

# URGENT ACTION

## JOURNALIST ARRESTED OVER DEFAMATION CHARGES

Journalist and President of the Niger bloggers association Samira Sabou was charged with defamation by means of electronic communication on 10 June 2020 and immediately transferred to the prison of Niamey. Sani Mahamadou Issoufou, son of The President of Niger and deputy chief of staff of the Presidency filed a complaint against her after a Facebook user mentioned his name in a comment responding to Samira's publication relating to allegation of corruption. Samira Sabou did not mention his name. The case is politically motivated and is part of the crackdown on human rights defenders, activists and journalists who speak about allegations of high level of corruption after the Ministry of Defence's audit report leaked.

**TAKE ACTION: WRITE AN APPEAL IN YOUR OWN WORDS OR USE THIS MODEL LETTER**

Minister of Justice Mr. Marou Amadou  
Boulevard du Djermaganda BP 466  
Niamey, Niger  
Email: [marou\\_amadou2000@yahoo.fr](mailto:marou_amadou2000@yahoo.fr)  
Fax: +227 20 72 37 77

Dear Minister,

Journalist and administrator of the information site *mides-niger.com*, **Samira Sabou** was summoned on June 9, by the senior investigating judge of Niamey's High Court to appear on a case related to allegations of corruption by public officials. On Wednesday 10 June, when she responded to the summons of the investigating judge, the warrant had no connection with the initial charges against her. She was charged with defamation following a complaint by Sani Mahamadou Issoufou. Sani Mahamadou Issoufou, son of the President of Niger and deputy chief of staff of the Presidency, filed a complaint against her after a user mentioned his name in a comment on Samira's Facebook publication of 26 May, relating to allegations of corruption. Samira Sabou never mentioned his name. The case is politically motivated and is part of the crackdown on human rights defenders, activists and journalists who speak about allegations of high-level corruption after the Ministry of Defence's audit report leaked.

Amnesty International has consistently called for decriminalising defamation and that imprisonment is never an appropriate penalty in defamation matters. We believe that bringing criminal complaints against anti-corruption activists and journalists would criminalize their work, violate their rights to freedom of expression and association and silence public criticism against public officials as well as undermine accountability.

Those in detention in Niger face heightened risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I therefore urge you to act swiftly to uphold and ensure full protection of the rights of everyone including the rights to freedom of expression and association by immediately dropping all charges against Samira Sabou which Amnesty International considers to be motivated by political interest. I urge you to immediately and unconditionally release Samira Sabou from detention as she is detained solely for exercising her human rights. Pending her release, the authorities should ensure that she has regular and unrestricted access to her family and a lawyer of her choice. If contact visits are restricted due to COVID-19 preventive measures, there should be alternative communications facilities, for example, by phone, emails or video calls. Finally, I urge you to end the harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders, anti-corruption activists and journalists and respect, protect and promote their rights to freedom of expression and association.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



*Yours sincerely,*

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Journalist and administrator of the *mides-niger.com* news site, Samira Sabou was fired from her position as a contractual worker for the newspaper, Le Sahel, which is managed by the National Office for Publishing and Press (ONEP, Office National d'Édition et de Presse) in October 2017, after she posted a photo of herself mimicking President Issoufou. Following pressures from the authorities, her phone was taken from her by her editor, and the photo was forcibly deleted from her Facebook. On 17 February 2020, a Tribunal in Niamey considered her firing from ONEP as abusive and ordered her employer to pay her compensation in the sum of FCFA 2.640.000.

The audit of the Niger defence ministry revealed allegations of overcharging of contracts and the embezzlement of billions of CFA francs intended for the purchase of military equipment for soldiers engaged on the various anti-terrorism fronts between 2017 and 2019.

According to a statement from the government spokesperson, the audit found weaknesses in the procurement procedures, as well as in the monitoring of their execution.

Since March 2020, members of civil society have denounced on social media and during demonstrations the facts revealed in the audit report - which leaked - the intrusions of the executive in the judicial proceedings and asked for a legal prosecution for those suspected to be responsible.

Since the beginning of the year, Amnesty International has recorded 27 arrests of activists, unionists, journalists and dissenting voices in Niger, 17 of them are anti-corruption activists who spoke out about allegations of corruption involving the Ministry of Defence.

Seven activists were arrested between 15 and 17 March in Niamey after organizing a demonstration on 15 March to demand an investigation and prosecution of those suspected of embezzlement of funds for the Defence Ministry.

There is also a pattern of harassment and intimidation of activists based on Cybercriminality Law. From March to end of May 2020, at least four activists were arrested and charged on the basis this law.

Ali Idrissa, coordinator of ROTAB (The Organisation for Transparency and Budgetary Analysis) and leader of civil society organisation was summoned to the police station on 9 April following a complaint by the former Army Chief of Staff. He was accused of defamation in connection with the corruption scandal involving the Ministry of Defense. Ali Idrissa was released on bail on 14 April. He was charged with "defamation against the general of the army and the wife of the former Chief of staff", as well as the "dissemination of information likely to disturb public order" based on the Cybercriminality Law.

### **PREFERRED LANGUAGE TO ADDRESS TARGET:** French

You can also write in your own language.

### **PLEASE TAKE ACTION AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL:** 19 August 2020.

Please check with the Amnesty office in your country if you wish to send appeals after the deadline.

### **NAME AND PREFERRED PRONOUN:** Samira Sabou (she/her)