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Niger: Three more human rights defenders arrested on false charges

On 15 April 2018, human rights defenders **Maikoul Zodi**, **Abdourahamane Idé Hassane** and **Ibrahim Diiori** were arrested by police in Niamey, Niger, on charges of participating in a protest in which they did not take part.

[Maikoul Zodi](#) is the National Coordinator of the Niger section of *Tournons La Page* (Let's turn the page), an international coalition of NGOs campaigning for democratic change in Africa. He is also a member of *Réseau des organisations pour la transparence et l'analyse budgétaire* (Network of Organisations for Budgetary Transparency and Analysis – ROTAB), which advocates for the eradication of corruption in Niger. [Abdourahamane Idé Hassane](#) is the president of *Jeunesse pour une Nouvelle Mentalité* (Youth for a New Mentality – JENOME) which is a pro-democracy youth-led civil society group. [Ibrahim Diiori](#) is a member of *Alternative Espace Citoyens* (Alternative Citizens' Space - AEC), a non-governmental organisation which, for many years, has been dedicated to promoting social, economic and cultural rights, particularly through the use of radio broadcasts.

On 15 April 2018, three human rights defenders were arrested by police in Niamey. Although they did not participate in a public protest that had taken place that day, all three were charged with “participation in a prohibited demonstration and damaging public property”. Maikoul Zodi was stopped and arrested while driving with his wife, Ibrahim Diiori was arrested at his home, and Abdourahamane Idé Hassane was summoned to the judicial police of Niamey where he was then arrested.

The protest on 15 April 2018 demanded the repeal of the 2018 Finance Law which civil society organisations argue will drastically increase the cost of living and violate the right to an adequate standard of living for many already living in poverty. The protest had been prohibited by the President of the Special Delegation of the City of Niamey on the basis of the incapacity of the authorities to ensure the security of property and persons in the context of such a protest. It was violently repressed by police who used measures including tear gas to disperse the protesters.

Front Line Defenders is deeply concerned by the government of Niger's targeting of human rights defenders who speak out against corruption and who subsequently frequently face trumped-up charges relating to protests. On 25 March 2018, human rights defenders [Ali Idrissa](#), [Moussa Tchangari](#), [Nouhou Arzika](#) and [Lirwana Abdourahmane](#) were arrested by security forces in Niamey in relation to a demonstration organised by civil society to demand the repeal of the 2018 Finance Law. The protest was violently

repressed by security forces. Like the arrest of the three civil society leaders on 15 April, these four human rights defenders had not participated in the protest. They were arrested at different locations and times, and charged with “organising and participating in a prohibited demonstration”, “complicity in an act of violence”, “assault” and “destruction of property” and were indicted on all charges by the Court of First Instance of Niamey. Following the hearing, they were transferred to prisons far from their families. They remain in detention.

On 29 October 2017, a demonstration organised to protest the then proposed Finance Bill was also violently repressed by police who again used tear gas to disperse protesters. On 30 October 2017, [Abass Abdoul Aziz](#), [Abdoulaye Harouna](#) and [Djibo Issa](#) were [arrested](#) by local police officers and charged with “participation in an unauthorised protest”, “armed gathering”, “theft” and “complicity in theft”. The human rights defenders were detained until their release on 24 November 2017 when they were found not guilty by Niamey High Court.

Front Line Defenders expresses serious concern over the arrest and detention of human rights defenders Maikoul Zodi, Abdourahamane Idé Hassane and Ibrahim Diori which it believes is solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defending human rights in Niger. It expresses further concern over the continued detention of Ali Idrissa, Moussa Tchangari, Nouhou Arzika and Lirwana Abdourahmane who are similarly being detained for their legitimate and peaceful work defending human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Niger to:

1. Drop all charges against Maikoul Zodi, Abdourahamane Idé Hassane and Ibrahim Diori as well as Ali Idrissa, Moussa Tchangari, Nouhou Arzika and Lirwana Abdourahmane as Front Line Defenders believes that they are being held solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in the defence of human rights and fighting corruption;
2. Immediately and unconditionally release Maikoul Zodi, Abdourahamane Idé Hassane, Ibrahim Diori along with Ali Idrissa, Moussa Tchangari, Nouhou Arzika and Lirwana Abdourahmane ;
3. Cease targeting all human rights defenders in Niger and guarantee in all circumstances that they are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment.

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