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AFRICA/NIGER - “The situation is calm and the people do not seem worried,” missionary from Niamey tells Agenzia Fides

Niamey (Agenzia Fides) - "The situation is calm. The schools are open and there do not seem to be any special security measures," Fides learns from a missionary of the Society of African Missions from Niamey, Niger's capital, where yesterday, February 18, a military coup ousted the President Mamadou Tandja.
"Our mission is not very far from the Presidential Palace. Yesterday, around 1pm, we heard gun shots come from the Palace of the President, who had met with the ministers for a special Council meeting. The shooting lasted until 3:30pm. The military coup, backed by armored vehicles, clashed with the Presidential Guard, and after a violent struggle succeeded in entering the Palace where they arrested the President Tandja and his ministers," the missionary told Fides. "The battle has affected only the Presidential Palace. The rest of the city remained calm. I myself went to say Mass in a parish, without encountering any problems. I was struck by the absence of a police patrol, usually stationed at a point in my journey: yesterday they were not there. For several hours, the national radio and television stations continued their normal schedule, without giving any news of the coup. Thanks to the foreign media, we learned of what was happening. Only at midnight did the radio announce the imposition of a curfew beginning 6pm today."
Colonel Goukoye Abdoulkarim, on behalf of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, (CSDR) has announced the suspension of the Constitution of the "Sixth Republic" and the dissolution of its institutions. The borders will remain closed until further notice. Colonel Abdoulkarim also announced that Chairman of the CSDR is Salou Djibo, commander of those who support Niamey and who possesses the armored vehicles.
Late last year, President Tandja, in power for 10 years, had dissolved the Parliament and the Constitutional Court after obtaining an extension of his mandate for another three years, thanks to the August 2009 referendum that approved a new Constitution (giving rise to so-called "Sixth Republic"). The opposition, which had boycotted the referendum and parliamentary elections in October, had denounced this coup by the President. The international community condemned the extension of presidential terms, which according to the old Constitution, should have ended on December 22. "In an effort to resolve the dispute, a mediation committee was formed, of which Archbishop Michel Cartatéguy Christian of Niamey is also a member," the missionary told Fides. "The coup was still in the air: the population was not siding with the President, and it is significant that the coup leaders include colonels, because the generals had been appointed by Tandja. We only hope the coup leaders keep their promise to restore democracy without bloodshed," concludes the missionary. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 19/2/2010)

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