

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVISTS ARRESTED FOR ORGANISING PROTESTS

Seven activists were arrested between 15 and 17 March in Niamey, Niger, after organizing a protest on 15 March. They were charged with organising an unauthorized gathering and complicity in damaging public property, arson, and manslaughter. Moussa Tchangari, Halidou Mounkaila, Habibou Soumaila, Moundi Moussa and Maikoul Zodi have been detained since 19 March. Karim Tanko and Seyni Djibo were released on bail on 19 March.

TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER

President of the Republic of Niger

*M. Issoufou Mahamadou
Palais Présidentiel, Boulevard de la République
Niamey, Niger
Email: pneniger@gmail.com*

Dear Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern that seven activists and journalists have been charged with complicity in damaging public property, arson and manslaughter, following a protest that they organised and in Niamey, Niger, on 15 March demanding an investigation into the misuse of funds by the Ministry of Defence.

Moussa Tchangari, secretary general of Alternative Espace Citoyens (AEC), Maikoul Zodi, National Coordinator of Tournons la Page (TLP), Halidou Mounkaila of the teachers' union (SYNACEB), Habibou Soumaila, regional TLP Communications and Information Secretary, and Moundi Moussa, a journalist, trade unionist and member of TLP, have been detained since 19 March in separate prisons in Niger. Karim Tanko, Financial Secretary of TLP, and Seyni Djibo, member of TLP, were released on bail but still face charges.

At least three individuals died when the demonstration was broken up by security forces using tear gas. Several shops were set on fire near Tagabati market. Amnesty International believes that the charges against the activists related to complicity in damaging public property, arson and manslaughter have been fabricated to undermine their peaceful struggle for accountability. According to many sources, the fire and the deaths were caused by the firing of tear gas canisters by security forces onto a roof of the market.

I am deeply concerned that Moussa Tchangari, Maikoul Zodi, Halidou Mounkaila, Habibou Soumaila and Moundi Moussa are detained in separate prisons, some of which are located more than 100 km from their relatives and lawyers and in areas classified as "state of emergency areas" due to terrorism.

In light of the above, I urge you to ensure that:

- They have prompt, regular and unrestricted access to their family and a lawyer of their choice; If contact visits are restricted due to COVID-19 prevention measures, they must be replaced with other means of contact, for example, by phone, emails or video calls;*
- If exceptional measures are put in place in Niger's prisons to deal with COVID-19 prevention, they must comply with the strict principles of necessity, proportionality and legality;*
- Put an end to harassment against members of civil society;*
- Carry out an independent and impartial investigation into the deaths during the demonstration on 15 March to bring the perpetrators to justice, with due regard for the right to a fair trial.*

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On Friday 13 March, authorities in Niger published a statement from the Council of Ministers concerning measures being taken to combat the spread of COVID-19, including a ban on all gatherings likely to attract more than 1,000 people. A demonstration was already planned to take place on 15 March in Niamey and other cities by civil society organisation to demand an investigation into the misuse of funds revealed by an audit of the Ministry of Defence. Despite the ban, the organisers went ahead with the demonstrations.

Early in the morning of 15 March, security forces blocked all the roads leading to the planned venue for the protest, the 'Place de la Concertation' in Niamey. At least three individuals died when the demonstration was violently broken up by security forces using tear gas. Significant damage was recorded as several shops were set on fire near the Tagabati market. Civil society leaders were subsequently arrested.

Karim Tanko, financial secretary of Tournons la Page (TLP Niger), Moussa Tchangari, secretary-general of Alternative Espace Citoyen and Halidou Mounkaila of the teachers' union (SYNACEB) were arrested separately on 15 March.

On Monday March 16, Maikoul Zodi, national coordinator of Tournons la Page (TLP), Moundi Moussa, a journalist, trade unionist and member of TLP were also arrested.

Habibou Soumaila, the communications and information secretary of the regional branch of TLP Niger in Niamey was arrested on 17 March.

Moussa Tchangari, Halidou Mounkaila, Moundi Moussa, Maikoul Zodi and Habibou Soumaila were charged with organising an unauthorized gathering and complicity in damaging public property, arson, and manslaughter. Two other civil society members, Karim Tanko and Seyni Djibo, were charged with participating an unauthorized gathering

Sani Chekaraou, president of the Niamey wholesalers' association was also arrested on 16 March and charged with assault of market officials. He is detained in Niamey.

On 20 March, they were transferred in separate prisons: Moussa Tchangari is detained in Tillabery prison (100 km from Niamey), Halidou Moukaila in Camp Penal of Dey Keyna (111 km from Niamey) , Moudi Moussa in Kollo Prison (35 km from Niamey), Maikoul Zodi in Ouallam Prison (100 km from Niamey), Habibou Soumaila in Filingue Prison (160 km from Niamey) .

On 19 March, Niger reported its first case of the COVID-19 infection in the country. On 20 March, the ministry of Justice declared in a press release that as a prevention measure, detainees are not allowed visits for three months.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: FRENCH

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [6 MAY 2020]

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: Moussa Tchangari, Halidou Mounkaila, Habibou Soumaila, Moundi Moussa, Maikoul Zodi, Karim Tanko, and Seyni Djibo (He/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: N/A

ADDITIONAL TARGETS

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