

UK diamond supplier asked for 'bribes' by Madagascan president's aide in police sting operation

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By [Martin Coyle](#) and Abishek Kumar

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Romy Andrianarisoa, 47, is accused of a single charge of bribery under the UK's Bribery Act. She faces allegations, which she denies, that she helped to approach UK mining company Gemfields and offered to help them obtain mining rights in Madagascar in return for kickbacks of 250,000 Swiss francs.

She is accused of working with Philippe Tabuteau, a French national, to ask the company for bribes. Andrianarisoa worked as chief of staff for Madagascar's president Andry Rajoelina.

Gemfields reported the request to the UK's National Crime Agency, which set up a sting in London last year that saw undercover officers record both Andrianarisoa and Tabuteau allegedly requesting substantial bribes from the company, said prosecutors today. Tabuteau is not on trial.

— London meeting —

Alex Leach, prosecuting the case on behalf of the NCA, said that Andrianarisoa made several attempts to meet with Gemfields executives on various dates in 2021 and 2022 in Dubai, Madagascar and London but scheduling issues prevented the meetings from taking place.

Tabuteau finally met Gemfields executives in London in March 2023. Algy Strutt, a senior director at the company, initially found Tabuteau to be knowledgeable and enthusiastic, but Strutt soon became suspicious of his intentions.

Tabuteau said he wasn't formally employed by Madagascar's government, but worked in a private capacity as he didn't want to be labelled as a politically exposed person, or PEP, said Leach.

"Algy Strutt understood that a PEP was a person who would attract a higher degree of scrutiny, because they are more likely to being the target of bribery and corruption," said Leach.

Tabuteau later asked for 250,000 Swiss francs to help Gemfields gain access to the country's president. He also asked for a success fee amounting to five percent of the proposed mining venture. Gemfields later worked out that this fee could amount to three million pounds.

Sean Gilbertson, Gemfields' chief executive, approached the NCA after hearing the proposal, suspecting the company was being bribed. At a meeting later set up in London's Sofitel Hotel in St James, an NCA investigator called Charles, met with both Tabuteau and Andrianarisoa. Charles told the pair that he was a consultant brought in by the company to help with the negotiations. He was, in fact, investigating the bribery allegations.

Covert recordings from the meeting were played to the jury today.

At that London meeting Gilbertson told the pair that he couldn't be directly involved in making a payment to meet the president of a country. He said that Charles had been brought in to ensure he had "total deniability."

"Philippe Tabuteau and Romy Andrianarisoa intended to negotiate payments designed to line their own pockets, in return for assisting Gemfields to obtain access to the precious gems market in Madagascar," Leach said.

Tabuteau told Charles at the meeting that Andrianarisoa had the "ear" of the president, but even if there was a change of

regime on the island he could still help Gemfields get mining access

“Both of them clearly understood that Sean Gilbertson couldn’t remain to participate in that process, and that he had brought in an intermediary to allow him deniability, because the payments that were being negotiated for Philippe Tabuteau and Romy Andrianarisoa were bribes and thereby, criminal in nature,” he added.

Gemfields told the duo that they could make the payments in precious stones instead of cash. Tabuteau said he would accept the diamonds if he was paid in a meeting in Geneva. Andrianarisoa told Charles that the president wasn’t aware of the fees being asked for.

The trial, at London’s Southwark Crown Court, continues.

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