. Local governments, law enforcement, and private businesses are willing to turn a blind eye to the practice for personal benefit. There have been instances of local governments and public security forces using tactics of intimidation, extortion, and assault to profit from the illegal industry, especially in areas that have weak government

control. Institutionalized corruption severely hampers efforts to regulate the sapphire industry, with interested parties reluctant to change the status quo of the industry for fear of a loss of personal profit. Corruption can have a negative effect on other extractive industries, with the corrupt practices of the sapphire trade setting a precedent for other industries.

For more information please contact;

*David Walsh-Pickering*

Researcher | Centre for International and Defence Policy (CIDP)

Queen's University

138 Union Street, Kingston, Ontario, Canada K7L 3N6

Tel: (514) 980-0999

Email: [d.walsh-pickering@queensu.ca](mailto:d.walsh-pickering@queensu.ca)

Website: [www.queensu.ca/cidp](http://www.queensu.ca/cidp)

---

<sup>i</sup> Laura Tilghman, Merrill Baker and Sally Dickinson DeLeon. "Artisanal Sapphire Mining in Madagascar: Environmental and Social Impacts." *University of Vermont* (November 2007).  
[http://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/gemecology/assets/Tilghman\\_et\\_al\\_Madagascar\\_2005.pdf](http://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/gemecology/assets/Tilghman_et_al_Madagascar_2005.pdf)