

TAKE ACTION: Please cut and paste this letter onto your personal or Institutional letterhead protesting the prison sentences handed down against Niger journalists Salif Dago, Mamane Abou and Oumarou Keita.

September 22, 2006

His Excellency Monsieur Mamadou Tandja
Président de la République
Présidence de la République
Palais de la République
Niamey, Niger
Fax: +011 227 20 73 34 30

Excellency,

I wish to add my name to this appeal from PEN Canada, the Canadian centre of the international writers' organization, International PEN. PEN Canada is writing to protest the prison sentences handed down against three journalists.

Salif Dago, a reporter for the bi-monthly private newspaper *L'Enquêteur*, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment on charges of "spreading false information". After his arrest on August 28, 2006, Dago was detained for four days before being summarily charged and transferred to prison. The charge is thought to relate to a story published by *L'Enquêteur* on August 14 titled "Black mass in Niamey cemetery", which described the alleged killing of a baby by an unidentified man as part of a macabre ritual.

Dago is reportedly appealing the sentence. His lawyer claimed that he has been fined 100,000 CFA francs and given a six-month suspended sentence in addition to the imprisonment.

Dago's detention and sentencing follows that of journalists **Mamane Abou** and **Oumarou Keita**, both of whom were sentenced to 18 months in prison. Managing editor and editor of the weekly *Le Republicain* newspaper respectively, the two journalists were arrested on August 4 and sentenced on September 1 with "publishing false information" and "defaming the state of Niger". Although their lawyers contested the legality of the trial, Justice Chaibou Moussa allegedly disregarded the appeal in sentencing the two men. The appeal was to be heard by a separate court later this month.

The arrest of Abou and Keita followed an article published in July by *Le Republicain* that suggested that the government's strengthening of diplomatic relations with Iran and Venezuela was happening at the expense of its relations with western countries. Prime Minister Hama Amadou, who was accused in the article of "wooing the Iranians", allegedly lodged a complaint against the two journalists, which resulted in their arrest. In addition to their imprisonment, Abou and Keita have been ordered to pay a fine of 5 million CFA Francs each.

Mamane Abou has been arrested several times following the publication of articles in his newspaper. He was sentenced to six months in prison in November 2004 for libel, but was released on probation in January 2005.

The journalists are being detained in separate prisons, both some distance from Niamey, which reportedly gives their lawyers, family and friends, who are all based in the capital, very limited access to them. Their lawyers have claimed that this violates Niger law, which states that detainees should be kept in a detention facility within the court's jurisdiction.

PEN Canada protests the detention of Mamane Abou, Oumarou Keita and Salif Dago. We call for their immediate and unconditional release, and for your government to adopt a law decriminalizing press offences in accordance with the public commitment made by Your Excellency during the 2004 presidential campaign.

Sincerely,

[Your name and address]

Copies to:

Monsieur Hama Amadou
Premier ministre
Primature
Niamey, Niger
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Please send copies of your appeal to the following Canadian authorities:

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