

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 18, 2023

Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20010

Linda Thomas-Greenfield
Ambassador
United States Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017

Dear Secretary Blinken and Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield,

Thank you for your efforts to support the restoration of civilian rule in Niger, including via support for dialogue led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). We continue to closely monitor events in Niger and continued instability across the broader Sahel region.

We write to express concern regarding the impact of ECOWAS sanctions on civilian populations, particularly regarding the delivery of humanitarian and development services. While maintaining the pressure for a return to civilian rule is important, we need to mitigate spillover effects to the population as much as possible. Therefore, we urge the Biden administration to advocate for exemptions for humanitarian assistance and critical commodities such as food and medicine to be integrated into current ECOWAS sanctions. Specifically, we encourage U.S. government officials to press this issue with interlocutors in ECOWAS member states during the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

Following the military takeover of the government of Niger on July 26, ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Niger, including closing of land borders and commercial airspace with Nigeria and Benin, suspending of all commercial transactions with Niger, freezing assets of the state of Niger in West African Central Bank, and freezing assets of the state of Niger in commercial banks. While the intent of these sanctions is to assert the need for reinstating civilian rule in the country, it is also important that all parties take steps to restore unfettered humanitarian access for civilians in need of humanitarian aid.

On August 17, the U.N. Under-Secretary General of Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator sent a letter to ECOWAS leadership, expressing concern with the adverse impact of

ECOWAS sanctions on the Nigerien civilian population and calling for amendments to current sanctions regimes to ensure timely delivery of aid and authorization of transactions essential for humanitarian operations. This request was echoed in an August 28 advocacy note signed by more than 40 international humanitarian and development non-profit organizations.¹

ECOWAS sanctions, as well as actions taken by the Nigerien junta, have reduced access to basic foodstuffs and pharmaceuticals. In addition, development and humanitarian service actors face limits on cash withdrawals from Niger-based commercial banks, impacting their ability to fund ongoing projects. Prior to the military seizure of power, an estimated 4.3 million people were already in need of humanitarian assistance in Niger. In mid-August, the World Food Program estimated that 3.3 million people were experiencing “severe” food insecurity, and that millions more could fall further into severe food insecurity due to the impact of sanctions. Without humanitarian exemptions for sanctions, humanitarian actors estimate that contingency food stocks are only able to reach 1.2 million Nigeriens through the end of September and that current funds for protection assistance programming will last only through November 2023, potentially endangering the more than a million people dependent on access to these programs for access to resources and physical safety.

We are concerned that if humanitarian exemptions are not implemented in a timely and efficient manner, ECOWAS sanctions will push millions of Nigeriens into more acute food insecurity. We are also concerned that the impact of sanctions on civilian populations may spur greater popular support for the National Council for the Safeguarding of the Fatherland (CNSP). Increased deprivation from sanctions without humanitarian exemptions may also be used as a tool for recruitment by violent extremist organizations, as well as create opportunities for trade in black market economies.

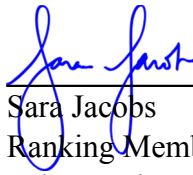
Incorporating humanitarian exemptions is consistent with ECOWAS’ own statements stating that sanctions should not prevent delivery of humanitarian assistance to citizens of ECOWAS member states; with United Nations Security Council Resolution 2664 (2022), which allows for humanitarian exemptions in United Nations asset freeze measures; and with the U.S. Department of Treasury’s global general licenses to ease delivery of humanitarian aid.

Therefore, we urge the Biden administration to engage ECOWAS leadership and ECOWAS member states on rapid amendment of existing sanctions to include humanitarian exemptions, and review of all sanctions adopted to date by applying the principle of “Do no harm.”.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

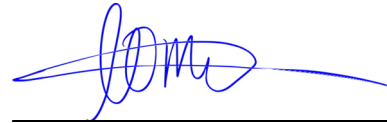
¹ [Advocacy note Niger - sanctions and humanitarian exemptions_EN_20230828.pdf \(oi-files-cng-v2-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com\)](https://www.amazonaws.com/oi-files-cng-v2-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/Advocacy%20note%20Niger%20-%20sanctions%20and%20humanitarian%20exemptions_EN_20230828.pdf)



Sara Jacobs
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Africa



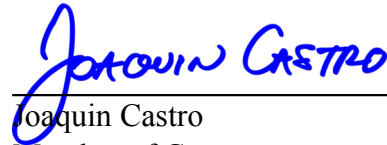
Sydney Kamlager-Dove
Member of Congress



Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



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Joaquin Castro
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