



Q10466. Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 21 July 2009

Information on the Tuareg Rebel Movement in Niger in 2008/2009 and in particular, any problems in the town of Niamey.

The *Freedom House* 2009 Freedom in the World report for Niger, under the heading 'Overview', states:

"A state of emergency remained in effect in the north during 2008, as fighting between the government and Tuareg rebels continued. Separately, former prime minister Hama Amadou was detained in June on embezzlement charges, which some members of the ruling party claimed were politically motivated." (Freedom in the World (16 July 2009) - *Freedom in the World 2009 – Niger*)

The report goes on to say:

"In February 2007, new fighting broke out between the government and the Movement of Nigeriens for Justice (MNJ), a Tuareg rebel group calling for more equitable resource distribution. Some 45 civilians were killed in the violence during the year. Tandja's government refused to negotiate with the rebels, whom it characterized as bandits and drug traffickers. In August 2007, the government imposed state of emergency in the vast northern Agadez region that was ultimately extended through the end of the 2008. Libyan-led mediation efforts in August 2008 yielded a temporary cessation of hostilities, but clashes resumed in October. Although clashes lessened in frequency by year's end, the state of emergency remained in effect in the north." (ibid)

A July 2009 *Agence France-Presse* news article states:

"NIAMEY, July 6, 2009 (AFP) - Leaders of Niger's main Tuareg rebel Movement of Nigeriens for Justice (MNJ) have arrived in Niamey for peace talks with the government, an interior ministry official said Monday.

The delegation arrived Sunday from Libya and will "have discussions about the possible disarming of their fighters" and barracks for the rebels if a deal is reached, said the official, who asked not to be named.

But MNJ president Agaly Alambo was not part of the delegation.

The MNJ emerged in 2007 in the uranium-rich north of the otherwise deeply poor west African country on the southern edge of the Sahara, part of the Sahel territory that is home to Tuaregs in several countries.

The first meeting between Niger's Tuaregs and President Mamadou Tandja took place on May 3.

Niger's leader, who had long dismissed the rebels as no more than armed bandits, eventually proposed an amnesty for those Tuaregs who laid down their arms. But divisions within the MNJ have created two splinter groups, which may complicate a peace process." (Agence France-Presse (06 July 2009) – *Niger's main Tuareg rebel group set for talks*)

The *US Department of State 2008 Country Report on Human Rights Practices for Niger* states:

"In February 2007 the Tuareg rebel group Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ) launched a series of attacks against military and strategic installations in the north. The frequency and intensity of attacks diminished at the end of 2008, but the government did not lift the state of alert declared in August 2007. While civilian authorities generally maintained effective control of the security forces, there were instances in which elements of the security forces acted independently of government authority." (US Department of State (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor) (25 February 2009) - *2008 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Niger*)

An August 2008 *Reuters* news article states:

"NIAMEY, Aug 19 (Reuters) - Niger's Tuareg rebel leader Aghaly ag Alambo said on Tuesday his fighters would not lay down their arms and a pledge he made in Libya at the weekend was in fact a message from a Malian rebel group.

"President Aghaly ag Alambo never referred to an MNJ release of prisoners, ceasefire or laying down of arms," the Niger Justice Movement said in a statement posted on its website m-n-j.blogspot.com/.

Niger state television broadcast Alambo's comments on Monday, translated from the Tuareg Tamasheq language, including a pledge to lay down weapons and join a mediation process led by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The MNJ accused the government in Niamey of a "treacherous" misinterpretation, saying the message was from Malian rebel leader Ibrahim Ag Bahanga to Gaddafi, who has acted as a mediator in Tuareg-led rebellions in Mali and Niger.

The statement said the rebels would not lay down their weapons until their complaints had been addressed.

The MNJ took up arms last year calling for a greater share of the desert nation's resources, in particular the uranium that is mined in the north, where most of the clashes have taken place, killing 70 government soldiers and 200 rebels.

Niger's government has refused to talk to the rebels, whom it dismisses as bandits and smugglers, until they disarm. Having deployed helicopter gunships, it has gained the upper hand in recent months, killing the deputy rebel commander in June.

A similar rebellion has simmered in Mali's north since the beginning of 2008.” (Reuters (19 August 2008) – *Niger Tuareg rebel rejects talk of ceasefire*)

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

“There remains a state of high tension between the government and the Tuareg-led Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ), including deadly fire-fights with government forces. The MNJ, which emerged in February 2007, has repeatedly declared that northern Niger is 'a war zone' and has attempted to target the region's uranium extraction industry, including an attack on installations at Imou-Araren in April and the kidnapping of a Chinese contractor in July 2007. The MNJ has also accused the uranium sector, spearheaded by the French conglomerate Areva, of long-time neglect of the environment and of the safety and interest of local, largely Tuareg, populations. Clashes between the MNJ and government forces in mid-2008 cost anywhere between 17 and 26 lives, bringing to nearly 300 the total number of those killed since the rebellion began. In July 2008, MNJ leader Aghaly Ag Alambo demanded that 20-30 per cent of all uranium revenue in Niger be distributed to the northern region. He claimed that the movement had the government on the defensive.” (Minority Rights Group International (July 2008) - *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples - Niger : Tuareg*)

A September 2007 *BBC News* article states:

“More than 44 soldiers have been killed in Niger since the formation in February of a new rebel group, the Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ).

Initially confined to Niger, recent tensions are now spilling into neighbouring Mali, where scores of government troops have been abducted in the country's remote north. While rebels in both countries claim not to seek political dominance, and talk of widespread rebellion is still dismissed by analysts, the rising tide of insurgency is a sure and growing obstacle to the stability of the Sahel.” (BBC News (07 December 2007) – *Q&A: Tuareg unrest*)

The same article under the heading 'What has the impact been on the civilian populations?', states:

!While life is said to continue as normal in the capitals of Bamako and Niamey, aid agencies suggest the disruption of Saharan supply routes by recent events is being increasingly felt by people in rural areas.

This comes alongside dislocation from recent floods which have affected some 14,000 in Niger alone.

Concern has also been raised about the continued diverting of funds away from existing problems such as housing and the fight against malaria.” (ibid)

A September 2007 *AlertNet* news article states:

“There are signs of growing tensions in northern Niger and Mali, the scenes of violent rebellion in the 1990s.

- Rebellion in Mali and Niger led by the nomadic Tuareg
- Northern Niger is rich in uranium
- Niger had the world's lowest Human Development Index in 2005 and 2006. Mali also ranked very low.

Tuareg rebel groups in northern Niger and Mali have long complained of being neglected and marginalised by governments ruling far away in the south.

The rebel Niger Movement for Justice (MNJ) has waged a low-level campaign against the Nigerien government since February 2007, but their attacks have become bolder and there are fears of another major insurgency.

The northern Agadez region is one of the world's largest sources of uranium but, like the rest of Niger, it has high levels of unemployment and chronic food shortages. Government plans to more than double uranium exports in the next four years means that it is determined to crack down on the rebel movement.

Tuareg, Arab and Toubou nomads staged an uprising in Mali and Niger in the 1990s, claiming neglect and marginalisation by their governments. A peace deal signed by a coalition of Tuareg rebel groups in 1995 in Niger pledged more development for the north, strengthened local government and promised the incorporation of thousands of former fighters into the security forces. A similar deal was signed in Mali in 1998, followed by another in 2006.

The MNJ accuses the central government in Niamey of neglecting its promises - a charge the government denies - and says it wants a greater share of the region's mineral wealth.

The rebels have kidnapped government soldiers and foreign mining staff. They have also been accused of laying mines in the region of Iferouane to the north of Agadez.

Opposition parties and even part of the ruling coalition have called for dialogue with the MNJ, which established a political wing in July 2007.

But the government has refused to recognise or negotiate with the group, which it dismisses as "bandits". Instead Niger's President Mamadou Tandja has called on neighbouring states in the Sahara to help persuade the Tuareg to lay down their arms. He has threatened to intensify military action if the rebels do not do so.” (Reuters AlertNet (03 September 2007) – *Niger-Mali Tuareg unrest*)

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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.

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