

17 March 2021

Niger: Arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender Ahmed Bello Issoufou

On 10 March, human rights defender **Ahmed Bello Issoufou** was summoned by the judicial police for a matter of concern. The human rights defender presented himself at the Niamey judicial police station and was arrested on the grounds of a defamation complaint filed against him by an officer of the national security forces of Filingue. The defamation complaint referred to a post on the human rights defender's social media page denouncing the release of a teacher in a sexual violence case. The human rights defender is currently detained at the Central Prison of Niamey with access to his lawyer and his family. A trial has been scheduled for 22nd March.

Ahmed Bello Issoufou is a human rights defender and an active member of the *Tournons La Page (Let's Turn the Page)* coalition's Niger branch. His work involves promoting human rights, advocating for civil and political rights and fighting corruption and bad governance in Niger.

On 10 March, human rights defender Ahmed Bello Issoufou received a phone call from the judicial police to present himself to their office for a matter of concern. The human rights defender immediately presented himself to the judicial police. He was subsequently arrested on the grounds of a defamation complaint filed against him by an officer of the national security forces of Filingue, a town in the south west of Niger. He endured several hours of interrogation and has since been held in pre-trial detention.

According to his organisation, Ahmed Bello Issoufou is being arbitrarily detained due to a post on the human rights defender's social media page denouncing the release of a teacher in a sexual violence case. The human rights defender is currently detained at the Central Prison of Niamey with access to his lawyer and his family.

Front Line Defenders is seriously concerned about the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender Ahmed Bello Issoufou, as it strongly believes that this is directly linked to his peaceful and legitimate work in defence of human rights.

Front Line Defenders urges the authorities in Niger to:

1. Immediately and unconditionally release human rights defender Ahmed Bello Issoufou;
2. Strongly condemn the arbitrary arrest and detention of human rights defender Ahmed Bello Issoufou as it is believed to be directly motivated by his peaceful and legitimate human rights work;
3. Ensure that his physical and psychological integrity are respected while in detention in accordance with international standards;
4. Guarantee in all circumstances that all human rights defenders in Niger are able to carry out their legitimate human rights activities without fear of reprisals and free of all restrictions including judicial harassment, threats, intimidations and arrests.

Front Line Defenders respectfully reminds you that the United Nations Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, adopted by consensus by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1998, recognises the legitimacy of the activities of human

rights defenders, their right to freedom of association and to carry out their activities without fear of reprisals. We would particularly draw your attention to Article 12 (1 and 2): *“(1) Everyone has the right, individually and in association with others, to participate in peaceful activities against violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. (2) The State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually and in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, de facto or de jure adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration.”*

Please inform us of any actions that may be taken with regard to the above case.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Anderson
Executive Director