

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Niger: Extrajudicial executions and population displacement in the north of the country**

Amnesty International is alarmed at the increasing number of extrajudicial executions of civilians by the army in the Agadez region and is asking the Niger authorities to put an immediate stop to them.

Over the past four weeks, at least thirteen civilians have been unlawfully killed by the Niger security forces in the north of the country. Some, if not all, of them were apparently killed by the army in reprisal for attacks carried out by the Tuareg armed opposition group, the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice (MNJ), Niger Movement for Justice, which took up arms against the government in February 2007.

Amnesty International has received reports indicating that the armed forces were directly responsible for these extrajudicial executions. According to the reports, on 22 November 2007, four people, Bachir Mouhamad and Mariko Kané, both gardeners, and Oukhoudane Algha and Hamad Ibrahim, both cattle farmers, were arrested by gendarmes in Tchintébizguint (30 km west of Agadez) after a mine exploded. Whereas the gendarmes wanted to interrogate the suspects, members of the armed forces seized the four and their bodies were found five days later in a common grave. According to witnesses who saw the bodies, they showed signs of bullet wounds to the heart, forehead and ear.

On 9 December 2007, seven other people, including two Arab tradesmen -- Ibrahim Sidi Amar and Osmane Sidi Rali -- a cook, a mechanic and two drivers, all either Tuareg or Hausa, who were travelling back to Agadez by car were arrested on the road by the Niger security forces.

A close relative of one of the dead told Amnesty International: "We were waiting for our relatives in Agadez when we saw their vehicles arrive driven by soldiers. We asked them where our relatives were. They refused to answer and then, as we insisted, they agreed to drive us to the place where the seven were buried."

The people who identified the bodies said that they saw numerous signs of cigarette burns and whipping on the victims' bodies, as well as many bullet wounds to the face and chest. The relatives of some of the victims have asked the Niger authorities for an explanation and were promised that light would be shed on the killings.

"Amnesty International is calling on the Niger authorities to open investigations into these unlawful killings, to bring those responsible to justice, and to provide reparations to the relatives of the victims. The authorities should also make it clear to the security forces that such unlawful killings and other human rights violations will not be tolerated and that those responsible will have to answer for their actions before the courts," said Erwin van der Borgh, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

The organization is also calling on the Niger authorities and the MNJ to publicly commit to respect Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions at all times and to take concrete measures to ensure the protection of civilians in conflict zones. In addition, Amnesty International is calling on the Niger authorities to respect human rights standards.

These extrajudicial executions, as well as fear of fighting between the Niger Army and members of the MNJ, have led to the displacement of both the settled and nomadic population. For example, the entire population fled the village of Iférouane (350 km north of Agadez) and sought refuge in Agadez and Arlit (200 km north of Agadez).

"Some of these displaced people will have been taken in by their families or the local population. However, they will find it hard to find provisions at a difficult time when basic food prices have gone up considerably. If

this state of affairs goes on for long, the displaced will find themselves in an increasingly precarious situation”, said Erwin van der Borcht.