

Citation of the Prize Committee of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation



—

President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, is the recipient of the 2020 Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership.

After careful consideration, the Prize Committee of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation found that, confronted with unprecedented national and regional challenges, President Issoufou demonstrated exceptional leadership.

President Issoufou has made history in Niger. He stepped down after two five-year presidential terms in office, demonstrating his clear respect for the constitution and his conviction that the rule of law must come first. His decision paves the way for the country's first-ever democratic transition of power – a milestone in a country that has experienced four political coups since gaining independence in 1960.

President Issoufou was first democratically elected President in 2011, following many years of military rule in Niger. He inherited one of the world's poorest economies facing a seemingly insurmountable combination of challenges.

Land-locked Niger had been ravaged by extreme food shortages following a severe drought. Acute malnutrition was rampant. Rising levels of regional terrorism and criminality, weak institutions, accelerating population growth and increasing desertification intensified levels of unrest and insecurity.

President Issoufou confronted this complex matrix of issues with commitment and courage.

Throughout his time in office, he has kept Niger on a steady path of progress. The proportion of Nigeriens living below the poverty line has fallen to 40%, from 48% a decade ago.

Between 2011 and 2019, Niger's GDP grew from \$8.7 billion to \$12.9 billion, leading to 16.1% growth of GDP per capita. This was driven in part by President Issoufou's transformative infrastructure agenda, including hospitals, universities and an international airport. As a champion for the African Continental Free Trade Area, he helped to promote economic integration across the continent.

In the face of increasing violent extremism, President Issoufou proved his steadfast political will. He brought the voice of the Sahel to the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member, and played a leading role in strengthening regional and international cooperation around this fragile region.

Data from the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) underline President Issoufou's achievements.

During his ten years as President, Niger has made progress in multiple areas, including improving in all four sub-categories of *Human Development*. Niger is one of the African countries that has best managed to reduce child and maternal mortality. It is also among the ten most improved countries in strengthening socioeconomic opportunities for women.

Of course, challenges remain. Niger's recent declines in the IIAG in *Safety & Security* and in *Participation* highlight the serious obstacles confronting the country's sustained progress.

Nevertheless, President Issoufou has laid firm foundations on which Niger can now build, while continuing to play vital roles in improving regional stability and strengthening economic integration.

Above all, President Issoufou has championed African democracy and respect for constitutional rule, in Niger and across the continent. His example shows that those who lead, whatever the challenges, can do so with the greatest reverence for both the citizens they serve and the rule of law.