

I didn't seek Gemfields payment, Madagascan presidential aide tells UK court

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An aide to Madagascar's president rejected allegations that she had asked for payments for herself at any stage of discussions or negotiations with British mining company Gemfields in a London court today. Romy Andrianarisoa said she believed most of the revenues from the mining contract between it and the Madagascan government would go to the country's people.

An aide to Madagascar's president rejected allegations that she had asked for payments for herself at any stage of discussions or negotiations with British mining company Gemfields in a London court today.

Romy Andrianarisoa said she believed Gemfields was one of the best companies for ethical and sustainable mining in Madagascar and that most of the revenues from a mining contract between it and the Madagascan government would go to the country's people.

Andrianarisoa, 47, is alleged to have approached Gemfields, a miner of precious stones, and offered to help it 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 undercover investigator covertly recorded her and Philippe Tabuteau, a French national, asking for kickbacks at a London restaurant last June. She denies the charge, while Tabuteau is not on trial.

"The payment negotiated between Mr Tabuteau and Gemfields would come as revenues and taxes according to the contract and would benefit the people of Madagascar," Andrianarisoa said. She also said Tabuteau was supposed to receive payment in accordance with the services he would provide.

She said she still holds Gemfields in high esteem for its vision for sustainable mining and good work in African countries close by Madagascar. "I allowed them to invest in the country not only because of their sustainable way of doing things in Africa but also because they put African people at the heart of the work they do," she said.

Both the Madagascan government and Gemfields were committed to maintaining sustainability at the heart of the contract, Andrianarisoa said.

She said she had learned about Gemfields for the first time in September 2021 at a meeting in London, where it was presented as a UK company involved in gemstone mining in Africa. Reporting four to six weeks later to Madagascar's president, Andry Rajoelina, she said she highlighted the company's sustainability vision and will to invest in the country.

"The president was very enthusiastic about the project. His reaction was enthusiastic to move forward with the project," Andrianarisoa said.

The trial continues.

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Areas of Interest: Financial Crime

Industries: Mining & Extraction

Geographies: Europe, Northern Europe, United Kingdom