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Niger: Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Moussa Kaka

Amnesty International calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the Niger journalist, Moussa Kaka, who the organisation considers to be a prisoner of conscience, detained solely because of his activities as a journalist.

Moussa Kaka, director of privately-owned Radio Saraouniya station and Niger correspondent of Radio France Internationale (RFI), was arrested on 20 September 2007 and held in police custody for 72 hours before being transferred to the Niamey civilian prison, without being brought before a judge, as required by the law and without the prosecutor notifying him of the reason for his imprisonment.

On 25 September 2007, he was finally brought before a judge, who charged him with "*involvement in a plot against the state's authority*" because of his alleged links with the Tuareg armed opposition group, the *Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice* (MNJ), Niger People's Movement for Justice, created in February 2007. The maximum sentence for such a charge is life imprisonment.

According to reports received by Amnesty International, the authorities are critical of Moussa Kaka because of his telephone contacts with MNJ members.

"Amnesty International believes that contacting and allowing all parties to the conflict to speak is a normal part of the work of an independent journalist and can, in no circumstances, constitute in itself an offence", Erwin Van Der Borgh, Director of the Amnesty International Africa Program said today.

Moussa Kaka has for some time been the victim of harassment and threats by the Niger authorities for carrying out his work as a journalist in an independent manner. On 14 July 2007, he was publicly threatened with death by the chief of staff of the Niger Armed Forces (FAN), Moumouni Boureima.

Other Niger and international press organs have been the target for attacks on the freedom of expression. At the beginning of July 2007, the bimonthly Aïr-Info was suspended for three months and, on 19 July 2007, the transmission of Radio France internationale (RFI) broadcasts was forbidden. In addition, on 31 August 2007, *the Conseil supérieur de la communication (CSC) du Niger*, Superior Communication Council of Niger, banned live radio debates on the situation in the Agadez region.

"Amnesty International is concerned that the arrest and charging of Moussa Kaka is just the last occurrence in this series of attacks on the freedom of the press and that it shows a willingness to muzzle the freedom of expression", Erwin Van Der Borgh said today.

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