

NIGER 2020 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Niger is a multiparty republic. In the first round of the presidential elections on December 27, Mohamed Bazoum of the ruling coalition finished first with 39.3 percent of the vote. Opposition candidate Mahamane Ousman finished second with 16.9 percent. A second round between the two candidates was scheduled for February 21, 2021. President Mahamadou Issoufou, who won a second term in 2016, was expected to continue in office until the second round was concluded and the winner sworn into office. International and domestic observers found the first round of the presidential election to be peaceful, free, and fair. In parallel legislative elections also conducted on December 27, the ruling coalition preliminarily won 80 of 171 seats, and various opposition parties divided the rest, with several contests still to be decided. International and local observers found the legislative elections to be equally peaceful, free, and fair.

The National Police, under the Ministry of Interior, Public Security, Decentralization, and Customary and Religious Affairs (Ministry of Interior), is responsible for urban law enforcement. The Gendarmerie, under the Ministry of National Defense, has primary responsibility for rural security. The National Guard, also under the Ministry of Interior, is responsible for domestic security and the protection of high-level officials and government buildings. The armed forces, under the Ministry of National Defense, are responsible for external security and, in some parts of the country, for internal security. Every 90 days the parliament reviews the state of emergency declaration in effect in the Diffa Region and in parts of Tahoua and Tillabery Regions. Civilian authorities generally maintained effective control over security forces, although at times individual soldiers and police acted independently of the command structure. Members of the security forces committed some abuses.

Significant human rights issues included: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by the government, allied militias, terrorists, and armed groups; forced disappearances by government and armed groups; cases of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment by government; harsh and life-threatening prison

NIGER

maximum eight hours of overtime per week, but this was not enforced. Penalties for wage and hour violations were not commensurate with those for similar crimes, such as fraud.

The law establishes occupational safety and health standards, which were current and appropriate for the main industries. It extends labor inspectors' authority and provides for sanctions, including a mandatory appearance before labor inspectors for resolving labor disputes. By law all workers may remove themselves from situations that endangered health or safety without jeopardy to their employment. Nevertheless, authorities did not effectively protect workers in such situations. The nonunionized subsistence agricultural and small trading sectors, where the law applies but was not enforced, employed approximately 80 percent of the workforce. In the nonunionized informal sector, despite the law, it was unlikely workers could exercise the right to sick leave without jeopardizing their employment.

The Ministry of Labor and Civil Service inconsistently enforced minimum wages and workweek laws and only in the regulated formal economy. The number of inspectors responsible for enforcing the labor code was not sufficient to enforce compliance and monetary sanctions were not commensurate with those for similar crimes. Inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections but do not have the authority to initiate sanctions.

Violations of provisions governing wages, overtime, and work conditions reportedly occurred in the petroleum and mining sectors, including at artisanal gold mines, oil fields, and oil refineries. Groups of workers in hazardous or exploitive work conditions included mineworkers, which included children, domestic workers, and persons in traditional slavery. In the artisanal gold-mining sector, the use of cyanide posed serious health hazards for workers and surrounding communities. A significant, but unknown, percentage of the mining workforce worked in the informal sector. The vast majority, however, were employed by large, international firms; labor advocates complained these firms were not transparent regarding work conditions.

Union workers in many cases did not receive information concerning the risks posed by their jobs. The Ministry of Labor and Civil Service responded to reports

