

# **NIGER: A Christian church set on fire in Maradi**

Agenzia Fides (17.06.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2J4c0y4> – In the night between Saturday 15 and Sunday 16 June, in Maradi, the third largest city in Niger, a group of protesters demonstrating against the arrest of a prominent local imam set a Protestant Christian church on fire. This was confirmed by Fides sources in Niger, reporting a situation of social tension. “The church of the Assemblies of God was totally burned in the Zaria district, as well as the priest’s car, by unknown persons. The umpteenth act of violence is added to the three suffered by the parish of Dolbel, 200 km from Niamey, on May 13th (see Fides, 14/5/2019).

According to local witnesses, on Saturday night groups of young people demonstrated by building barricades on the road for the arrest of Imam Cheick Rayadoune, who had called “anti-Islam” a government bill on the organization of the practice of worship in the country. Rayadoune was released Sunday afternoon, and admitted he was misled in the interpretation of the Niger Worship Bill and apologized. “My supporters must stop creating unrest in the city, Islam does not support this, I was not abused by the police”, the leader said in a message. “I was deceived by those who translated a text that was supposed to be the official document”.

The bill, adopted at the end of April by the Council of Ministers, establishes in particular that “freedom of worship must be exercised in compliance with public order”.

The text, which will be discussed in Parliament for entry into force, states that “to build a place of worship, a request for authorization and a declaration of sources of funding are mandatory”. Higher Education Minister Yahouza Sadissou said: “We will never be taken against Islam and we have a duty to

protect other religions”.

Niger is a predominantly Muslim country, with 1 to 2% Christians out of a population of more than 20 million inhabitants. The country has already experienced serious religious unrest. In 2015, there were anti-Christian uprisings in Niamey that destroyed most of the churches in the capital, and in Zinder, the second largest city in the country.