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Madagascar. Fernand Cello, Investigative radio reporter arrested

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) condemns combative radio journalist Fernand Cello's arrest on seven outrageous charges, requests his immediate release and calls on the Madagascan authorities to stop persecuting him.

Fernand Cello, whose real name is Avimana Fernand was arrested on the evening of 6 May as he left a private clinic in the capital, Antananarivo, where he had been receiving treatment during the previous few days. The individuals who carried out the arrest identified themselves as gendarmes.

An investigative reporter for Radio Jupiter, a radio station based in the northern city Ilakaka, Cello is well-known for having exposed the existence of an illegal sapphire mine in Ilakaka and had only recently emerged from four months in hiding. The charges brought against him include "*defamation*", "*spreading false news*", "*inciting hatred*" and "*endangering state security*". It is not known to what specific alleged actions by Cello they refer.

An additional charge of "*stealing chequebooks*" has been filed against him by Maherlla, a privately-owned power company based in Ilakaka that was accused by Cello in August 2016 of cheating its clients.□

« We condemn the use of such methods by the Madagascan authorities, who would rather harass an investigative journalist than confront the conflicts of interest and corruption that are eating away at the nation, RSF said. The long list of accusations brought against Fernand Cello shows that their aim to put a stop to his investigative reporting altogether because he has been hitting the target. We call for his release and the withdrawal of all the charges ».

Cello went into hiding in December 2016 after getting death threats and after the army raided Radio Jupiter and confiscated its transmitter. Shortly before the raid, [Cello had – in broadcasts and in posts on social networks – accused Gondwana, a mining company owned by government allies, of operating an illegal sapphire mine](#)

[Radio Jupiter was previously silenced in August 2016 when the local power company Maherlla turned off its power supplier](#) after Cello accused it on the air of colluding with Ilakaka's mayor to cheat consumers.

On 21 April, the ministry of mining finally ordered Gondwana to suspend operations for contravening the mining code. It was this decision that persuaded Cello to come out of hiding.

Madagascar is ranked 57th out of 180 countries in RSF's 2017 World Press Freedom Index.

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Press release10.05.2017