

[Niger: Stop restricting the rights to freedom of expression and assembly](#)

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States should use the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) to call for greater respect and protection for human rights defenders and civil society actors in Niger.

Today ISHR, the [West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network](#) and Collectif des Organisations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie launched a [briefing paper on the situation of human rights defenders in Niger](#). The briefing paper highlights concerns over laws which unreasonably restrict the right to freedom of expression and freedom of association. The briefing paper also documents reports of the use of reprisals against human rights defenders working on corporate accountability and transparency issues.

'Niger's development in its transition to democracy must be implemented on the ground to ensure the protection of human rights defenders, in particular those working on corporate accountability issues' said Abdoulaye Kanni, Collectif des Organisations de Défense des Droits de l'Homme et de la Démocratie.

The briefing paper serves as a submission to the UPR, which will scrutinise the situation of human rights in Niger in January 2016, and is intended to assist States and other stakeholders to formulate questions and recommendations during the UPR.

Following Niger's first UPR in May 2010 Niger has made significant changes in its transition to democracy, including establishing a new Constitution, enacting the 2010 Press Law and holding free and fair elections in 2011. Meanwhile, the grave concerns continue to persist for human rights defenders that represent a disconnect with this development.

At its first UPR in 2010, the government accepted all six recommendations in relation to freedom of expression, including a specific recommendation calling for respect and protection of human rights defenders. Despite these promises, journalists continue to be subject to arbitrary arrest and detention, and instances of police using excessive force, arrest and detention to repress peaceful protests continue.

'While there has been some progress in Niger, the lack of police knowledge of legislation decriminalising defamation has resulted in arbitrary arrest and detention being used to silence journalists' said Melanie Sonhaye Kombate, West Africa Human Rights Defenders Network.

Particularly at risk are human rights defenders working on transparency issues and journalists critical of the government. Women human rights defenders and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual rights defenders also work in a conservative climate.

ISHR urges States to make strong UPR recommendations regarding the protection of human rights defenders

and safeguarding civil society space. These recommendations should include that the Nigerian Government refrain from criminalising the legitimate activities of human rights defenders and develop and enact specific laws and policies that recognise and protect the work of human rights defenders. The government should also guarantee transparency and ensure civil society engagement in connection with the extractive industry.

For further information about the Briefing Paper or the Human Rights Council resolution, please contact ISHR's Tess McEvoy, on t.mcevoy@ishr.ch.

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