

For Immediate Release

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Madagascar's Minister of Energy announces the end of Madagascar's ban on rough gemstone exports.

“The gemstone rough export ban has been lifted” stated the interim Minister of Mines Jean Rodolphe Ramanantsoa on July 17, 2009. The gemstone ban was decreed by former president Marc Ravalomana in February 2008 and caused serious disruption of the country's gem industry. The Mines Minister said that the export ban caused a loss of earnings of over 39 million dollars in 2008 and 2009.

Gem mining activity in Madagascar has ground to a near halt as most international buyers have found alternative sources for their product. The export ban led foreign owned gemstone mining companies to suspend their operations. The artisanal mining sector was also hard hit. This has placed severe hardship on the hundred thousand or more Malagasy who earn some part of their income from gemstone mining and mining related efforts.

A reason for the ban had been stated by authorities as the desire of the former government to have foreign gemstone buyers and dealers open their cutting factories in Madagascar. Unfortunately the global economic slowdown and the political turmoil in Madagascar have kept investors at a distance and no new workshops have opened since the suspension.

Since 2004 the Institut de Gemmologie de Madagascar (IGM) had been training gemstone cutters and gemologists but found its funding frozen in reaction to the coup d'état of March 2009. Beginning in 2008 Artminers, The Institute for Sustainable Mining has been operating a scholarship program financed by the Tiffany and Company Foundation to educate gemstone cutters. Over four hundred lapidaries have been trained on modern cutting machines to a very high level of competence. The IGM has recently opened the Madagascar Gem Market which is held monthly in Antananarivo. When the international buyers return to Madagascar they will find well trained lapidaries looking for work and well cut gems looking for buyers in addition to the wealth of rough gemstones Madagascar is famous for producing.