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## **Niger: Executions and forced disappearances follow army reprisals**

Amnesty International is very concerned at the new wave of extrajudicial executions committed by the Niger army in the Agadez region, which for more than a year has been shaken by a rebellion led by an armed opposition group, the Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice (MNJ), Niger People's Movement for Justice.

"We launch an urgent appeal to the Niger authorities to immediately order the security forces to stop extrajudicial executions and forced disappearances of civilians in the north of the country. The government should investigate the events, bring those responsible for these actions to justice and pay reparations to the families of the victims", Véronique Aubert, Deputy Director of the Africa Program said today.

At least eight civilians were arbitrarily executed between 22 and 25 March 2008 after clashes between the MNJ and the Niger army. A number of soldiers were killed in the clashes and several army vehicles were blown up by antipersonnel mines. After sustaining these casualties and material damage, the army launched reprisals against the population, executing and arresting civilians and destroying property.

Amnesty International has learned that on one occasion, on 26 March 2008, on the Dabaga-El Meki Road, the army forced a civilian to drive in front of a military convoy to protect it against mines. However, a military vehicle drove over a mine and was damaged. The soldiers accused the civilian driver and his two passengers of leading them into a trap and beat them. The convoy carried on along the road and a little later, the civilian vehicle was blown up by a mine. The soldiers then gave treatment to the injured and took them to a health centre.

Hada Baregha, a herder aged 67, was returning from his fields with his donkeys, on 25 March 2008, when he was killed extrajudicially by the military, in the town of Dabaga, in the Agadez region.

Another civilian was tortured before being killed. A tradesman, Aboubakar Attoulèle, with the surname of Kouzaba, was arrested by the military on 26 March 2008. According to information received by Amnesty International, this man had his ears cut off and his head and hair set on fire before being stabbed.

Another civilian was severely beaten up before being killed. Mohamed El Moctar, a gardener aged 66, was arrested at his camp, in Tabouhait, on 24 March. The soldiers struck him with the butts of their guns before killing him. At least three other people were shot dead, including two on 22 March 2008, in the village of Tamazalak.

"Although the security forces have the right to respond with legitimate and proportionate force to armed attacks, they may not carry out indiscriminate attacks against defenceless populations", Véronique Aubert, Deputy Director of the Africa Program said today.

In addition, these extrajudicial executions violate article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which says that: “Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life”. Human beings cannot be deprived of this right in any circumstances, even in the state of emergency currently in force in the Agadez region.

Amnesty International has also learned of several cases of forced disappearances and arrests. Four people, including Al Wali, village chief of Tourayat, were abducted by soldiers on 30 March. Their families have so far been unable to obtain any news about their whereabouts.

Soldiers also attacked property, burning houses and camps, for example, in Dabaga and Tamazalak. The inhabitants of these two villages sought shelter in Agadez. Other villagers escaped into the mountains in order to avoid the main roads, where soldiers might question them.

Amnesty International has also learned that the military has threatened the elected representatives of the Dabaga region for allegedly communicating information about atrocities committed by the army.

The organisation is also concerned about the use of mines in this conflict, which has opposed the Niger security forces and armed elements of the MNJ since February 2007. Each side says the other is responsible for laying these mines, which have already claimed many civilian and military victims. Amnesty International calls on both parties to the conflict to immediately stop the use of antipersonnel mines, which are a constant danger to all those in the area, including civilians, who risk the loss of life and limb by stepping on them.