

Niger gives French ambassador 48 hours to leave over interference in internal affairs

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Niamey, August 26 (RHC)-- Niger has given France's ambassador to Niamey 48 hours to leave the country charging the European country with meddling in the internal affairs of its former African colony.

Faced with "the refusal of the French ambassador in Niamey to respond to an invitation" from Niger's foreign minister for a meeting on Friday and "other actions of the French government contrary to the interests of Niger," the authorities have decided to withdraw their approval of Sylvain Itte and ask him to depart within 48 hours, read a statement by the Nigerien top diplomat.

Niger's Army generals overthrew the country's Paris-allied President Mohamed Bazoum on July 26. Ever since they have accused France of seeking to intervene militarily in the West African country to reinstate Bazoum.

On July 31, the junta took aim at Paris, saying: "In its search for ways and means to intervene militarily in Niger, France with the complicity of some Nigeriens, held a meeting with the chief of staff of the Nigerien National Guard to obtain the necessary political and military authorization."

Back at the time, France responded to the accusation, with Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna denying the charges and adding that it was still "possible" to restore Bazoum to power.

Despite denying any intention to invade Niger, Paris has vowed to resort to "immediate and uncompromising" action if French citizens or interests were targeted.

Ever since the coup, Nigerians have, on several occasions, come out in force to display support for the coup leaders and voice rejection of the country's former Western-backed authorities. Earlier this month, thousands of people surrounded a French military base in the capital, protesting against years of military intervention by the European country in Niger.

Protesters rallied near the army base on the outskirts of Niamey, shouting, "Down with France, down with ECOWAS," in reference to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West Africa's main regional bloc, which they accused of being "manipulated by France."

Late last month, supporters of the military in Niger marched through the streets of the capital and gathered outside the French embassy, denouncing the former colonial power before storming the diplomatic mission.

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