



ADF Statement on the Nigerien Referendum

10 August 2009

The African Democracy Forum (ADF), a network of over 450 democracy and human rights organizations throughout Africa, expresses concerns over the recent development in Niger, particularly the Nigerien referendum held the 4th of August 2009, and calls for immediate and full restoration of the Constitution of the 5th Republic, promulgated in August of 1999.

On Tuesday, 4 August 2009, the country held a referendum instituted by President Mamadou Tandja that would allow him to remain in power until 2012, and would then give him the authority to run without term limits. Under the 1999 constitution, the President can only serve two five-year terms and would require President Tandja to step down at the end of this year. Before the referendum, President Tandja dissolved both the Parliament and the Constitutional Court after both institutions called the proposed referendum un-constitutional, and named himself the sole member of the executive branch. According to preliminary results from the national electoral commission, the President won the referendum with 92.5 percent and 68.3 percent voter turnout. The coalition of opposition parties called for a boycott of the referendum and instead claimed that voter turnout was less than 5 percent.

This referendum constitutes grave democratic backsliding in a country that had seen marked improvements in the areas of democracy and human rights. It also causes a threat to other emerging democracies in the region, as underlined by critical statements made by President Umaru Yar'Adua of Nigeria. The ADF is especially concerned with President Tandja's claim that the referendum indicates the will of the people for him to oversee foreign investment projects totaling more than 6 billion USD. The ADF worries this may lead to personal enrichment and rampant corruption in one of the poorest countries of the world. Prior to the referendum, the European Union and the French government proposed sanctions and the withholding of aid in response to the unconstitutional referendum.

The ADF calls on the government of President Mamadou Tandja to respect the Economic Community of West African States' Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, signed by the Foreign Minister of Niger in the name of President Mamadou Tandja in 2001. In addition, the ADF encourages the President to adhere to the democratic principles that the African Union's adopted Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance outlines.

7 August 2009

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