

# JOINT PRESS RELEASE

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## **Niger. Successive postponements of three activists' trial increase pressure on civil society**

- **After more than 150 days in detention Maikoul Zodi, Ibrahim Diori and Karim Tanko finally on trial in Niamey on Monday**
- **The proceedings against them must be immediately dropped**
- **Repression of those who criticize austerity measures must end**

The Nigerien authorities must try or release three activists who have spent almost six months in detention, 12 human rights organizations said on the eve of their trial.

The trial for “organizing and participating in a banned demonstration” and for “causing damage to public property” of Maikoul Zodi, Ibrahim Diori and Karim Tanko begins on Monday 1 October in the capital Niamey. It has been postponed twice due to public holidays in the country and the absence of one of the civil party lawyer.

“These successive postponements of the trial have increased the pressure on these activists who should never have spent a day in prison, but have ended up spending almost six months behind bars on spurious grounds,” said Samira Daoud, Amnesty International's Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa.

“Their long-awaited trial, which is due to begin this Monday, must bring an end to the prosecution proceedings and lead to their immediate release. No other pretext must be used to keep them in detention for even one day more.”

This is the third trial against human rights defenders in Niger in less than a year. All the trials are linked to the mobilization over the last ten months against the 2018 Finance Law. Maikoul Zodi, Ibrahim Diori and Karim Tanko were arrested and charged for planning to organize a demonstration against that law on 15 April 2018.

With the 2019 Finance Law currently being reviewed by parliamentarians, the signatory organizations consider that there is a risk that any further anti-austerity protests will also be suppressed by the authorities. As in 2018, the 2019 budget proposed by the government contains austerity measures and new taxes on small business owners and low-income households.

“The Nigerien authorities must acknowledge that the austerity measures included in the Act are excessive and will seriously undermine the rights of the population,” said Ali Idrissa, National Coordinator of the Network of Organizations for Transparency and Budget Analysis (ROTAB) and Publish What You Pay (PWYP) Niger.

“Repressing those who criticize austerity measures is not the solution. If authorities want to fulfil their human rights obligations, they must abstain from any repressive conduct and take measures to enable every citizen to enjoy his human rights.”

Maikoul Zodi is the coordinator for Niger of the *Tournons la Page* group, Ibrahim Diori is a member of the association *Alternative Espaces Citoyens* (AEC) and Karim Tanko a member of *Union des Jeunes pour la Protection de la Démocratie et les Droits de l’Homme* (UJPDDH).

Diori is being held at Kolo remand centre (East of the country), Maikoul Zodi at Say prison (South West) and Karim Tonko in Niamey, the capital.

The repression of human rights defenders’ activities has reached worrying proportions in Niger this year, particularly in connection with the protests against the new fiscal measures.

In the city of Zinder, 500 miles east of Niamey, two activists are still awaiting their trial. Sadat Illiya Dan Malam, Regional Coordinator of *Mouvement Patriotique pour une Citoyenneté Responsable*, was arrested on 18 April of this year. He has been charged with “participation in an insurrectional movement” and “conspiracy against state security”. Yahaya Badamassi, Regional Coordinator of *Alternative Espaces Citoyens*, was arrested on 25 April. He was initially charged with “organizing and participating in a banned demonstration” and with “causing damage to public property” then, in June, the additional charges of “participation in an insurrectional movement” and “conspiracy against state security” were brought against him.

On 6 May 2018, Yahaya Badamassi and Sadat Illiya Dan Malam were transferred to Magaria and Matameye prisons, which are 50 and 40 miles respectively from Zinder. On 28 August, the charges against Yahaya Badamassi were dropped, but the Prosecutor appealed the decision. He remains in detention.

“Arrests and detentions further undermine human rights in Niger. The authorities must end the prosecution proceedings and unconditionally release anyone who

has been arrested for simply exercising their right to freedom of peaceful assembly,” said Laurent Duarte, International Coordinator of *Tournons la Page*.

### **SIGNATORIES**

1. *Action by Christians Against Torture (ACAT France)*
2. *Agir pour Être Niger*
3. *Alternative Espaces Citoyens (AEC)*
4. *Amnesty International*
5. *Association de Défense des Droits des Consommateurs des Technologies de l'Information, de la Communication et de l'Energie (ACTICE)*
6. *International Federation for Human Rights (IFHR)*
7. *Front Line Defenders*
8. *Réseau des Organisations pour la Transparence et l'Analyse Budgétaire (ROTAB)*
9. *Survie*
10. *Tournons la Page*
11. *Association des Blogueurs pour une Citoyenneté Active (Niger)*
12. *Publish What You Pay*