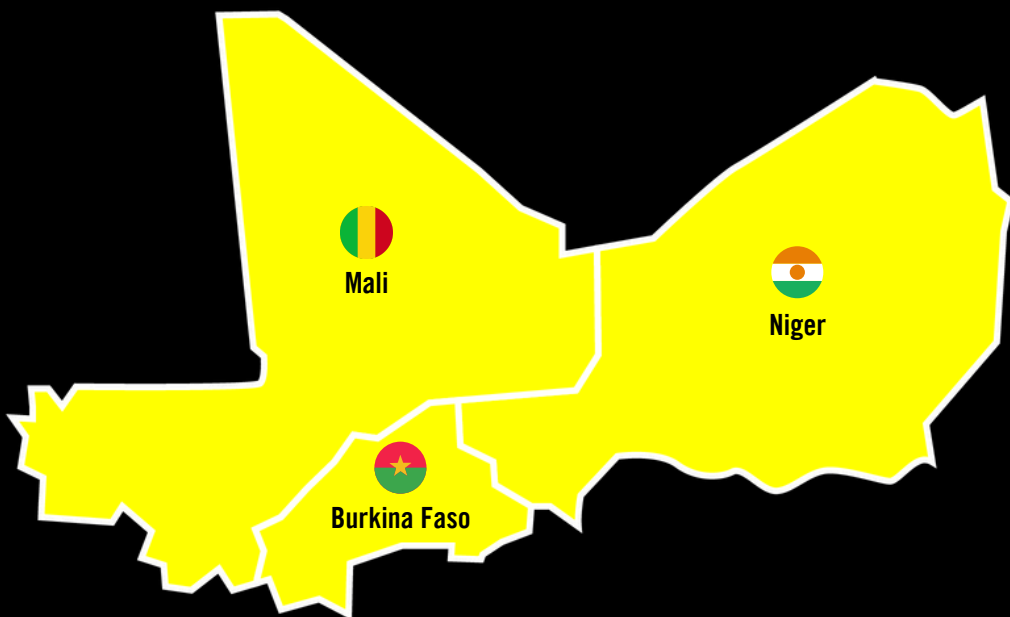


**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



SILENCE AND REPRESSION: THE NEW FACE OF THE SAHEL



**When the “fight against terror” and
the anti-imperialism become pretexts
for repressing freedoms in the Sahel.**

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*Cover photo: Map of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES).
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INTRODUCTION

In several Sahel countries, rights and freedoms, long taken for granted, are being repressed, all in an enforced silence.

Under the guise of “fighting against terror”, the military authorities of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are restricting freedoms of expression, association, information, and the right to a fair trial, even going so far as to strip citizens of their nationality.

Journalists, activists, human rights defenders, influencers, and citizens are being arrested, threatened, or disappeared simply for speaking, tweeting, or staying in a foreign country.

Their only “crime”: having exercised their rights to freedom of expression, association and information.

The cases presented in this booklet represent only a small fraction of a larger reality: the civic space is closing and entire societies are reduced to silence.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN
TO DEFEND FREEDOMS IN THE
SAHEL**



**SIGN THE PETITION IN SUPPORT
OF ACTIVISTS AND JOURNALISTS
IN THE SAHEL**





© Life in the village of Labien in Burkina Faso in 2018. Photo taken by Sophie Garcia

The Sahel, a region of hope under threat

The Sahel is a region of immense contrasts: a land of hope, youth and resilience, but also the scene of recurring political and security crises.

Millions of people live there courageously, creating, innovating and building supportive communities despite the difficulties.

Today, however, this hope is threatened.

The governments emerging from recent coups in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger claim to be acting for stability and national sovereignty. But in reality, they have restricted civil liberties and criminalized free speech.

Under the pretext of “fighting against terror”, they stifle all critical voices and impose fear as a mode of governance.



A climate of fear and silence

The military regimes have turned the “fight against terror” and the anti-imperialism into an alibi for repression.

Independent media are being shut down, journalists are being censored, and civil society organisations are being dissolved.

The accusation of "apology of terrorism" or "undermining national defence" is now also a weapon against those who dare to speak out.

This climate of intimidation has transformed the public space: debates disappear, criticism leads to prison and self-censorship becomes a survival reflex.

For many, expressing an opinion is no longer just a right – it's a risk.

Moussa Tchangari – Niger



Detained for his public opinions, he risks the death penalty

Moussa Tchangari is the secretary general of the organisation Alternatives Espaces Citoyens (AEC), a figure in Nigerien civil society and a long-time human rights defender.

On 3 December 2024, after returning from a trip, he was arrested by armed men in civilian clothes and hooded.

His arbitrary detention comes amid widespread repression targeting the political opposition, the media and all forms of peaceful dissent orchestrated by the Nigerien authorities since they took power.

A few weeks earlier, Moussa Tchangari had publicly criticised the Interior Minister's decision to withdraw the accreditations of two humanitarian NGOs and to include several organisations on the national list of persons and entities involved in terrorism (FPGE). This listing automatically results in the freezing of assets, travel restrictions, and, in some cases, the loss of nationality, all without prior conviction.

On 3 January 2025, he was placed in pre-trial detention in Filingué, 170 km from Niamey, without having been heard by a judge. The Nigerien authorities accused him of: "criminal association in connection with a terrorist enterprise", "undermining national defence" and "conspiracy against the authority of the State in cooperation with enemy powers".

If convicted of conspiracy with enemy powers, Moussa Tchangari faces the death penalty.

Rokiatou Doumbia – Mali



Convicted for talking about the cost of living

Known as Tantie Rose, Rokiatou Doumbia is a Malian influencer followed by thousands of young people on TikTok.

Through her videos, she denounces the high cost of living and growing insecurity.

On 13 March 2023, she was arrested for posting a video criticising the economic and social situation since the army took power.

Sentenced to one year in prison for "inciting revolt" and "discrediting the State", she remains in detention, although she has served her sentence.

Her story bears witness to the price one has to pay in Mali for expressing oneself freely.

Idrissa Barry – Burkina Faso



Disappeared for denouncing human rights violations

Journalist and national secretary of the political movement Servir et Non se Servir (SENS), Idrissa Barry has regularly denounced human rights violations committed by the armed forces and local militias.

On 18 March 2025, a few days after the publication of a press release by SENS denouncing “deadly attacks” against civilians near Solenzo, Idrissa Barry was arrested in Saaba by individuals presenting themselves as gendarmes.

Taken away in a vehicle without plates, he disappeared without a trace.

Since then, no authority has acknowledged his detention.

His enforced disappearance is part of a deliberate strategy of intimidation and fear, aimed at silencing journalists and activists critical of the regime.

Clément Dembélé – Mali



Anti-corruption activist arbitrarily detained

President of the Platform Against Corruption and Unemployment (PCC), Clément Dembélé is an emblematic figure in the fight for good governance in Mali.

On 17 November 2023, while preparing a press conference on the power outages, he was arrested and accused of threatening the transitional president in an audio message.

However, an expert opinion showed that the voice on the recording did not belong to him.

In April 2025, a judge dismissed the case, but Dembélé remains detained at the Bamako Central Prison.

His case illustrates how justice is used to silence critical voices.

A spreading repression

40+

cases of journalists, activists, human rights defenders, influencers and citizens arrested, threatened or forcibly disappeared simply for daring to speak out.

These arrests, disappearances and arbitrary detentions are not isolated incidents: they reflect a regional trend towards the criminalisation of free speech.

The “fight against terror” and “anti-imperialism” have become a convenient pretext for repressing human rights defenders and stifling legitimate criticism.

This instrumentalization of security has a cost:

- Civil societies are weakening.
- Fear replaces dialogue.
- Institutions lose their legitimacy.

In this climate of impunity, the voice of civil society must be heard and respected, not repressed. Human rights violations must stop.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

We call on the authorities of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to:

- End arbitrary arrests and harassment of human rights defenders and journalists;
- Immediately release Moussa Tchangari, Clément Dembélé and Rokiatou Doumbia;
- Reveal Idrissa Barry's whereabouts, guarantee his safety and rights, and release him.
- Ensure respect for freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly throughout the region.

You can :

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- Join our campaign by signing the petition

SCAN TO ACT NOW



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