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Niger: Human rights defenders arrested in relation 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, Niger, in relation to a demonstration organised by civil society to demand the repeal of the 2018 Finance Law.

[Ali Idrissa](#) is the Coordinator of *Réseau des organisations pour la transparence et l'analyse budgétaire* (**Network of Organisations for Budgetary Transparency and Analysis – ROTAB**) and **Publish What You Pay Niger (PWYP)**. He is also a member of the Board of Directors and the Africa Steering Committee of PWYP. He has long campaigned on issues of transparency in the mining sector. [Moussa Tchangari](#) is a journalist and General Secretary 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. [Nouhou Arzika](#), President of *Mouvement patriotique pour une citoyenneté responsable* (**Patriotic Movement for Responsible Citizenship - MPCR**), is a civil society actor in Niger, particularly vocal on consumer rights. [Lirwana Abdourahmane](#) is a member of MPCR and a lawyer.

On 25 March 2018, Ali Idrissa, Moussa Tchangari, Nouhou Arzika and Lirwana Abdourahmane were arrested by security forces in connection with a protest organised to demand the repeal of the 2018 Finance Law, which civil society organisations argue would drastically increase the cost of living and violate the right to an adequate standard of living for many already living in poverty. The human rights defenders were arrested at different times throughout the day although none of them had participated in the march.

In a decree dated 23 March 2018, the President of the Special Delegation of the City of Niamey prohibited the demonstration for “obvious reasons of security ...and with regards to the security context in Niger and in the sub-region, and furthermore, the recent terrorist attacks”. On the morning of the march, security forces based themselves at the meeting points for protestors and prevented many from taking part in the demonstration, they then used tear gas grenades to disperse protesters and arrested 23 people in total. Moreover, the television station run by the press group Labari was closed by the security forces who entered without presenting a warrant or a written notification from the Superior Council of Communication. As of 27 March 2018, security forces were still preventing people from entering the premises.

Although the human rights defenders did not participate in the march, they have been charged with organisation and participation in a prohibited demonstration, complicity in 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 different prisons far away from their families.

On 29 October 2017, a demonstration organised to protest the then Finance Bill was also violently repressed by police, including the use of tear gas. On 30 October 2017, [Abass Abdoul Aziz](#), [Abdoulaye Harouna](#) and [Djibo Issa](#) were **arrested** by local police officers. The human rights defenders were released on 24 November 2017.

Front Line Defenders expresses serious concern over the arrest and detention of human rights defenders Ali Idrissa, Moussa Tchangari, Nouhou Arzika, Lirwana Abdourahmane which it believes is solely as a result of their legitimate and peaceful work in defending human rights in Niger.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Niger to:

1. Drop all charges against Ali Idrissa, Moussa Tchangari, Nouhou Arzika, 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;
2. Immediately release Ali Idrissa, Moussa Tchangari, Nouhou Arzika, Lirwana Abdourahmane pending their trial result;
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.