

URGENT ACTION

ACTIVIST SENTENCED TO ONE YEAR, OTHERS RELEASED

Three activists, Moussa Tchangari, Ali Idrissa and Nouhou Arzika were released on 24 July after being handed a three-month suspended sentence. A fourth activist, Lirwana Abdourahmane, was sentenced to one year in prison for “contempt of court by speaking” on 23 July and remains imprisoned. The four human rights defenders were among a group of people arrested and detained on 25 March by security forces in Niamey, Niger in connection with a peaceful protest.

Activists **Ali Idrissa**, Coordinator of Publish What You Pay, and Coordinator of the Niamey civil society organisation ROTAB, **Moussa Tchangari**, Secretary General of Alternative Espaces Citoyens (Alternative Citizens' space) and **Nouhou Arzika**, President of the Mouvement Pour la Promotion de la Citoyenneté (Movement for the Promotion of Responsible Citizenship) were each given a three-month suspended sentence after being found guilty of “illegal assembly” on 24 July. Having spent more than four months in prison, they were released the same day.

Lawyer and human rights defender **Lirwana Abdourahmane** was also given a three-month suspended sentence. However, the day before that sentence, he was in court for a different case brought against him on 12 July after a complaint by the chief investigating judge for “contempt of court by speaking”. He was sentenced to one year in prison and give a one year suspended sentence on that count. He remains in prison serving his sentence.

The four human rights defenders were among a group of people arrested and detained on 25 March by security forces in Niamey, Niger. Lirwana Abdourahmane was arrested while leaving the “Labari” TV station where he had been invited as a guest to discuss a protest organised by civil society organisations. Ali Idrissa, Nouhou Arzika and Moussa Tchangari, through their organisations, planned and organised the protest to demand the repeal of the 2018 Finance Law. None of them attended in the peaceful protest, but were charged with ‘organisation and participation in a prohibited demonstration’, ‘complicity in violence’, ‘assault’ and ‘destruction’.

Please write immediately in French or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to review Lirwana Abdourahmane's conviction for contempt of court, making sure it is in line with international law and standards and does not violate his right to freedom of expression;
- Refrain from using the charge of ‘contempt of court’ to silence and prevent human rights defenders and activists from exercising their human rights;
- Urging them to guarantee that activists and human rights defenders in Niger are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and unlawful restrictions.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 SEPTEMBER 2018 TO:

President of the Republic of Niger

M. Issoufou Mahamadou
Palais Présidentiel
Boulevard de la République,
Niamey, Niger
Fax: + 227 20 73 34 30
Email: pneniger@gmail.com
Salutation: Your Excellency

Minister of Justice, Human Rights and

Attorney General
M. Marou Amadou
Boulevard du Djerma BP 466
Niamey, Niger
Fax: +227 20 72 37 77
Salutation: Your Excellency

And copies to:

Minister of State for the Interior Public
Security, Decentralization, and
Customary and Religious Affairs
M. Mohamed Bazoum
893 Niamey, Niger
Fax: +227 20 72 21 76
Salutation: Your Excellency

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 30/18. Further information:

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr43/8193/2018/en/>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Since the 2018 Finance Bill, which provides for new taxes on housing, power and other items, was tabled in Parliament in November 2017, civil society organizations have campaigned for it to be repealed for what they denounce as its “anti-social” character. Protests have been organized since November 2017.

The Bill was adopted into Law in January 2018. Civil society organisations have continued to protest against the 2018 Finance Law and calling for it to be amended arguing that it would drastically increase the cost of living and violate the right to an adequate standard of living for many already living in poverty. Five peaceful demonstrations have been organized since November 2017 and the sixth demonstration was banned. A public gathering in support of the Law in March 2018 was not banned.

In March, civil society organisations held a peaceful march organized to protest against the finance law, despite the ban against it. The police lobbed tear gas to break up the protest. Twenty three people were arrested in connection with the protest, some at the offices of civil society organizations and others during the protests.

On 25 March, security forces sought a copy of the recording of the news broadcast during which Lirwana Abdourahamane was interviewed on Labari TV. The television station’s management refused to comply with this demand. Amnesty International watched the recording to confirm that he had neither called for nor advocated in favour of hatred or violence. The station was later shut down for four days by security forces who stormed it without providing a written notice from the High Council for Communication or a search warrant from the police.

The hearing in the case against Moussa Tchangari, Ali Idrissa, Nouhou Arzika and Lirwana Abdourahamane took place on 10 July. During the hearing, Lirwana Abdourahamane declared publicly that, “the chief investigating judge has accepted a pledge of 40 million CFA (71,430 USD) from the authorities to keep in prison the activists of the Civil Society”. While admitting to having made these remarks, Lirwana Abdourahamane explained that it was the atmosphere that prevailed last Tuesday in the courtroom that pushed him to make these affirmations, before apologizing to the chief investigating judge and the families of magistrates and lawyers of the court.

In addition to the human rights defenders who appeared before the court on 10 July, five other civil society members Ibrahim Diori, Sadat Illiya Dan Malam, Yahaya Badamassi, Maikoul Zodi and Karim Tanko are still awaiting their trial after more than four months in detention. They were arrested in April.

Name: Moussa Tchangari, Ali Idrissa, Nouhou Arzika and Lirwana Abdourahamane
Gender male

Further information on UA: 30/18 Index: AFR 43/8856/2018 Issue Date: 2 August 2018