

STEELWORKERS HUMANITY FUND UPDATE

JUNE 2024



FOLLOWING THE ILMENITE TRAIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF RIGHTS IN MADAGASCAR

Visiting the QMM mine, known mainly for its ilmenite ore.

Since 2019 the Steelworkers Humanity Fund (SHF) has been supporting a project aimed at strengthening union capacity and building solidarity with union partners representing employees at the QMM mine, which is owned by the multinational Rio Tinto. It is mostly ilmenite that is mined on the site, and this ore travels a very long distance by boat before ending up at Rio Tinto's processing plants in Sorel, Quebec. Although raw materials circulate freely around the world, workers all across the chain don't usually have the opportunity to communicate with one another to learn about their respective realities.

One purpose of this project is to bridge this distance by fostering collaboration and communication between Malagasy and Quebec unionists who share a common employer. This is the context in which an SHF delegation recently visited Fort-Dauphin, located on the southern tip of the island of Madagascar, for the first time in five years. The USW Education Coordinator in Quebec, Maude Raïche, and Sorel Local 7493 President, Patrick Sarrazin, were able to take part in this trip, which allowed them to immerse themselves in a community that has been completely shaped by the company's activities.

Just like many remote communities in Canada with local economies that are largely dependent on a single employer, Fort-Dauphin and the surrounding area feel the mining giant's footprint very strongly. Madagascar is ranked as one of the world's poorest countries; despite the inflow of substantial royalties from Rio Tinto, however, many locals complain that they have yet to see any benefits.

At the union level, the SHF's local partners are valiantly defending the rights of their members, in a context where the company mainly uses subcontractors instead of hiring permanent employees. This is one of the key points of the USW's advocacy efforts with the company and is the context in which Patrick and Maude co-facilitated a training session on conflict management. Thanks to this sharing of experiences, the group was able to address the need for knowledge and to defend its rights and the important role that union and political action plays in improving the working and living conditions of union members and the community.

Training attendees in front of one of Madagascar's emblematic travellers' palms.



Just as we are separated from our Malagasy brothers and sisters by an immense distance, the reality in which they operate is also very far from our own. To quote Maude: "Here we unionize to gain respect and obtain justice. In Madagascar, however, I would say that people unionize to make sure they have enough to eat and keep a roof over their heads. And if they do manage to unionize, to put in place whatever it takes to make

it through the working day unhindered." A new phase of operations in Fort-Dauphin will soon be getting under way, and the importance of our union solidarity remains unwavering. We are determined to continue supporting our fellow workers in their struggles – and thus raise the bar for all workers across the Rio Tinto supply chain.

To learn more about the
Steelworkers Humanity Fund

[USW.CA/SHF](https://www.usw.ca/shf)

Maude Raïche and Patrick Sarrazin co-facilitated a training session on conflict management for local union activists.



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