

URGENT ACTION

JOURNALIST REQUIRES MEDICAL ATTENTION

Journalist Mamane Kaka Touda has been detained in Niamey Civil Prison, Niger, since 5 March, after publishing a post on social media regarding a suspected case of COVID-19 in the Emergency Department of the Niamey Reference Hospital. He is charged with “disseminating data tending to disturb public order”. He is being denied access to visits and requires medical care. His trial was scheduled for 23 March, but all public hearings have been postponed until 25 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
Fax: + 227 20 73 34 30
Salutation: Your Excellency*

Dear Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern about the detention of journalist Mamane Kaka Touda in Niamey Civil Prison since his arrest on 5 March.

Since 9 March, prison guards have refused to take the food delivered by Mamane Kaka Touda’s family and give it to him because they do not have a communication permit. His aunt, with whom he has lived in Niamey for more than 25 years, is not considered to be a close relative and is therefore not allowed to visit him. Mamane Kaka Touda’s immediate family live in N’Guigmi, in the Diffa region, 1,493km from Niamey where he is detained.

Despite the statement of the penitentiary administration of Niamey, published on 11 March, denying allegations of visit restrictions for Mamane Kaka Touda, Moussa Tchangari and Ibrahim Diori, members of NGO Alternative Espaces Citoyens, were not allowed to visit him on 10 and 11 March respectively.

Mamane Kaka Touda needs medical assistance. He is detained in a small cell, in which his movement is severely restricted. Pain in his foot is preventing him from sleeping. He has also been experiencing dizziness due to the harsh conditions of his detention.

Mamane Kaka Touda is being arbitrarily detained solely for exercising his right to freedom of expression. In light of the above, I urge you to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release Mamane Kaka Touda and drop all charges against him. This is especially urgent as Niger is dealing with its first case of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, which could further expose detainees to health risks;*
- Ensure that, pending his release, Mamane Kaka Touda’s conditions of detention are in line with international standards, including access to water, food and regular access to his family. If contact visits are restricted due to COVID-19 prevention measures, they must be replaced with other means of contacting his family, by phone, video call or emails, for example;*
- Provide Mamane Kaka Touda with any appropriate medical care he might need.*

Yours sincerely,

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mamane Kaka Touda, journalist and human rights defender, and member of the NGO "Alternative Espaces Citoyens", is detained in the Civil Prison of Niamey, the capital of Niger.

He published posts on social media alerting on a suspected case of COVID-19 infection on 5 March. In a statement released the same day, the hospital said there were no cases of COVID-19 in its departments. A spokesperson for the Ministry of Health subsequently confirmed the suspected case mentioned by Mamane Kaka Touda, explaining that an Italian national had indeed been admitted there "as a precaution" before leaving the hospital, the tests being negative.

On 19 March, Niger reported its first case of the COVID-19 infection in the country. On 20 March, Nigerien authorities suspended all visits to detainees for three months. All judicial hearings are temporarily suspended until 25 March. This includes Mamane Kaka Touda's trial scheduled initially for 23 March.

Following a car accident last year, Mamane Kaka Touda has been experiencing pain in his leg. As his movement is restricted in a small cell, his foot hurts very much and prevents him from sleeping.

Friends, colleagues, and other family members, except from close relatives (mother, father, siblings and spouses) are excluded from the right to visit according to the Law No. 2017-008 determining the fundamental principles of the prison regime in Niger. The law explicitly enshrines the right of close relatives. As such, the public prosecutor says that only those identified as close relatives can be entitled to the communication permit.

Beyond Mamane Kaka Touda, several other individuals have been arrested over the past weeks. On 14 March, the editor-in chief and a journalist from Labari Television were summoned by the police after they interviewed veterinary doctor Zoulkarneyni Maiga about COVID-19. The doctor was also summoned and released on the evening of 16 March. Amnesty International was able to obtain the video of the interview in which Dr. Maiga only talked about the origin of the virus and explained the stages in its development, while asking the public to apply preventive measures.

At least 15 people, including six civil society leaders, were arrested between 15 and 17 March for having participated in an unauthorized demonstration on 15 March, organized to denounce allegations of corruption linked to the purchase of military equipment. The demonstration was organized in a context where the authorities had, to prevent the spread of COVID-19, taken measures to ban gatherings, particularly those of a political, sporting and cultural nature likely to bring together at least 1,000 people. At least three individuals died during the dispersal of the protest by tear gas.

PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET: [French]

You can also write in your own language.

PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL: [5 May 2020]

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

NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN: [Mamane Kaka Touda] (he/his)

LINK TO PREVIOUS UA: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr43/1976/2020/en/>