

## Madagascan presidential aide was never promised payment in gems, she tells London court

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By [Abhishek Kumar](#)

An aide to Madagascar's president told a UK court today that at no point in talks with mining company Gemfields did she agree to accept personal payments in gemstones. Romy Andrianarisoa is on trial over allegations that she offered to help the British company obtain mining rights in Madagascar in return for cash and commission payments.

An aide to Madagascar's president told a UK court today that at no point in talks with mining company Gemfields did she agree to accept personal payments in gemstones.

Romy Andrianarisoa said she rejected a proposal from the British emerald and ruby miner to make payments in precious stones instead of money as she believed it would not be channeled into the social investment of Madagascar.

Andrianarisoa, 47, is on trial over allegations that she offered to help Gemfields obtain mining rights in Madagascar in return for 250,000 Swiss francs (around \$290,000) in bribes, plus a 5 percent cut of any future mining deal.

She was charged under the UK's Bribery Act following a National Crime Agency prosecution over claims that an investigator last year covertly recorded her and Philippe Tabuteau, a French national, asking for kickbacks. The pair are alleged to have been promised payments in gems and were supposed to pick them up at the hotel. She denies the charge, while Tabuteau is not on trial.

At Southwark Crown Court in London today, Andrianarisoa said Tabuteau had done the job of negotiating the contract and that she was unaware of any agreement for payments through precious stones.

She rejected allegations that she demanded an initial payment of \$125,000 for helping set up a meeting between Gemfields and the Madagascan president.

"There is no reason for any member of the government to be paid for organizing a meeting with the president," Andrianarisoa said.

She also denied using her influence over the signing of the contract between the British miner and the government of Madagascar. "I have the role and responsibility to advise the president, but I cannot influence him," she said.

Andrianarisoa described Tabuteau's role in the project, saying he was engaged as a consultant mainly to gather the expertise needed to build the project, draw up the project timeline and negotiate the amount of social investment that Gemfields would bring to Madagascar.

Gemfields was not selected as a priority project by the president's office, she said, and so it was not a core focus for her and her team. It was in this context that she felt the need to hire a consultant for the Gemfields project, she said.

"My team was working full capacity on priority projects. None of them could devote any time for 'non-important projects' and we therefore needed to hire a consultant," she said. "However, that is not the only reason why I took Philippe Tabuteau. He was in Madagascar, available and helping in other projects of the president's office and, critically, I trusted him."

The trial continues.

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**Industries:** Mining & Extraction

**Geographies:** Europe, Northern Europe, United Kingdom