

## **PRESS RELEASE**

On Monday 03 January 2022, investigative journalist Moussa Aksar, Director of Publication of the newspaper "L'Evènement" and President of the Board of the Cell Norbert Zongo for Investigative Journalism in West Africa (CENOZO), was sentenced to two (02) months imprisonment suspended and fined 500. 000 fcfa fine, for having relayed on the website of his newspaper, an article by experts of Global Initiative - an NGO fighting against transnational crime - on drug trafficking in Niger. **This conviction is a serious and damaging attack on press freedom in Niger.**

In 2021, Moussa Aksar appeared in two different trials, with more than a dozen summonses. Prosecuted for defamation for his investigation into financial malpractice in the Ministry of National Defence in Niger, Moussa Aksar was sentenced in the first instance to a fine of 200,000 fcfa and 1,000,000 fcfa in damages. The journalist has appealed against this sentence. While the appeal has not yet begun, Moussa Aksar is the subject of new legal proceedings, this time for having relayed an article by experts on drug trafficking, which implicates the Niger authorities. He is being prosecuted together with the Nigerien journalist Samira Sabou, who is accused of having mentioned the article in a Facebook post.

CENOZO notes that these various lawsuits are a cleverly orchestrated attempt to prevent investigative journalist Moussa Aksar from doing his work in peace. This shows a clear desire on the part of the Niger authorities to silence an experienced journalist, whose probity and ethics are known and praised throughout the world.

CENOZO also notes that the Niger justice system, which is quick to investigate complaints against journalists, has, for nearly two years turned, a deaf ear to the complaint of investigative journalist Moussa Aksar against a notorious arms trafficker, who threatened him with death while he was investigating financial misappropriations in the Ministry of National Defence of Niger.

CENOZO reminds the Niger authorities that **freedom of expression and information** is a fundamental and inalienable right and an indispensable element of democracy, guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Niger, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa.

CENOZO therefore calls on the Niger authorities to put an end to the judicial harassment of journalists and to work towards the establishment of an environment conducive to quality journalism, which is vital for the entrenchment of democracy and the promotion of universal values such as peace, tolerance, justice, good governance and non-discrimination for sustainable social cohesion.

**Ouagadougou, 03 January 2022**