



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)  
LEGAL AID BOARD

## **Niger - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 9 July 2009**

### **Information about the Toureg and Zarma tribes in Niger.**

The May 2009 *Amnesty International* report for Niger states:

“The government blocked some humanitarian efforts despite widespread hunger and a growing threat of famine. Civilians suspected of supporting a Tuareg-led armed opposition group were unlawfully killed by security forces. A number of soldiers and civilians were abducted by this group. Several journalists were detained in an attempt to muzzle the press.” (Amnesty International (28 May 2009) - *Amnesty International Report 2009 – Niger*)

The same report, under the heading ‘Background’, states:

“Armed conflict between government forces and a Tuareg-led armed opposition movement, the Niger People's Movement for Justice (Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice, MNJ), based in the Agadez region in the north, continued throughout the year. Despite calls by civil society and political parties to engage in talks with the MNJ, the Nigerien President ruled out any dialogue, describing the MNJ as "bandits" and "drugs dealers". The government renewed several times the state of emergency in the Agadez region which gave additional powers to the security forces.” (ibid)

The April 2009 *United States Department of State* Background Note for Niger under the heading ‘People’, lists the following:

“Ethnic groups: Hausa 53%, Djerma (Zarma) 21%, Fulani 7%, Tuareg 11%, Beri Beri (Kanuri) 6%; Arab, Toubou, and Gourmantche 2%” (United States Department of State (02 April 2009) - *Background Note: Niger*).

The report continues:

“The largest ethnic groups in Niger are the Hausa, who also constitute the major ethnic group in northern Nigeria, and the Djerma-Songhai, who also are found in parts of Mali. Both groups, along with the Gourmantche, are sedentary farmers who live in the arable, southern tier of the country. The remainder of Nigeriens are nomadic or semi-nomadic livestock-raising peoples--Fulani, Tuareg, Kanuri, Arabs, and Toubou. With rapidly growing populations and the consequent competition for meager natural resources, lifestyles of agriculturalists and livestock herders are increasingly threatened” (ibid)

Section 3 of the *United States Department of State 2008 Country Report on Human rights Practices for Niger*, under the heading 'Elections and Political Participation', states:

"All major ethnic groups were represented at all levels of government. There were eight seats in the National Assembly designated for representatives of "special constituencies," specifically ethnic minorities and nomadic populations. President Tandja, reported to be half Fulani and half Kanouri, is the country's first president who is not from either the Hausa or Zarma ethnic groups, which make up 56 percent and 22 percent, respectively, of the population." (United States Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) (25 February 2009) - *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Niger*)

Section 5 of the same report, under the heading 'Children', states:

"Certain ethnic groups practiced FGM, predominantly the Fulani and Zarma in the western region of the country. According to UNICEF, the FGM rate decreased from 5 percent in 1998 to 2.2 percent in 2006. However, an October 17 UN IRIN report stated that circumcisers traveled from Burkina Faso to Niger to carry out FGM on nomad Gourmantche girls as part of a rising trend of cross-border FGM. FGM was practiced on young girls, and clitoridectomy was the most common form. FGM is against the law and punishable by six months to three years in prison. If an FGM victim dies, the practitioner can be sentenced to 10-20 years' imprisonment. The government actively combated FGM, continuing its close collaboration with local NGOs, community leaders, UNICEF, and other donors to distribute educational materials at health centers and participated in educational events." (ibid)

The same section, under the heading 'Trafficking in Persons', states:

"A traditional form of caste-based servitude was still practiced by the Tuareg, Zarma, and Arab ethnic minorities." (ibid)

Section 6c of the same report, under the heading 'Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor', states:

"The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, except for legally convicted prisoners, and prohibits slavery; however, it does not specifically prohibit forced or compulsory labor by children, and such practices occurred. In general, the government did not adequately enforce the antislavery laws. A traditional form of caste-based servitude was still practiced by the Tuareg, Zarma, and Arab ethnic minorities, particularly in remote northern and western regions and along the border with Nigeria." (ibid)

The July 2008 *Freedom House Freedom in the World* report for Niger states:

"Tandja was credited with returning Niger to relative economic and political stability after years of turbulence. In October 2005, the government began implementing an economic assistance program for former Tuareg rebels, the

final phase of a 1995 peace accord that ended fighting between ethnic Tuareg and government forces. The agreement promised increased development assistance in the north, which is mainly Tuareg in population.

In 2007, fighting broke out between the government and the Movement of Nigeriens for Justice (MNJ), a Tuareg rebel group calling for more equitable resource distribution. The authorities refused to negotiate with the rebels. Between February and September 2007, as many as 45 soldiers were killed in confrontations with MNJ forces, 2 civilians died in cross fire, and as many as 80 soldiers were abducted. A Chinese employee of a Chinese-owned mining company was abducted by rebels in July, although he was later released, as were many of the captured soldiers. Tandja in August imposed a state of emergency in Niger's northern region, and it remained in force at year's end.” (Freedom House (02 July 2008) - *Freedom in the World 2008 – Niger*)

The Niger Overview of the July 2008 *Minority Rights Group International World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*, under the heading ‘Peoples’ states:

“Just over 55 per cent of the population is Hausa, settled agriculturists who live in the south. Second to them, comprising a fifth of the population, are Songhai cultivators whose homeland is located west of the Hausa territory. Songhai are a broad constellation of ethnic clans including the Dendi, Djerma, Gube, Kurtey, Sorko and Woga. Dendi who live on the Niger-Benin border are essentially descendants of the Songhai who resisted the Moroccan conquest of central Songhai and Gao. Djerma are found east of the River Niger between Niamey and the Hausa belt, and along the River Niger. They are believed to be descended from Malinké and the Sarakolé and to have migrated southward from Mali before the rise of the Songhai empire and to have adopted Islam in the tenth century. Dosso, their loose confederacy of small clans and village states, developed a feeling of deeper affinity only after wars with the Fulani and pressure from the Tuareg and became powerful in the nineteenth century, especially under colonial rule. The arid north and centre are home to Tuareg camel and goat herders, who speak Tamashek, a language related to Berber (see page on Tuareg). The second-largest traditionally pastoralist group is the Peulh (also known as Fulani, Fula and Toucouleur), nomadic cattle herders who are found all over the West African Sahel from Senegal and Guinea to Cameroon. Today, most are sedentary. In Niger they are dispersed throughout much of the country, with concentrations in the south-central and west. Their ancestors were known as Bororo, who form a subgroup today which is less Islamicised than sedentary Peulh. The origin of the Peulh is uncertain; it has been postulated that they may be of Ethiopian origin. Toubou are inhabitants of Tu, the local name for the Tibesti Mountains that are centred in the Sahara of northern Chad and reach into Libya and north-eastern Niger. They are nomadic, traditionally extracting a levy on all caravans and tribute from sedentary villages. There are at least three distinct castes in Toubou society, and intermarriage is rare. In Niger, Toubou control the salt pans, acting as intermediaries between the Kanuri population of the oases and the Tuareg overlords. Toubou are comprised of Teda (Braouia) and Daza (Gorane). Teda are a branch of the Toubou found mostly in northern

Chad and in small numbers in eastern Niger. They call themselves Tedagada (those who speak Tegada) and are related to Kanuri. In Niger they are found in the Kaouar and Djado areas. There are very small numbers of Daza in north-eastern Niger, around Lake Chad. They call themselves Dazagada. Toubou are Muslim, but Islam was not widely followed until well into the 20th century. Related by language but not livelihood are Kanuri agriculturists of the south-east, near Lake Chad, but many are now urban dwellers. Kanuri are known in Niger by their Hausa name, 'Beri Beri' which Kanuri consider derogatory. With Toubou nomads, some Kanuri continue to exploit remote salt pans and desert oases of Kaouar. Manga, who speak Kanuri and are sometimes regarded as a sub-group of the Kanuri, live east of Zindar in Agadiz department on the Niger-Chad border” (Minority Rights Group International (July 2008) - *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Niger : Overview*)

The July 2008 *Minority Rights Group International* World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples entry for the Tuareg of Niger under the heading 'Profile', states:

“Tuareg pastoralists are indigenous to three African countries: Algeria on the northern side of the Sahara, north-eastern Mali and central and northern Niger. There are negative connotations associated with the term Tuareg, an Arabic word meaning 'the abandoned of God', and they call themselves, Kel Tamashek, the people who speak Tamashek. Tamashek is related to ancient Libyan. The greatest number of Tuareg, around one million, live in Niger, mostly south and west of Air Massif, with smaller populations in Algeria, Mali and Libya.

Tuareg society is highly stratified and consist of several castes; nobles, imajeren 'the proud and free'; imrad, 'free but subordinate'; ineslemen, the religious caste; ikelan, slaves who today live in neo-peonage, tending the palm groves and vegetable gardens of their masters. Inadin are an artisan caste of silversmiths living outside regular Tuareg society, which looks down upon their lifestyle. They wander from Tuareg encampment to encampment also serving as fortune tellers and medics. Additionally, the Tuaregs are split into various tribes: the Kel-Air, Kel-Gress, Iwilli-Minden, and the Immouzourak.” (Minority Rights Group International (July 2008) - *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Niger : Tuareg*)

## References:

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

#### **Sources Consulted:**

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Freedom House  
Human Rights Watch  
International Crisis Group (ICG)  
IRB: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada  
IRIN News  
LexisNexis  
Minority Rights Group International

Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database  
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UNHCR Refworld  
United States Department of State