

# **Niger - Civil society statement on the meeting with the President of the Republic**

Tuesday 22 August 2023, by [TCHANGARI Moussa](#) (Date first published: 14 January 2022).

**Yesterday, Thursday 13 January 2022, a delegation of leaders of civil society organisations was received by the President of the Republic, in the Council of Ministers room, in the presence of the Prime Minister, the Minister of National Defence, the Minister Delegate for Decentralisation, the Minister of State for the Presidency, the Minister Director-Cabinet, the Secretary General of the Ministry of the Interior and the President's adviser in charge of civil society. This meeting was initiated by the President of the Republic in order, in his own words, to discuss with civil society players the worrying security situation that has prevailed in our country for several years now.**

During the meeting, which lasted from 5pm to 9pm, the Head of State gave a wide-ranging presentation on the security situation in various regions of the country, including Diffa, Tillabery, Tahoua, Maradi, Agadez and Dosso. This presentation was an opportunity for the Head of State to share with civil society players not only his concerns, but also the efforts made and planned by the government to deal with the situation. In particular, the Head of State announced his intention to reactivate the National Council for Political Dialogue (CNDP) in order to calm the political climate in the country, to fight against the trafficking of arms, drugs and fuel, as well as his availability and openness to any initiative by civil society aimed at providing an appropriate response to the security crisis underway in our country and other countries in the region.

In response to the statement by the President of the Republic, the civil society delegation, while welcoming this initiative for dialogue, drew attention to a number of bitter observations that had been highlighted several times in civil society statements and positions, in particular those published in May 2021 and on 8 January 2022. In particular, the delegation expressed its deep concern about the worsening social, economic and security situation in our country, the failure of the public authorities themselves to respect the fundamental texts of the Republic, and the arbitrary detention of several people for political reasons and opinions, stressing that :

1. The security situation in the country continues to deteriorate, particularly in the regions of Tillabery, Tahoua, Maradi and Diffa, and there is every indication that other regions of the country could in turn be confronted with the phenomenon of armed insecurity;
2. Despite all the measures taken, non-state armed groups continue to perpetrate murderous attacks against civilians and members of the defence and security forces, kidnap and hold civilians for ransom, levy taxes, seize livestock, burn granaries and social infrastructure, in particular schools, rape women and girls, etc;
3. The persistence of armed insecurity has caused hundreds of teachers to flee, as they have been targeted by armed groups, and has led to the closure of at least 579 schools, including 392 in the Tillabery region alone, depriving more than 53,000 pupils of their right to education, who are now left to fend for themselves;
4. In Tillabery, Tahoua, Diffa, Maradi and Dosso, displaced persons, both internally displaced persons and refugees, continue to live in deplorable conditions, surviving largely thanks to the

support of international organisations and humanitarian workers;

5. The persistence of armed insecurity has led to the emergence of self-defence groups in several areas of our country, which are trying to protect villages and communities; and that the emergence of self-defence groups unfortunately poses serious risks to social cohesion;
6. The people of Niger are facing food insecurity throughout the country as a result of a poor agricultural season, and this is likely to take on worrying proportions due in particular to the persistence of armed insecurity and the already unsustainable rise in the price of staple foods;
7. Since 2018, attacks on public freedoms, in particular the freedoms of expression and demonstration, have persisted and tended to become commonplace, in defiance of the guarantees contained in the Constitution and the regional and international legal instruments ratified by the State of Niger;
8. Niger's judicial system continues to send out worrying signals about its ability not only to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of its citizens, but also to fight effectively against corruption and various economic crimes, the most emblematic of which is the so-called MDN affair, in which the government waived the right of the State of Niger to bring a civil action on the basis of fallacious arrangements.

At the end of the discussions, and while remaining vigilant and mobilised for the defence of human rights and the promotion of good governance, the delegation of civil society actors notes with satisfaction and warmly welcomes :

1. The commitment made by the President of the Republic never to worry or imprison civil society actors for their opinions, and no longer to hinder the exercise of individual and collective freedoms, in particular the freedom of demonstration, which he himself says he has enjoyed enough to become a predator;
2. The declared determination of the Head of State to continue, despite the obstacles he himself has raised, the fight against corruption, fraud in competitive examinations and exams, complacent recruitment, trafficking in arms, drugs and fuel, to equip and support the defence and security forces, to maintain channels for discussion and negotiation with certain elements of the insurgent groups, and to work to calm the political climate in the country by reactivating the National Council for Political Dialogue (CNDP);
3. The Head of State's commitment to continue working to ensure that justice is done for those killed and/or injured during the sad events in Tera, where elements of the Barkhane force fired live ammunition at young demonstrators;
4. The clear awareness displayed by the Head of State of all the risks associated with the emergence of self-defence groups and the challenge represented by the respect by public servants of human rights standards and international humanitarian law in a context of armed conflict;
5. The favourable reception by the Head of State of the appeal by civil society inviting the public authorities and all social and political players to create the conditions not only for inclusive national consultation on issues of peace and security in the Sahel region, but also for a way out of the current crisis through dialogue.

Taking all these positive points into account, we will be making proposals over the coming days to give concrete expression to our desire to ease the political and social climate, and to lay the foundations for collective reflection and action aimed at getting our country out of the serious crisis in which it finds itself and which threatens its integrity and sovereignty.

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**Moussa Tchangari**

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Moussa Tchangari

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