

AMADOU BOUBACAR CISSÉ

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

NOVEMBER 8, 2015

UNITED TO SERVE NIGER

UNION FOR
DEMOCRACY
AND RÉPUBLIC



UDR-TABBAT
UNION-JUSTICE-PROGRESS

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

ISSUED NOVEMBER 8, 2015



UNITED TO SERVE NIGER

Summary

FIRST CHALLENGE	The fight against poverty	8
SECOND CHALLENGE	Access to employment	10
THIRD CHALLENGE	The fight against insecurity	12
THE FIRST KEY ELEMENT	Uniting and rallying together	14
THE SECOND KEY ELEMENT	Our economic development	16
THE THIRD KEY ELEMENT	Confidence in our youth	21

*Fellow party members,
Nigeriens,
Dear countrymen and countrywomen,
Dear friends,*

I am very honoured to stand solemnly before you today as our party's candidate for the presidency of our country. I am fully aware of the responsibility and magnitude of my duties as a candidate, and overjoyed to embark with you on the journey that will lead me to our country's highest office. I wholeheartedly believe that the short- and medium-term plan of action we will present to the Nigerien people is that which best reflects their aspirations, and which will provide the best possible solutions to the regional, national and international problems that Niger faces.

Five years ago, we all hoped that the winds of change were finally set to blow across our country and give it the strength to shape a future worthy of its sons and daughters' legitimate aspirations. The revival of democracy was expected to pave the way for a more united, vigilant society determined to protect the interests of the Nigerien people, regardless of their birthplace or ethnicity.

The new economic landscape both at home and abroad understandably led to high hopes for unprecedented growth and a far-reaching transformation of our economic and social institutions for the good of our people. Nigeriens strived to achieve these goals, which were rooted in social justice, to benefit future generations.

Our party, its leaders, members and supporters sincerely believed that a promising turn of events was about to come for Niger and the Nigerien people, so we actively supported private-sector initiatives that aimed to achieve two goals:

- ▷ **firstly, to establish a democratic society** mindful of the well-being and security of Nigeriens and their property;
- ▷ **secondly, to build a modern,** thriving economy that efficiently draws on all our natural and human resources while sharing the progress achieved with all citizens.

We have spared no effort—at every level of responsibility conferred to us—to take part in and lead programmes designed to fulfil these objectives. These goals range from strengthening regional security to maximising the financial resources available for the investments needed to shape our country's future.

Unfortunately, we are forced to acknowledge that the positive steps taken have, for the most part, been impeded or circumvented by personal interests, preventing the initial goals from being reached. Those in power wasted little time in demonstrating a lack of discipline and method, using unorthodox practices to consolidate or expand personal privileges, at the expense of the common good.

As a result, the regime lacked the vision needed to qualitatively improve the fortunes of Nigeriens and their children. The examples of these failures are numerous.

The 2012/2015 Economic and Social Development Plan, which was approved with great fanfare and heralded by our partners as a model of consistency and strategic planning, is no longer the “single framework of reference” for government initiatives that it was intended to be, and a wide range of organisations have voiced concerns about its impact. It may soon be no more than a barren tree in a hostile landscape, blown about by wind from all directions.

The substantial financial resources mobilised for Niger—mainly in the form of donations and loans at very concessional rates made possible by our partners' confidence in our development plan—were not used quickly or rationally enough to produce the desired knock-on effect.

The planned investments incurred a number of delays that could compromise the international credibility we had begun to win back.

As a result, the state administration—contrary to promises made—was not transformed into an effective instrument for the development strategy advocated by the government to spearhead the planned changes. Neither the private sector nor civil society were able to fully implement its initiatives; both were quickly handicapped by the paralysis and inertia of those stuck in the past. National companies, youth and vulnerable groups have felt the brunt of this obstruction.

We long sought to correct these weaknesses and aberrations while continuing to back the regime's overall policy direction. However, we had no choice but to recognise that the regime would not fulfil its commitments

and, additionally, that every effort was being made to cast doubt on our recommendations and our support in this area.

Our duty today—a period of mounting threats that calls for major changes—is to offer the Nigerien people a strategic direction that serves as a beacon for the country over the next five years.

I see three major challenges that affect the nation as a whole and therefore define the basis of our planning and all our plans of action. **The first is the fight against poverty. The second is to provide employment for all. The third is to protect the security of all.**

FIRST CHALLENGE

The fight against poverty

Poverty is a disease that has long plagued a large part of our population. Some of its causes are beyond our control, such as our harsh environment and the influence of traditions that are poorly suited to the modern world.

But most of the factors that explain why this situation has endured are directly related to the lack of political will to combat this affliction. Our main shortcomings include the low income of our farmers and the poor living conditions of rural populations; a weak education system and vocational training; weak economic growth and the inequitable distribution of wealth; the gaping flaws in our urbanisation policy; the growth of disguised unemployment; and the lack of added value in many industries. The results of this poor management are clear to see. In 2015, Niger remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Half of the Nigerien population still lives in extreme poverty, according to the United Nations, despite the litany of speeches and tantalising promises that never came to pass.

Niger has made very little progress toward the Millennium Development Goals.

This glaring failure is even more dismaying given how significantly conditions have improved for most of the countries in our monetary union and the extent to which our economic strengths have grown over the past

five years. The reason for this failure is simple: despite the comforting rhetoric, the fight against poverty and for inclusive development was not a central focus of the actions carried out, nor a core component of all our investment programmes. These words were not backed by the necessary measures, which required both long-term vision and a steadfast will to act.

SECOND CHALLENGE

Access to employment

The situation with regard to access to employment is even more desperate. We are experiencing a demographic trend that will see the population triple in one generation, to reach 50 million in 2050. As a result, a massive influx of young people will enter the job market, exacerbating unemployment and underemployment, which are already acutely felt.

The continuing rural exodus remains a concern, as it leads to a concentration of uneducated, impoverished Nigeriens in underprivileged urban neighbourhoods. This fact is tragically absent from political discourse, whereas it should be a central topic of discussion, especially given the increase in poverty among many vulnerable groups that will occur if current trends are left unchecked. The strategy implemented must focus on maximising job creation and fighting unemployment, both in the short and long term.

This requires widespread action on several fronts: stimulating the sectors (from industry to services) that create the most jobs by all possible means; providing training to build a more qualified workforce that better reflects the job market and is better able to improve our companies' competitiveness; and fostering individual entrepreneurship, which has the potential to meet a wide range of needs and develop innovative approaches. All of these initiatives must be carried out with the utmost urgency, in order to:

- ▷ **Meet the legitimate expectations of our young people**, who are desperately seeking prospects for the future and coming up empty-handed.
- ▷ **Offer employment and decent pay** to who feel betrayed when they complete school or university and discover that their education is inadequate and that they are unable to feed their family.
- ▷ **Help those who have fled rural areas** in search of a better life and see their hopes crumble.

THIRD CHALLENGE

The fight against insecurity

These tragedies lead to the third major fear— insecurity—which exists in various forms.

The most immediate type is, of course, physical insecurity and the growing terrorist threat that looms over the country and its citizens. Courageous actions have been taken on this front in recent years, which should be applauded. But we must do much more to strengthen our armed forces and our level of protection throughout the country. We must ramp up efforts to expand regional coordination, to integrate our efforts to fight the terrorist groups operating in the Sahel, and to work with international forces that can provide us with the support we need now and train our troops for the future. Our economic development initiatives hinge on the success of this long-term obligation, of which they are part.

At the same time, economic insecurity also exists in its own right, in the poverty and unemployment described earlier. It is partly administrative in nature; our public sector has not lived up to our expectations and needs. Our government is dreadfully slow, inefficient and opaque—clearly due to a lack of resources—but especially due to the lack of a sense of public service among many civil servants. The public sector acts as a hindrance, instead of supporting and protecting individuals and companies, as it should. Laws are often flouted in the justice system, taxation and

property transactions. The public sector's failure to fulfil its duties has stripped the government of its credibility and bred widespread distrust among citizens. This loss of authority comes at a time when it is particularly needed, in order to successfully manage the challenges at hand.

To emerge victorious from the fight against poverty, insecurity and unemployment, the future president of Niger will have to pursue a consistent, term-long policy covering all aspects of economic and social life. This policy must be backed by a blueprint for society—a long-term vision of the country's future and a set of clearly defined programmes that will bring this vision to fruition, which will be approved by the people at the election next February. Our blueprint will be shared with you as the campaign unfolds and, at every step in the process, will be expanded to reflect your input as necessary. I would nonetheless like to share with you the three key elements of the blueprint: **Unity, Development and Youth.**

THE FIRST KEY ELEMENT

Uniting and rallying together for the upcoming election

It reflects our deeply-held belief that the scale of the challenges we face, and the obstacles we must overcome to prevail, require everyone who believes that Niger can break free from the vicious circle that has long held the country back to pool their energy, intelligence and strength of will.

We therefore reject all forms of sectarianism and welcome all kindred spirits, those who prefer action to idle chatter and laxity, hold duty above privilege, choose to reward achievement and punish transgressions, and possess the will to push forward rather than maintain the status quo or protect undeserved advantages. Our enemies will be the lax and selfish. Our detractors will be those unwilling to fight. Our friends and allies will be those who believe that a better future is possible for Niger, if its leaders work for the common good, and all the country's sons and daughters join hands as they reach for new horizons.

Those in power must embody our idea of democracy and accountability, without bias or exclusion, by maintaining daily contact with people from all walks of life and all manifestations of civil society. It is by this means alone that we will remain in touch with the aspirations of society at

large and achieve their goals without delay. This does not mean pursuing policies lacking conviction that shift as the wind blows. Quite the contrary, we will have to demonstrate an ability to share and convey our fundamental aims and the efforts required to achieve them. But it does mean maintaining an inclusive, ongoing dialogue to ensure that the focus of our policy becomes more representative and thus more effective.

SECOND KEY ELEMENT

Our economic development

This is vital to transform the country quickly and comprehensively, while addressing the demographic trends that are set to continue over the coming decades. To succeed, Niger must leverage its current assets and mobilise others.

FOSTER STRONG, HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

The country's traditional strength is the mining industry. Long dominated by uranium production, the industry has thankfully diversified in recent years, with the start-up of oil production. The country has many assets that have yet to be exploited, for which there are many potential partners and significant opportunities in terms of employment.

The infrastructure sector could prove to be a second driver of sustained growth. The focus has long been on extending the network, with maintenance suffering as a result. We still need to optimise investments in this area. **The energy sector has become an absolute priority,** with hydropower and solar projects—for which Niger enjoys a major comparative advantage—topping the list. This sector is also a potential catalyst for progress in many other areas.

For the most part, the other means of boosting national economic growth have yet to be developed:

- ▷ **powerful, modern, efficient primary sector;**
- ▷ Niger possesses natural resources and people. The country needs to establish the financial, educational and technical means required to capitalise on these assets and establish a sector that is productive and competitive enough to **guarantee food security and sustained growth;**
- ▷ **a construction sector** capable of meeting the needs that will arise from demographic growth and urbanisation, which seeks to provide decent housing for all;
- ▷ **and industry, crafts and tourism,** the sectors that provide the most qualified jobs and have the potential to revolutionize our national economic system and secure lasting growth.

Developing these sectors will require the government to urgently improve the business environment on an ongoing basis and support private-sector initiatives that support growth and strengthen economic production structures.

BUILD A FAIRER, MORE UNITED SOCIETY

We have defined four major policy tools in this area, which will lay the foundation for strong, sustainable growth while substantially improving Nigeriens' living conditions.

- ▷ **The top priority is to make advances in general and vocational education, through an initiative with both qualitative and quantitative targets.** The initiative will raise the average level of education among both young people and adults, and improve jobseekers' ability to apply for openings at companies.
- ▷ **Strengthening the healthcare and social security system.** Action must be taken with regard to available facilities, increasing the number of health workers and improving their level of qualification, and expanding state reimbursement of certain expenses. Our ability to foster social cohesion will be contingent on the care provided to the country's most vulnerable groups and isolated regions, in particular in rural areas.
- ▷ **Establishing an effective regional development policy at national level.** The primary goal of this policy is to guarantee the security of all citizens across the country. It also must include the creation of regional development hubs capable of slowing the rural exodus, in order to improve the balance between regions and better control urbanisation, especially in the capital. To this end, local institutions must be provided with the funding required to complete the tasks they are given.
- ▷ **Honing and diversifying**

distributive policy tools.

This is a vital component of the strategy for solidarity and inclusion advanced in our

blueprint for society, which can be achieved through tax policy, subsidies and cooperation with the private sector.

EXPAND NIGER'S INTEGRATION WITH THE REGION AND WORLD, WHILE PROTECTING NATIONAL VALUES

▷ **The main priority for this focus area is to ensure that Niger plays a more active role in regional development.**

This means maintaining a strong presence in and taking a proactive approach to regional organisations; diligently adhering to regional decisions at national level; and promoting regional projects, especially with regard to infrastructure. Regional cooperation not only provides economic benefits, it is the only efficient means of countering the risk of terrorism and

stamping it out for good.

- ▷ **Improving Niger's integration into the rest of the world.** Many nations and regional and international organisations are willing to place their trust in Niger and provide the country with much-needed financial and technical assistance, on the condition that we demonstrate our determination to make inclusive economic development an absolute priority. We must make every effort to take advantage of this goodwill, in particular to carry out a structural overhaul

of our state administration and our economy. In addition, more extensive integration of the economy with world trade should result in new business and growth opportunities.

- ▷ These changes will not affect

the meticulous efforts taken to **protect our national identity, which will rely on our rich history, quality traditions and culture, and respected traditional leaders.**

As you can see, our blueprint for society truly marks a radical shift from our country's past policies.

THIRD KEY ELEMENT

Confidence in our youth

It is only logical that this shift brings us back to our youth and the key role they have to play in implementing this blueprint. They alone possess all the qualities best suited to ensuring our success.

Young people have the most at stake with regard to our future—their lives are just beginning and our decisions will shape their entire working, social and family life. As such, they will be motivated by a precise, reliable definition of the institutional, economic and social environment in which they will lead their lives. Our young people are those best placed to erase the marks left by a past littered with failures and partial successes, fears and dishonourable behaviour to which they have fallen victim. Young people are the best at keeping up with how the world is changing, the new technical possibilities it offers and the new modes of behaviour it requires of us. We need their youthful spirit to achieve the efforts, changes and Herculean tasks required to break free from the vicious circles that hold us back and hinder our development.

The qualities of our youth best reflect the ideals that we seek to defend and champion: justice for all; rewarding the merit that ensures we achieve our goals; and solidarity and sharing, which will stand as a barrier to excessive inequality and see that everyone makes progress together, once and for all. Born into a world of communication in the digital age, our young people will spur our country to confront the

changes that frighten their elders, without which Niger would remain isolated and on the losing side. We need their critical minds to re-assess and further our thinking on all aspects of life, in order to find the best solutions. It is their high standards that will lead our civil servants to hold their head up high and take to heart their duty to faithfully serve all our citizens, without exception. It is their pride that will give Niger the will and the strength to vanquish its enemies near and far, to stand up to all forms of totalitarianism.

That is why we are sending out this plea to our youth to throw their full support behind our plan. This is not a passing trend. This not solely an appeal for young people to vote in droves and make their voices heard at the upcoming elections. Nor is it a sign that older generations are giving up and abandoning their responsibilities—the life experience of older people is invaluable for avoiding pitfalls and mistakes, for using the lessons of the past to shape the future. No. It is only, for the first time ever, an invitation for young people to play a significant role in the exercise of power, alongside their elders. In this way, the future president may also use his mandate to rely on the support of representatives of our young people, who have long been kept on the sidelines as silent spectators forced to accept policies that do not reflect their needs or hopes. This alliance of generations will also serve to embody the grand coalition that we are seeking to form.

Long live Niger!

**Long live the UDR-TABBAT,
stronger and more united
to serve the Nigerien people!
Long live democracy and the Republic!**

