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**STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGER
FOR THE 52ND SESSION OF THE
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

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Introduction

1. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international, non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights around the world. The ECLJ also holds Special Consultative status before the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This report discusses the status of human rights in the Republic of Niger (Niger) for the 52nd session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

Background

2. Niger is a country located in western Africa and has a population of approximately 27.2 million people.¹ The country is predominantly Muslim, with approximately 85% of the population identifying as Sunni Muslim, 5% as Shia Muslim, 9% adhering to traditional beliefs, and 1% identify as other.² In its 2025 World Watch List, Open Doors ranked Niger as the 28th worst country for Christians to live in.³ This ranking stems from the presence of Islamic extremist groups that target Christians and carry out attacks throughout the country in order to seize power.⁴

3. Niger's last review was held on May 3, 2021.⁵ As a result of the review, Niger received 254 recommendations, 248 of which it supported.⁶ It was recommended by Croatia, and supported by Niger, that the government "[a]dopt all necessary measures to protect Christians and other religious minorities from all forms of violence and discrimination."⁷ In our last report on Niger, we also expressed concern over the persecution of Christians by radical Islamic groups.

Legal Framework

4. Article 30 of Niger's Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. It states that "[a]ny person has the right to freedom of thought, of opinion, of expression, of conscience, of religion and of worship" and that "[t]he State guarantees the free exercise of worship and the expression of beliefs."⁸ However, in July 2023, a military coup took place and the armed forces seized power and suspended the constitution.⁹

¹ Diouldé Laya et. al., *Niger*, BRITANNICA, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Niger> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

² *Id.*

³ *Niger*, OPEN DOORS, <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/persecution/countries/niger/> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Universal Periodic Review – Niger*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ne-index> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

⁶ *Infographic – Niger*, OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/NIGER.pdf> (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

⁷ OHCHR, UPR of Niger (3rd Cycle – 38th Session) Thematic List of Recommendations, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Niger_Thematic_List_of_Recommendations.docx (last accessed Oct. 7, 2025).

⁸ CONSTITUTION OF NIGER 2010 art. 30, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Niger_2017.

⁹ *The Coup in Niger*, IISS (Aug. 2023), <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2023/the-coup-in-niger/>.

5. Niger is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹⁰ Under Article 18 of the ICCPR:

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.¹¹

Islamic Militancy

6. Despite Niger being overwhelmingly Muslim, it has historically enjoyed a harmonious relationship between the Muslim majority and adherents of minority religions¹². Unfortunately, this has come under attack with the rise of Islamic militant groups in the region.

7. The persecution of Christians in Niger has escalated following the coup in July 2023. Islamic militant groups like al-Sunnah-wa-Jama'ah (ASWJ) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) have taken advantage of Niger's weak state following the coup to seize territory and implement their version of strict Islamic rule.¹³ These groups seek to rid the country of Christianity, which is why converts, in particular, face great danger.¹⁴ Converting to Christianity is viewed as betraying the Muslim faith and community.¹⁵ Those who are discovered to be converts risk being beaten and driven from their villages.¹⁶ Although Niger's Constitution guarantees religious freedom, extremist groups have essentially created a de facto ban on religious conversions, especially in regions under their control.¹⁷

8. Since the coup, Islamic extremist groups have targeted Christians as well the military junta who has taken control since the coup.¹⁸ The military coup has had a disastrous impact on the military's ability to combat extremist insurgent groups.¹⁹ The military junta that now has power cited that one of the reason for the coup was the deteriorating security situation and they promised to bring security to regions that were affected by Islamic extremist groups.²⁰

¹⁰ *Ratification Status for Niger*, OHCHR, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=126&Lang=EN (last visited Oct. 7, 2025).

¹¹ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights art. 18, Dec. 16, 1966, 999 U.N.T.S. 171, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights> [hereinafter ICCPR].

¹² OPEN DOORS INT'L / WORLD WATCH RSCH., NIGER: PERSECUTION DYNAMICS 10 (Jan. 2025), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Niger-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf

¹³ *Niger Media Advocacy Dossier*, OPEN DOORS (2025), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Niger-Media_Advocacy_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

¹⁴ *Id.* 14.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Niger Media Advocacy Dossier*, *supra* note 13.

¹⁹ *Violent Extremism in the Sahel*, GLOBAL CONFLICT TRACKER (Sep. 4, 2025), <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel>.

²⁰ *Niger, Islamist Armed Group Executes Civilians, Burns Homes*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Sep. 10, 2025), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/09/10/niger-islamist-armed-group-executes-civilians-burns-homes>.

Unfortunately, many of the actions that military junta has taken since gaining power has weakened its ability to combat these extremist groups.²¹ For example, since the military junta seized power, it stopped its military cooperation with France who had stationed troops in Niger to help combat extremism in the region.²² As a result, France pulled its troops out of the country.²³ Since the coup, more than 1,600 civilians have been killed by Islamic extremist groups.²⁴

8. Additionally, Christian churches in territories under the control of Islamic extremist are attacked, vandalized, and destroyed.²⁵ In fact, many churches were closed in 2024 as a result of such attacks.²⁶ Further, there have been reports of violence against Christians, such as verbal and physical assaults, as well as kidnappings.²⁷ In 2024, more than 100 Christians were reported to have been killed and more than 100 churches were attacked.²⁸ Below, we have highlighted a few of the attacks carried out by Islamic militant groups since Niger's last UPR.

9. In September 2025, gunmen on motorbikes killed fifteen villagers who were attending a baptism ceremony.²⁹ The militants then went to the outskirts of the village and killed seven more people.³⁰

10. On May 13, 2025, militants killed five men and two boys in the hamlet of Dani Fari.³¹ According to a local herder:

The bodies were scattered ... riddled with bullets. There wasn't a single body out there that had fewer than three bullet holes. The bullets had hit people in the back, arms, head.... We found the bodies of the two children lying on their backs.³²

9. In May 2025, ISWAP attacked police headquarters in the Diffa region.³³ Two police officers were killed in the attack, and the militants were able to seize guns and ammunition.³⁴

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Violent Extremism in the Sahel*, *supra* note 19.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ *Niger: Islamist Armed Group Executes Civilians, Burns Homes*, *supra* note 20.

²⁵ OPEN DOORS, NIGER: PERSECUTION DYNAMICS 8

(2025), https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Niger-Full_Country_Dossier-ODI-2025.pdf.

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Id.* at 7.

²⁸ *Id.* at 9.

²⁹ *Gunmen Kill 22 Villagers at Niger Ceremony*, ARAB NEWS (Sep. 17, 2025), <https://www.arabnews.com/node/2615691/world>.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Niger: Islamist Armed Group Executes Civilians, Burns Homes*, *supra* note 20.

³² *Id.*

³³ *Islamic State West Africa Province – (ISWAP) Documents Three Attacks in One Day on “Christian Village” in Northeastern Nigeria, Police Headquarters in Eastern Niger, Army Site Northern Cameroon, Killing and Injuring Eight*, MEMRI (May 8, 2025), <https://www.memri.org/jttm/islamic-state-west-africa-province-iswap-documents-three-attacks-one-day-‘christian-village’>.

³⁴ *Id.*

10. On September 29, 2023, several hundred Islamic militants attacked the town of Kandaji, near Niger's border with Burkina Faso.³⁵ The initial attack resulted in the deaths of twelve soldiers, but the military launched a counterattack and killed more than 100 militants.³⁶

11. In August 2023, Islamic militants stormed two churches armed with assault rifles, knives, and whips.³⁷ The militants entered the churches as the Christians were closing in prayer and they asked the Christians, “[h]ave you not heard that we have prohibited Christian acts of worship in this area?”³⁸ The militants then ordered the Christians to kneel and told them that they would be beaten because they did not comply with their ban on Christian worship.³⁹ The militants then proceeded to beat seventeen of the Christians.⁴⁰

12. Further, while the threat of Islamic militant groups has been exacerbated since the 2023 coup, Christians have been the target of these groups before then. In fact, according to the 2022 Global Terrorism Index, Niger had the largest increase in casualties as a result of violent attacks as it increased by 129% in 2021.⁴¹ Further, although the number of attacks has not necessarily changed, their lethality has increased.⁴² Additionally, in 2021, Niger had the third highest civilian death toll in the world.⁴³

13. Additionally, in May 2021, gunmen on motorcycles attacked the village of Fantino and killed five civilians.⁴⁴ In addition to the killings, the gunmen also damaged a church.⁴⁵

Recommendations

14. Niger and the military junta must take immediate and meaningful steps to address the presence of Islamic militants in the country. If action is not taken to stop the violence, Islamic militants will continue to grow and expand their presence within the country. Niger must protect its Christian population from being attacked and targeted because of their faith.

³⁵ *Niger: Islamic Militants Are Growing in Confidence*, OPEN DOORS (Oct. 11, 2023), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/articles/stories/Niger-Islamic-militants-are-growing-in-confidence/>.

³⁶ Wycliffe Muia, *Niger Attack: Soldiers Killed by Hundreds of Jihadists in Kandadji*, BBC (Sep. 29, 2023), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66956989.amp>.

³⁷ *Another Attack in Niger Leaves Christians Reeling*, OPEN DOORS (Oct. 6, 2023), <https://www.opendoorsus.org/en-US/stories/another-attack-niger-pray/>.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ OPEN DOORS, NIGER: FULL COUNTRY DOSSIER 7 (2023), <https://www.opendoors.org/persecution/reports/Full-Country-Dossier-Niger-2023.pdf>.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ *Niger: Church Deliberately Damaged During Village Attack*, OPEN DOORS (May 30, 2021), <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/articles/stories/niger-church-deliberately-damaged-during-village-attack>.

⁴⁵ *Id.*