



Covering events from January - December 2000

## NIGER

### Republic of the Niger

**Head of state:** Mamadou Tandja

**Head of government:** Hama Amadou  
(replaced Ibrahim Assan Mayaki in January)

**Capital:** Niamey

**Population:** 9.4 million

**Official language:** French

**Death penalty:** abolitionist in practice



**The human rights situation improved with the return of civilian rule after elections in November 1999. However, some journalists were targeted and arrested during 2000 and there were several cases of torture in detention.**

### Background

For the first time since 1996, Niger was ruled throughout 2000 by a civilian head of state, elected at the end of 1999 after fair and transparent elections. The presidential election ended four years of military rule marked by two coups, the second of which led to the killing of President Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara by members of his presidential guard in April 1999. During this period of military rule, the human rights situation had deteriorated.

### Impunity

In March, President Mamadou Tandja declared himself ready to "seek out and establish the truth" concerning the killing of President Baré Maïnassara. In July a coalition of 11 opposition parties, the *Coordination des forces démocratiques* (CFD), Coordination of Democratic Forces, called for the truth behind this killing to be established. The European Union and AI also called for investigations into the killing, but no inquiry was opened by the end of 2000.

### Detention of journalists

Several journalists were detained during 2000.

- In June, Abdoulaye Tchiémogo, publishing director of *Le Canard libéré*, a private weekly, and one of his journalists, Illa Kané, were arrested and held for four days. The newspaper had been highly critical of the military junta which took power in April 1999. The journalists received a two-month

suspended sentence in August for publishing an article which described Prime Minister Hama Amadou as a "pyromaniac and coward". In a second case, the two journalists received a six-month suspended sentence in October for publishing several articles which were deemed defamatory, and which allegedly "sapped the morale of the army".

- In October, three journalists from the private weekly *L'Enquêteur* were charged with "spreading false news" after the publication of an article about a dispute between Niger and Benin concerning the island of Lété. The three were Soumana Maïga, the founder of the weekly; Tahirou Gouro, its managing director; and Salif Dago, a journalist. In November, Soumana Maïga was sentenced to eight months' imprisonment. He was a prisoner of conscience. The two other journalists received six-month suspended sentences.

### **Torture/ill-treatment**

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Torture and ill-treatment of both criminal and political prisoners were reported during 2000.

- In August, three detainees in Diakena prison near the town of Tillabéry in the west of the country were handcuffed and hanged head down from a tree by their feet for more than 10 hours. The three men were suspected of theft. One had to have a leg and an arm amputated as a result. An investigation was opened and three prison warders were arrested.
- In June, several soldiers arrested on suspicion of kidnapping Major Djibrilla Hamidou Hima, spokesman of the former military junta, were tortured and ill-treated. The detainees and their lawyer lodged a complaint but no inquiry into these allegations of torture had been opened by the end of 2000.

### **AI country report**

- Niger: The right to justice (AI Index: [AFR 43/001/2000](#))
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