

# Women's leadership 'critical' to future of Niger

The role of women in leadership positions is critical to the future of a peaceful Niger according to the UN [Deputy Secretary-General](#), Amina Mohammed.

Ms Mohammed was speaking at a meeting with the Nigerien president, Mahamadou Issoufou, on Saturday in the capital Niamey which was part of a joint United Nations -African Union (UN-AU) mission to the country.

"I stressed to the President the importance of women's participation and leadership in preventing conflicts," she said. "I also underlined the need to include women in all national and regional responses to the ongoing environmental, humanitarian and development challenges that Niger and the Sahel region face."

The deputy UNchief is leading the UN-AU visit to Niger, which includes many of the most senior women in the UN, the African Union, Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security, as well as the Foreign Minister of Sweden, Margot Wallström.

A key focus of the two-day trip is women's participation and leadership in conflict prevention, including violent extremism. Security.

The security situation in Niger has worsened since 2015, when the first attack was launched by Boko Haram extremists in Diffa in the east of the country – an attack which displaced some 300,000 people, the majority of whom are women and children.

The presence of Boko Haram, whose goal is to create an Islamic state in the north of Nigeria, has been particularly harmful to women and girls who have experienced what the UN has called "staggering and multiple forms of sexual and gender-based violence."

## **Humanitarian situation**

Insecurity which has caused displacement, and climate change, including insufficient rains, have led to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Niger. The number of people in need of assistance has reached 2.3 million in 2018, an increase of 400,000 over 2017.

Moreover, the country is currently hosting some 165,000 refugees the majority from neighbouring north-eastern Nigeria, the epicenter of Boko Haram activities.

## **Sahel Support Plan**

Niger is one of ten countries which are part of the [UN Support Plan for the](#)

[Sahel](#), a region which stretches from Chad in central Africa to Mauritania and Senegal in the west.

The plan, which was presented by Ms. Mohammed on the margins of the AU summit held in the Mauritanian capital Nouakchott last month, aims to build lasting peace in the ten focus countries. It also prioritizes economic growth, women youth and job creation.

Ibrahim Thiaw, the UN Secretary-General's Special Adviser for the Sahel was part of the UN-AU joint visit to Niger.

"There are certainly significant challenges in this region, but there are also opportunities," he told UN News in the Nigerien capital, Niamey. "The degradation of the environment, insecurity due to extremism and terrorism are both deep-rooted problems. However, the region has enormous potential due to its natural resources and cultural assets as well as, of course, its people."

The UN Security Council is due to hold a debate on the Sahel region on Wednesday.

The ten focus countries in the Sahel Support Plan are: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.