



UN Volunteers during their first training with the UNODC in June 2017, in Niamey, Niger. (UNODC, 2017)

Des volontaires de l'ONU au Niger soutiennent le processus judiciaire antiterroriste

With the assistance of specialised UN Volunteers, Niger has processed 230 cases involving terrorism suspects, including 11 women and 25 children, in 60 days. This is the result of concerted action of the Nigerien judicial authorities supported by United Nations volunteers and the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

The majority of these suspects had been held in pre-trial detention since 2015, when the terrorist attacks committed by Boko Haram ravaged the Diffa region, in the east of the country, by the border with Nigeria. *"I have seen how the work of a volunteer brings a glimmer of hope in the eyes of prisoners,"* says Ali*, UN Volunteer for the [United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime](#) (UNODC) in Niger.

Niger and the broader Sahel region are facing a growing terrorist threat. Recurrent attacks in the region have been put to a hard test, particularly since 2010, when various armed groups have intensified their activities.

In 2011, Niger established a legal framework enabling stronger responses against these threats, notably through a reform of the criminal legislation, as well as the creation of an anti-terrorism specialized judicial unit (in French,

" *pôle judiciaire spécialisé*").

In response, UNODC has taken steps to support the anti-terrorism specialized unit and improve access to justice for detainees associated with Boko Haram, affiliated to the Islamic State since 2015. UNODC recruited and trained ten Nigerien lawyers as UNVs, to assist the specialized judicial unit in providing legal assistance to persons detained for terrorism, particularly those in positions of vulnerability. However, the number of staff remains insufficient in comparison to the number of arrests and prosecutions related to terrorism. More than 1,500 people - including women, children and mentally disabled persons - are currently in pre-trial detention in Niger, often lacking the necessary resources to seek legal assistance.

To ensure that the basic human rights of all detainees are respected, the UNVs' mission is to visit prisons and interview detainees to ensure the lawfulness of their detention and of their treatment, to guide them on the procedure to be followed, and make them aware of their rights.

“ Our actions have allowed detainees to understand and know their rights better, and most importantly, to ensure a closer follow up of their cases to accelerate the procedure.” - Fatima, UNV for UNODC in Niger*

UNVs have achieved unprecedented levels of collaboration from both prison managers and judges. This has resulted in an improved and accelerated follow-up of cases, the provision of concrete answers to prisoners' questions, and better responses from authorities. Cases of excessive pre-trial detention have been reported, leading to in-depth evaluations of such cases, and the subsequent release of some detainees.

“ People detained over prolonged periods, awaiting trial, are vulnerable to radicalization. UNODC contributes to preventing violent extremism in supporting the Nigerien authorities with processing these cases.” - Pierre Lapaque, UNODC Regional

Representative for West and Central Africa




UNVs carry out their work in difficult conditions, especially given the sensitivity of terrorism-related cases. UNVs report that there is an important psychological dimension to their work, as they support individuals who often have suffered trauma. *"This work has enabled individuals in vulnerable situations to benefit from legal assistance, alleviating suffering of some, and creating new hopes for others. It contributes to respecting the legal norms in force in Niger, such as the right to a fair trial, the right to information, and the right to a defence, to name just a few."* -Mamoudou*, UNV for UNODC in Niger

In 2006, the Member States of the United Nations committed to ensuring the "the apprehension and prosecution or extradition of perpetrators of terrorist acts, in accordance with the relevant provisions of national and international law, in particular human rights law" (UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy, 2006). UNODC and its partners encourage UNVs in their efforts to work towards an efficient justice system in Niger, as a response to terrorism.

* *To ensure their security, the UNVs are not referred to by their real names.*

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