



Association Timidria

WAHAYA

Domestic and sexual slavery in Niger

A report by Galy Kadir Abdelkader and Moussa Zangaou

10 PERSONAL STORIES

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The President of Timidria,
Ibrahim Habibou

INTRODUCTION

Timidria, Anti-Slavery International and their partners present this report as an overview of an undocumented form of slavery that continues to persist in Niger amid the near-total silence of the State and its partners, as well as the national and international communities.

‘Wahaya’ are girls and women bought and exploited as property by many dignitaries (mostly religious leaders or wealthy men who bear the title ‘Elhadji’). The women are used for free labour and for the sexual gratification of their masters, who assault them at will when they are not with their legitimate wives.

Our research to deepen understanding of slavery in this form was carried out with great care: for example, the areas under investigation were chosen according to where the phenomenon is most common. The research team routinely met with local resource persons known for their understanding of the wahaya practice and made use of data collected in advance; the victims were met at the sites visited as a last resort. The research team conducted 165 interviews, which were carefully documented. The interviews focused on victims living in Niger and northern Nigeria, the area in which a great deal of trafficking is organized, profiting certain traders, politicians and traditional chiefs.

This report is intended to give a voice to the victims, whose identities have been concealed, so that we may learn about the lives led by these citizens in flagrant violation of the provisions of the Constitution (the foundation of national law), the criminal code (which is based on international agreements ratified by Niger), and the rules of the predominant religion, Islam.

This report urges political authorities, citizens, traditional leaders, women’s groups and human rights organizations to work together to devise and promote measures to eradicate the shameful wahaya practice, and allow the release and socio-economic integration of its women victims. We look forward to working with you!

In solidarity,

President of Timidria
Ibrahim Habibou

SLAVERY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Forms of slavery have varied over time and across countries and cultures. However, since the creation of international frameworks designed to establish human rights in all countries, precise definitions of the practice have been drawn up and submitted for countries to adopt on the basis of agreed rules.

Thus in 1924, the Council of the League of Nations adopted a list of situations considered to constitute slavery, including: slave raiding, reducing a person to a state of slavery by whatever means, slave trading and dealing, domestic or agricultural serfdom, and also:

- the acquisition of girls by purchase disguised as payment of dowry, when it is understood that this does not refer to normal marriage customs;
- the adoption of children of either sex, with a view to their enslavement, or the disposal of their persons;
- all forms of pledging or reducing to servitude of persons for debt or other reasons;
- all systems of compulsory labour, public or private, paid or unpaid.

The first definition of slavery, based on this list, was then drawn up by the League of Nations, the forerunner of the present United Nations. The Slavery Convention of 25 September 1926 defined slavery as: “the status of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”. The Convention further described the slave trade as: “all acts involved in the capture, acquisition or disposal of a person with intent to reduce him to slavery; all acts of disposal by sale or exchange of a slave acquired with a view to being sold or exchanged, and, in general, every act of trade or transport in slaves”.

In 1930 the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted Convention no. 29 on Forced Labour. This is defined as “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily” (Art. 2). It requires States parties to “suppress the use of forced or compulsory labour in all its forms within the shortest possible period”. At the time this convention was used to support the pioneers of African independence in their fight against forced labour in the colonies. It took until 1946 before it was prohibited in the French colonies (Houphouët Boigny Law, 1946).

In 1956, a Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery was adopted by the UN. It obliges States to abolish both slavery and institutions and practices similar to slavery, including debt bondage and serfdom, but also, and above all with regard to women, “(c) any institution or practice whereby:

- A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group;
- The husband of a woman, his family, or his clan, has the right to transfer her to another person for value received or otherwise;
- A woman, on the death of her husband is liable to be inherited by another person;

- (d) Any institution or practice whereby a child or young person under the age of 18 years, is delivered by either or both of his natural parents or by his guardian to another person, whether for reward or not, with a view to the exploitation of the child or young person or of his labour.” (Art. 1, (c) and (d)).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) proceeded to confirm and reinforce the earlier League of Nations and UN conventions and resolutions, proclaiming: “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms” (Art. 4).

In 1957, the adoption of ILO Convention no. 105 strengthened the legislative framework against slavery and forced labour, as it “provides for the immediate and complete eradication of forced labour in specific circumstances. Article 1 imposes an obligation on the States parties to suppress the use of forced labour for

political purposes, for purposes of economic development, as a means of labour discipline or punishment for strike action and as a means of discrimination.”¹

Subsequently, it was observed that, while the practice of slavery no longer involved open slave trading, it had assumed other forms not covered by existing legislation. These mutations therefore had to be taken into account. At the 1998 session of the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, a recommendation was adopted stating that: “cross-border trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation is a contemporary form of slavery and constitutes a serious violation of human rights.”

In 1999, the General Conference of the International Labour Organization unanimously adopted Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour. A child is defined as any person under the age of 18. Article 3(a) of the Convention prohibits: “All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour [...]”

To end to the trafficking of persons, the UN passed the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000). For the purposes of this Convention, “an organized criminal group shall mean a structured group of three or more persons.” The Convention is an instrument designed to facilitate cooperation between States in the fight against organized crime. The term “trafficking of persons” is used when three elements are all present, these being: “The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of threat or use of force or other means of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

Commenting on these provisions, David Weissbrodt² writes: “The definition of abusive situations [...] goes beyond the means of control and coercion invoked in the slavery conventions to include deception and the abuse of power and vulnerability [...] Along with the use of force, coercion and deception, the Trafficking Protocol addresses the situation in which money is paid to a third person, for example the victim’s relatives, in order to gain control over the victims. Where an abuse of power or position of responsibility occurs, the *travaux préparatoires* state that such abuse must be understood “to refer to any situation in which the person involved had no real and acceptable alternative but to submit to the abuse involved.” For example, if a woman has no choice but to submit to her husband’s, relatives’ or employers’ wishes – resulting in her recruitment or transfer into an exploitative situation – an abuse of power or position of responsibility occurs. The criteria in the second element of the definition only apply if the person trafficked is aged eighteen or over; when young persons under eighteen are involved, coercion or deception does not have to be shown.”

In Niger, slavery has been banned on several occasions: first of all under the colonial regime³, and also on 5 May, 2003, when Niger’s Parliament voted unanimously to bring in legislation that made slavery a criminal offence. This was Law 2003-25 of 13 June 2003 reforming the penal code which dated from 1961. Article 270-2 of the new code is very clear: “reducing others to slavery or inciting them to alienate their freedom or dignity or that of any dependants for the purpose of turning them into slaves is punishable by a prison sentence of ten to thirty years and by a fine of 1,000,000 to 5,000,000 francs.” Other provisions that strengthen the applicability of the law include Article 270-5, which stipulates that: “Any association duly registered at least one year before the facts and mandated by its statutes to fight against slavery or similar practices, may bring criminal indemnity action to obtain compensation for damages caused by offences that violate the criminal law on slavery.”

Niger does, therefore, have international and domestic instruments that enable it to fight effectively against slavery. Unfortunately, because of the lack of political will from the ruling elites, the often dishonest ways of gaining power and the interests attached to a social position which facilitates access to state emoluments, slavery-like practices persist under the guise of ‘cultural traditions’. Furthermore, no laws or policies that specifically address human trafficking exist in Niger. Victims of such practices either do not have a voice or

¹ David Weissbrodt, *Abolishing Slavery and its Contemporary Forms*, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, New York and Genève 2002: 13

² Ibid.: 23.

³ By the Decree of December 12, 1905, making slavery a criminal offence, signed by the Governor-General of French West Africa.

they are silenced, when in fact the problem could be solved by simply implementing the law.

Among the forms of slavery still practised in Niger is one in which the victims are known as “wahaya” (plural: wahayu) or ‘sa daka⁴’. A wahaya is a female of slave status bought by a man; a woman would not buy a wahaya because sexual exploitation is implicit in the term. A wahaya is usually acquired through the sale by her master or mistress. It is also possible, though rare according to our research, for a wahaya to be bought from her own parents. The wahaya moves in with her master’s family and works for him and his wife (or wives) without remuneration and with no form of recourse other than her master’s favour.

The wahaya practice may be exercised by any man who so desires, whether he has one wife or several. It is common practice in certain circles in Niger and Nigeria. In Nigeria, noblemen and wealthy individuals obtain wahayu by means of cross-border trafficking from Niger, with most wahayu coming from the Tahoua region. While in the other regions of Niger it is very rare to own a wahaya, in the Tahoua region it has become a sign of affluence amongst dignitaries, tradesmen and large-scale farmers and stockbreeders.

The practice was introduced in the area following the conquest of Adar by the Touaregs, led by Agabba in 1772. The arrival of the Touaregs in the entire Adar region (the present Tahoua region) was accompanied by slavery-like practices particular to Touareg society. Slaves were, and in some cases still are, used for all types of work. In contrast with female slaves, however, wahayu are usually bought by new masters when they are young, and the children born as a result of sexual relations with the master are considered to be legitimate. When a female slave becomes pregnant, the child is never recognized by the master.

From a religious perspective, some people believe that possession of a wahaya is legitimised by a certain interpretation of verse 3 of surah 4 of the Holy Qur’an, which reads: “... *and if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, then marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four, but if you fear that you will not do justice (between them), then (marry) only one or those your right hand possesses.*” This cannot, however, be used to justify present practice, in particular because wahayu are Muslim and Islam states that a Muslim cannot enslave another Muslim.

4 Sa daka in Hausa literally means ‘put in the bedroom’. In the wahaya context, however, it can be interpreted to mean ‘shove her in the bedroom!’, with the intention to have sexual relations being implicit.

THE WAHAYA PRACTICE

In Niger, the wahaya phenomenon is practised mainly in the Tahoua region, and more particularly in the Illela, Bouza, Madaoua and Konni districts. To collect the information for this report, a research team comprising a lead researcher (Moussa Zangaou), four further male and female researchers and two coordinators was set up by Timidria, with the help of Anti-Slavery International. The team toured the aforementioned areas for a preliminary identification of the nature and extent of the practice. Then, the researchers received relevant training before returning to the areas to gather information using an interview guide and questionnaires. Data was collected in Nigeria in the affected states of Sokoto, Kano, Kaduna and Zaria. Only female researchers conducted interviews in northern Nigeria because it is not permitted for a man to enter another man's household compound.

In the course of the interviews led by Moussa Zangaou, wahayu women reported that they came from nomadic groups in Arzorori, Galma, Tambaye, Tajaé and Nobi. These regions are known by Timidria as the 'triangle of shame' given its experience of fighting against slavery in this region. According to Zangaou, the Touaregs of this triangle are the sole suppliers of young black Touareg girls – specifically of slave status – as wahayu. Indeed, the survey of 165 wahayu women revealed that 129 are of slave descent. This status makes these girls very vulnerable to being sold as wahayu by their families' 'masters' or even by their own parents, driven by the poverty in which people of slave descent generally live.

The wahayu were bought or exchanged in 80% of cases, at prices ranging from 200,000 CFA francs (€305) to 400,000 CFA francs (€610). Typically the master who had negotiated and sold the victim would pocket the sum involved. It sometimes happened that the mother received a fraction of the proceeds of the sale, but this was never more than one-tenth of the amount. Wahayu are sold at a young age: according to Zangaou's survey, the average age of the girls was between 9 and 11 in 43% of cases and between 12 and 14 in 40% of cases. Overall, 83% of wahayu were sold before they reached the age of 15.

The supply for the wahayu 'market' comes from the Touaregs in the above-mentioned groups, while demand is either local, i.e. from the Tahoua region, or from outside – especially from Nigeria and in particular the northern States (Kano, Katsina, Zaria). At local level, demand comes from farmers and tradesmen. In Nigeria, noblemen and wealthy tradespeople constitute the clientele for the sale of wahayu. Transactions are managed by intermediaries who are usually Touaregs or Hausa who frequent the Touareg community.

The process involves initiating discussions with a member of the supplier family, typically a tribal chief, to see if there is a young girl of slave status available. If so, the transaction and the delivery of the girl take place in absolute secrecy. Sometimes, according to interviewees, several girls are presented to the buyer so that he may choose between them. If no girls are available, he will extend his enquiries to other tribes and/or settlements of the same tribe. Sometimes a messenger is sent to one of the traditional chiefs of the Arzorori, Galma, Tambaye, Nobi and Tajaé groups, so that they can help identify 'merchandise'. For example, according to Chaibou Sarkin Bouzayé of Wourno, "in the last quarter of 2008, prominent members of the Sultanate of Sokoto went to Zouraré, Tajaé, in search of young wahayu. Three female slaves were presented to them. They declined the offer of these three girls; they were not suitable. A two-month deadline was given to the suppliers to find 'suitable' girls from other nomadic groups. Girls had to be found, because it would be dishonourable for the Touareg elites and their groups to say that they do not have slaves available."

Once bought, the young girl is taken into her new master's family. There, she is given a straw mattress and equipment for her work. Wahayu are never left outside their master's family; they are the permanent slaves of the wife or wives of their master. In addition to household chores, their master might have them work in the fields or taking livestock to pasture. This is very difficult work: taking livestock to pasture does not simply involve watching over and caring for the animals, but also means giving them water drawn up manually from deep wells.

The interviews with wahayu reveal that they are constantly mistreated by the master's legitimate wives who see them as competitors – weak competitors, admittedly, but competitors nonetheless. So nothing is spared them; they face sarcasm, violence, insults, repetitive and contradictory orders and gruelling work. The

wahaya's life is also unstable. Some victims told researchers that in Northern Nigeria, "some rich businessmen simply sell on their wahayu to others when their business is failing, especially when the wahayu have no children."

In some cases, such as that of Matchido Ailale III, the late Sultan of Sokoto, who had 40 wahayu, the possession of wahayu enables the master not only to have extra 'wives' but also to have girls of slave status to accompany and work for his daughters when they marry. H.M., a former wahaya of the Sultan, lived in Sokoto until the Sultan's daughter was married to the son of the Sultan of Zaria. She then became a servant to the Sultan's daughter. Social norms dictate that the daughter of a chief should not be without a large entourage to serve her and demonstrate her high status.

In cases where the master is a farmer, the wahaya usually takes him the meal that she has prepared out to the fields. This gives him the opportunity to satisfy his sexual desires by raping her. In other cases, she serves her master during the day by taking his meal to his bedroom. Often he will ask her for a massage, which is a common and well-known pretext for satisfying his desires. Children born of relations with the master are recognized as legitimate, but are called 'dan wahaya' (wahaya child), so that they know their place. The child of a wahaya is often relegated to the corner of the house where his mother lives, the kitchen or the food storeroom. He is subjected to the same treatment from the legitimate wives and his siblings as his mother, sharing her chores and her misery.

A wahaya lives with an obsessive fear of what might happen to her children. This is because the master's legitimate wives know that a wahaya's children are heirs like their own children and thus attempt to get rid of them by any means. If the wahaya's children are no longer around, their children will inherit more. Moreover, the children of wahayu are fierce competitors, driven by the desire to improve their situation and that of their mother. H. M., one of the three wahayu of the Sultan of Zaria, recounted that she was on good terms with the Sultan's legitimate wives until she gave birth to a boy. Then the threats started. "All three of us were forced to escape, because the legitimate wives had vowed to drive us crazy with sorcery from marabouts [spiritual guides] and charlatans."

In many cases, wahayu fear that their children will be abducted and killed in the frenzied pursuit of wealth and power. Human sacrifice or mutilation of certain organs are persistently rumoured to be common practice, especially in northern Nigeria. T.A., the wahaya of Malam Bouwèye, says: "At one time, my sister feared for her life because other wahayu and their children were disappearing without a trace." So the wahaya, who has no money, family or support, must remain vigilant to foil all these plots, most of which involve sorcery and are designed to destroy her children.

A wahaya's future entails servitude until her strength fails her or her life ends. Some do manage to flee. But when the fugitive returns to her parents, she is usually taken back, either by her original master or by her own parents. Some of those who run away to the towns end up as prostitutes. Others, and especially those who have fled Nigeria, take refuge in the village of Zongon Ablo, in Dogueraoua in the district of Konni, where there is a significant wahayu population. It should not be forgotten that, since the majority of wahayu are sold at a very young age, they have only a vague idea of where they come from. Zongon Ablo has become their refuge and a place where they can start a new life.

Masters often refer to wahayu as their wives. This is an abuse of the term, intended to deflect attention in areas where the practice does not exist. In those areas where possession of a wahaya is commonplace, there is no need to hide one's status as an owner. Introducing a wahaya as one's wife is manifestly a lie because the wahaya practice does not respect the rules that govern marriage.

Marriage in Niger takes place in a number of stages which are observed either completely or in part, irrespective of the socio-cultural group involved. Since the population of Niger is 98% Muslim, the Islamic rules are constant. Some variations exist, often stemming from customs that pre-date the introduction of Islam.

In an Islamic marriage, there are two essential prerequisites:

- the marriage proposal;

- payment of the *Mahr*⁵, which is translated in Hausa and in the majority of Niger languages by the term *sadaki*, or ‘dowry’ in English. It is important to understand, however, that this is not the same as a dowry in other cultural traditions, i.e. what the bride brings to the marriage in terms of goods or land.

Marriage proceedings are essentially conducted by proxies. The first stage is the proposal itself which is made by a delegation acting for the bridegroom and headed by an *Alwali*, or ‘main representative’. The proposal is received by the bride’s representatives who are also headed by an *Alwali*. The proposal usually takes the form of a gift symbolizing the intention (*kyawta* in Hausa or *souji* in Zarma). The gift is generally a certain sum of money, and it is on this occasion that the representatives of the future bridegroom formally ask for the girl’s hand in marriage. The gift then ‘does the rounds’ of the whole family and friends. The same girl may receive several gifts from a number of suitors, and the parents are free to spend the gift or put it towards their daughter’s ‘trousseau’. If the money is spent and the family finally chooses someone else, the successful suitor will take it upon himself to reimburse the losing suitor.

The *Mahr* is actually given to the bride’s parents, usually on the day of the marriage ceremony. In town it might amount to 50,000 CFA francs. It can also be in gold pieces or take the form of an animal (usually a camel in nomadic communities, or one or more cows). The *Mahr* is the cornerstone of the marriage. It is a woman’s own possession and must under no circumstances go to anyone else. It is presented publicly on the day of the wedding and the guests are witness to its payment either in full or in part. If the guests vouch for what they have witnessed, the marriage will be blessed in the form of a *fatiah* (Qur’anic reading). The festivities begin a few days before the blessing and end a few days afterwards. In the event of divorce, if it is pronounced against the wife, she has to repay the amount of the *Mahr*.

When the husband has several legitimate wives (Islam allows four wives on the condition that they are treated equally), conjugal life is divided into ‘turns’. The days are split into turns of equal duration for each wife. The husband spends the night or nights with the wife whose turn it is. During the day, he listens to her and she takes responsibility for the whole family’s subsistence. When each wife has her own room in the house and the husband does not, he goes from one bedroom to another, depending on whose turn it is. When he does have his own room, it is the wives who go to him, in turn, and serve him both day and night. This arrangement is bound by strict rules which are drawn up by mutual agreement between the husband and his wives, and they have to be scrupulously respected. Any failure to do so will result in a dispute which may have to be settled by the *cadi* (Islamic judge), the chief, the judge or the *Alwali*.

None of this applies, however, in the case of a wahaya. She is not, therefore, ‘married’ because:

- there is no proposal of marriage and, above all, there are no *Alwali*. It is the two *Alwali* who would take care of problems that the couple may encounter, providing advice and, if necessary, restoring stability by counselling the couple who, in most cases, are learning to live together;
- no *Mahr* is paid; without this, there is no marriage;
- there is no ceremony and therefore no witnesses;
- there is no *fatiah* (Qur’anic reading);
- there is no divorce from a wahaya since no marital union has taken place or been blessed;
- a wahaya does not have her turn, as only legitimate wives have rights to conjugal life. A wahaya is used on occasion for sexual gratification, but stealthily and in secret.

The wahaya practice may be described as a form of slavery applying to women and girls bought by men who use them for labour and sexual gratification. It is a practice that violates all international conventions and dispositions against slavery. Overall, it violates:

- The League of Nations Convention of 25 September 1926, which defined slavery as “the status of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”. As we will see in the stories that follow, wahayu are bought and unequivocally bear the status of slaves;

5 “And give women [that you marry] their *Mahr* (dowry that the husband has to give to the wife when they marry) freely”, surah 4, verse 4

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, which proclaims: “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude: slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms”;
- The Supplementary UN Convention of 1956, which obliges States to abolish both slavery and institutions and practices similar to slavery, including debt bondage and serfdom, but also, and above all with regard to women, any institution or practice whereby: “a woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group”;
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, adopted on 27 June 1981 at the 18th Conference of the Organization of African Unity, which entered into force on 21 October 1986 and was then ratified by Niger on 15 July 1986. Article 5 of the Charter stipulates that: “Everyone has the right to respect for the inherent dignity of the human person and the recognition of his legal status. All forms of exploitation and degradation of man particularly slavery, trafficking in persons, physical or mental torture, and inhuman or cruel inhuman or degrading treatment are prohibited”;
- The 1998 Resolution of the United Nations Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, which recommended that “transborder trafficking of women and young girls for sexual exploitation is a contemporary form of slavery and constitutes a serious violation of human rights”;
- ILO Convention 182, adopted by the General Conference of the International Labour Organization in 1999, which concerns the worst forms of child labour.
- The UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (2000).
- The Constitution of the 7th Republic of Niger which, in its preamble, affirms: “our attachment to the principles of pluralist democracy and to human rights, as defined by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 1981 African Charter on Human and People’s Rights” and enshrines its adherence to “the regional and international legal instruments for the protection and promotion of human rights, as signed and ratified by Niger”.
- Law 2003-25 of 13 June 2003, which criminalises the practice of slavery in Niger.

The personal stories of the ten wahayu, together with the story of an owner of wahayu who explains his motives, clearly show that the wahaya phenomenon is a slavery-like practice that violates international and national standards. From the story of Tebrakote who was 80 at the time of her interview, to that of Talamt who was only 17, the testimonies allow us to understand the life of a wahaya: the conditions of her purchase, her despair and hopes, and her relationships with the master, fellow wahayu and with legitimate wives and their children. Each story will contribute to the effort to free those still enslaved; each will help to reintegrate those who have escaped and each will further the quest for a solution to freeing all wahayu.

The human rights organization Timidria, which has been fighting against slavery and all forms of discrimination for nearly 20 years, is committed to eradicating the wahaya practice. We must recall Hadidjatou Mani, who was imprisoned simply for daring to marry a man of her choice after she was freed from her wahaya status by her former master, the father of her children. How many women are like Hadidjatou, hidden away in settlements in Niger, in households in towns, exiled in Nigeria and elsewhere? Our immediate objective is to secure their freedom. Timidria will call on the authorities to do their work: ensure justice and protect all citizens without discrimination.

PERSONAL STORIES

TIKIRIT AMOUDAR, 45

Mother of 9 children, 6 of whom are girls

I do not know how I got the status of slave that meant that I later became a wahaya. My parents were from Allokoto, beyond Sabonga. My mother is still alive and I visit her from time to time. She was also a wahaya. I became a wahaya when I was 10, and I lived as one for 15 years.

My master, a man called Amola Zono, lived in his family village of Toudoun Adaraoua. He was Hausa. I was his only wahaya and my clothes set me apart from his four legal wives. They dressed decently, while my clothes barely covered me. He used to come to me at night in secret for sex. My workload was heavy: fetching water for all the family; fetching water for livestock (over 100 cattle); hulling and pounding grain (millet and sorghum) for food and foodstuffs; providing firewood for the family; large preparations – the day before and on the days of community gatherings in the master’s fields during the rainy season (for 30 to 40 people); washing up; preparing the mistresses’ and the master’s beds; looking after the children and keeping the courtyard clean – these were my tasks until my master’s death in 1988.

Even as a legally married woman, my daily workload is still heavy, what with watering the animals and gathering the wood that I sell in Dogueraoua so that we can eat every day. But in contrast to when I was a wahaya, what I produce or earn is mine alone, whereas before both my work and I belonged to my master. I just had to obey him. I could never make any suggestions; I was just a ‘thing’, a multi-purpose object to be used at any time, however and wherever.

Now I feel equal to other women in the village even though they always remind me of the status I inherited whenever we have arguments: slave! Women like me (who were or are still wahaya) – the so-called ‘bouzoua’ – can’t stand the wahaya status that sets us apart from the other women in the village. The practice only affects black Touareg women. But it’s not as bad as before, thanks to the work of human rights organisations like Timidria. Everyone is careful not to call another person a slave openly. We are now insulted for being poor (my children too), because we are a poor family.

At least I’m capable of making my own decisions. Most importantly, I’m seen as a woman entitled to a normal conjugal life with my husband. It is because I make decisions in our household that my husband and I together decided to send our children first to Qu’ranic school and then, more recently, to ordinary school. My two children, Tagat and Elou, are in junior school. All our hopes rest on them. I want all my children to go to school because that’s where you learn things; you learn about your rights and responsibilities. One day my children will help to free us all from servitude and my daughters will refuse to become wahaya. They’ll have responsibilities in the social and community life of their village and they’ll help to ease my workload, and that of the village women in general.

It’s the custom that a wahaya’s workload is only reduced once she gives her master a baby boy, but the boy has to grow up and ask for this to happen. My master’s children could have inherited me when their father died. My four children (two girls and two boys) stayed with their father’s relatives, and they maintain the link with my master’s family. I don’t really know how my children are treated but, given the discrimination in our society, I doubt that they are fully accepted as part of their father’s family circle. I hope one day to live together with all my children in the same place.

Mother of four children, including a legally married 19-year old daughter. A wahaya since 1975.

My parents come from Allakato. My father is dead. I still don't know how my mother came to be a slave and then Alfagah's wahaya. She is still in the process of paying the necessary levy to buy her freedom, but she is still in debt to her master Alfagah, so he could force her back into slavery at any time. She had two girls, including me, and two boys. We all belong to her master. She is trying to secure her freedom by getting together some money to give to her master.

I was sold to my current master, Ebawèye Zono, here in Toudoun Adaraoua, by Alfagah, who lives in Nobi. Only Alfagah knows the price I was sold for. So I am now in this awful situation as wahaya to my master Ebawèye Zono, head of the village of Toudoun Adaraoua. He has two wives and 11 children; seven with his legal wives and four with me. I have to do all the work. My master treats my children worse than his legal wives' children, especially when it comes to gifts – my children always get less.

He has set me up in a shabby little house and he comes to me in secret at night for sex. He's never stayed the whole night with me because he's scared of being seen spending the night with a slave. He always sneaks in and rushes back. I have no objections to that. I put up with it against my will, because I don't know how to get the money to buy my freedom.

I have three boys, aged 17, 14 and 4; the girl is eight months. They are not yet old enough to ask for the master to reduce my workload. My situation as a wahaya is so difficult; it's such a burden. I keep on raising it with my master: in the little time that he spends with me, I always ask him to release me by marrying me legally. I even threatened to complain to the Timidria sub-section in Dogueraoua, whose chairman, Almou Wandara, is well-known for his efforts against this kind of injustice.

I'll admit I'm impatient about the casual way my master treats my request, because I'm still working away doing all these unpaid, thankless and endless chores, and all the while I'm getting older. With every day that goes by, my chances of enjoying my freedom as an emancipated and active woman with a normal conjugal life are going down. I want to have all the rights of a married woman, but it seems my master just isn't going to say yes. I want to appeal to Timidria, just like Hadidjatou did; I know her case very well. Enough is enough; my life is a waste. It's a pointless existence and I'm not respected in the village, especially in this little house where I'm isolated from everyone [*she cries*]. The master's children call me 'bouzoua' [slave]; they only very rarely call me by my real name, by accident.

*Has no information about her biological parents, who she never knew.
Having escaped her situation as a wahaya, she has started a new life in Zongon Ablo.*

I think my parents became slaves during a raid led by Touareg chiefs. I know nothing about them, except that they lived with their masters and were still serving them when I was sold. Because of the unstable life I've had, I'm essentially an orphan now, because I don't even know if my parents are still alive. I have no other family members; my family is just my husband, my mother Tassoubarat⁶ and my village, Zongon Ablo.

I was probably seven years old when I was separated from my parents who lived in a village called Chanyassou, in the Tahoua region, towards Bagaroua. So I was very young and hadn't really had the chance to enjoy my childhood with all the other girls and boys in my village when, one day, my parents' master sold me to a Hausa who took me away from all the childhood games with the children in my village. This meant that my status suddenly changed, much earlier than what was (and is) common among the light-skinned Touareg girls and the Hausa girls (I was sold to the Hausa). They get married when they are at least 15 years old and their marriages were, and still are, big celebrations with ceremonies, wedding parties, dancing, rejoicing and festivities all with the sound of the 'tende'⁷ and drumming. I had none of this; I was just given an order, which was to follow my buyer, who took me away in a vehicle. I can only remember the beginning of the journey (my home village of Chanyassou) and the end of it (Nigeria).

The masters think I have no opinions of any worth, even now I'm older. It was the same for my parents who were, it seems, their property. I didn't really have a childhood, just a troubled time of disregard, chores, abuse, submission and orders to be carried out immediately. That was my childhood.

I was sold three times to three different masters. In 12 years, I had three false 'marriages'. I only remember the first names of my three masters, all of whom were Hausa, and where they lived: I was first sold to master Bargo in Farara; re-sold to master Mabrouk Dogo in Salka, and the third time in Sokoto, to master Ailale, whom I remember best. I will never forget the times I changed masters. I can still feel it now, especially when I went to my third master's house, as I was older by then. By 12, I'd started to feel bitter, as I'd realised that I was different from the others I lived with. It was awful. I was faced with this fate and my parents couldn't do anything about it. I asked myself: what is happening to me and why? Then one day I made the decision to escape and run away from any relationship – either with the master (Ailale) or with my parents, who would have just wanted to bring me back and have me continue to put up with the same suffering, in the name of fate.

At Ailale's, there were seven women of wahaya status and we all spoke Tamacheq. Four of us had children with our master, but we all lived in the same courtyard, separated from the legal wives of the master. The legal wives would give out food to those of us who didn't have children, and they would do that only after we had finished our domestic chores. The wahayu were all sympathetic to each other. Some would occasionally get secret visits from the master. He seemed to choose between the four wahayu who had already had children in no apparent order, so that one might get a number of demands for sex while the others were helplessly waiting for him to show an interest in them.

Still, neither the wahayu with children, nor us ever had the right to the 'turns' that each legitimate wife had. We certainly couldn't ask him to treat us more equally. We were all treated like and called 'bouzoua', which means 'slave' in Tamacheq. We were Ailale's slaves, so we had to take care of all the domestic work all day. To be cruel, our master would often refer loudly to the fact that he had bought us. While those with children had the privilege of occasional sex in secret with our master, all of us still had to clean the courtyard, gather firewood and drinking water for the family, hulling millet or sorghum, depending on the season, and pounding them into flour to make meals for the legal wives, the master, and his children, whenever they wanted.

⁶ Tassoubarat is well known as a wise woman. In the village of Zongon Ablo, she acts as a confidant, counsellor and a mediator of conflicts between former wahayu. She seems to enjoy the sincere trust and affection of the former wahayu.

⁷ A Touareg musical instrument, consisting of a tambourine covered with goatskin.

We had to carry out orders from the master and his wives. Night and day were just the same; each moment that passed brought more work. Only speed and skill in carrying out orders allowed us to avoid the master's punishments, especially if he was angry at us because of the tales his legitimate wives had been telling him. When that happened we'd be called 'chegiya', which means 'bastard' or 'bouzoua banza' – 'useless slave'.

I had to look after the children of the mistresses and the four wahayu. I would rock them, and at the slightest movement, I'd rush over and put them on my back, or I'd take them in my arms until they went back to sleep. I used to panic when they cried, for fear of making the master or his wives angry. If they cried in my absence, I had to answer for it. It was like I was the only thing that would calm them or make them better when the children cried or got upset. I was programmed to predict any disturbance in the children of the mistresses, who would just lounge around doing absolutely nothing. They only moved to eat, sleep, wake up, give orders and visit relatives. I dreaded it when they travelled, because it was my role to prepare a horse for them and to follow behind on foot, carrying the child they were nursing on my back, both on the outward and return journeys. That always made me want to find a way out.

Before I was transferred to my third master, my parents managed to have me back for a while. I then managed to get together a little money, which I kept with me. This money let me plan my escape. One day I decided to run away, though I was very scared. It took days and nights of absolute anxiety, passing through villages and hamlets and asking where the black Touareg lived. I can't recall all the villages I went through, only that I held on to the name of Zongon Ablo. Zongon Ablo is a village where 80% of the inhabitants, mostly women, are originally from other places. I focused all my attention on getting there. I know I went through Guidan Iddar. Zongon Ablo! I had finally arrived.

Here, less than a month after I arrived, someone asked for my hand in (legal) marriage. I accepted the offer without hesitation. I was young and childless. I really felt revitalised. From being subjugated, objectified, and treated like an animal, I was suddenly in charge of my own household. After the marriage was consummated, I could see the difference between my situation as a wahaya and that of a wife who is consulted and who participates in social and community life. I see my life as having had four phases, three of which were the same because my views were completely ignored by those in control. The fourth, my marriage to Abou, is based on my own free will. I am really happy with this and I am holding onto it. We have two children: Tazou, a boy whose twin sister died, and a girl called Akarat.

My husband is poor; we live on farm produce and money transfers from abroad. For example, last winter, he wasn't here but he sent me 20,000 CFA francs to take care of work in the fields and to pay the farmhands. From time to time he sends me clothes and money. I accept him in his poverty and I am more and more responsible for rebuilding my future. In addition to his income abroad, my husband has a cow and a field. I also make mats that I sell at the market. Like all the others who live in Zongon Ablo, I am fulfilled as a person through my income. At least I have aspirations; this makes me a human being with needs, aware of those needs and fighting to fulfil them.

The women of my status and I – that is, the ex-wahayu of the village – form a group around a woman called Tassoubarat, a very patient woman who we really trust. She acts as a mediator between us and our husbands.

My greatest wish is to erase my former masters from my memory. I hope I never meet them again. That's my answer to the question about my relationship with these inhuman people who make humans into objects. I don't want to see them again! I am sorry for the men and women who still endure the agony of this pure form of discrimination. I tell myself that something must be done for them: we must help them to free themselves so that they can enjoy life and human existence ... their state and condition is just deprivation, a prison.

Sold at the age of 10 in Nigeria.

After escaping, she rebuilt her life in Zongon Ablo, earning a living by making mats

My parents died around the time I had my first child. They were of slave descent because their parents had been captured in a slave raid led by the Touaregs against their native village. That's how I inherited the slave status that I still have now.

I was very young, maybe 10 years old, when I was sold. I never had the fun childhood that I could see other little girls had, especially at the age I was sold. For example, I never played 'mother' to things and boys never played at being my husband in games. I grew up in my master's compound, so I was under his control. I was never allowed to go out and play with the children from the village, and I never had the time anyway. I felt a strong need within me to indulge in play and games like these girls and boys who would run around, scampering here and there, laughing, shouting, dancing and singing ... but I never had any of that. Today, I want to relive my childhood in a different way to the one I experienced, which was unfortunately traumatic.

My master Aïniss, who lived in Falali in Nigeria, had two legal wives at the time I escaped from him. I was very little when he bought me from my parents' master. My workload was awful, unimaginable, and the physical and psychological abuse was hellish and inhuman. I was responsible for all the domestic work: drawing water from the well, gathering firewood, washing up, washing clothes, cleaning the compound, caring for the children, pounding grain and cooking. When the animals came back from pasture, I would tie them up for the night and untie them in the morning. I ate little or nothing at all. My best days were the days when my master and mistresses did not have guests. I could eat their leftovers to fill my stomach.

My master was very mean and hit me more than anyone else. I still remember the last beating he gave me. He beat me until I bled and I still have the mark of the blows I got on my left shoulder. He showed me no mercy. He considered me to have no soul. He would have sex with me quickly and secretly, without my consent or any warning. He would use me for pleasure while hate burned in my heart. It was this that made me leave my master's home.

After all this suffering, I managed to escape from the hellish life of a wahaya. I arrived at Zongon Ablo after a stay in Guidan Iddar. Shortly afterwards, I met Abatol, who was single and had no children, and he asked to marry me. I accepted his proposal. We had five children, including two twins, but all of them died. We do basic crafts: Abatol makes ropes and I make mats.

In my view, Zongon Ablo is the ideal village. Most of the women, men, old people and young people are like me. Everyone knows everyone else's past. No one mocks anyone else – at least, not in my neighbourhood – because everyone has had a tragic past. Zongon Ablo is a village of tragedies: everyone who lives here came unexpectedly, and all of us, especially the women, share a low former social status. About 80% of us, the women of Ablo, are fugitives. That's why we get on and help each other without any difficulties.

I have no relationship with my former master. There's no reason for me to stay in contact with him. I learned about 10 years after I left that he had died. I can hardly bear to hear his name for all the pain he caused me.

*Sold 'like a goat at the age of 12 or 13 to a stranger because he had money'.
Escaped and living in Zongon Ablo*

The master-slave relationship that links my parents to my buyer dates back to the beginning of time. I had always seen that there were two types of people in families: the masters as the supreme chiefs, who issued orders and demands, and their slaves, who were responsible for all of the master and mistresses' chores. The slaves would generally live cramped in a corner of the courtyard or of their owners' rooms. It was so normal that no one thought anything of it.

I was 12 or 13 when I was sold to a Hausa from Nigeria who lived in Sokoto. My childhood was destroyed because I was a girl of slave status. That was what justified me being sold like a goat to a stranger because he had money – I was born a slave. You know, I still don't even know the names of my masters. But I don't care to know the names of these criminals now. As soon as I arrived in the family, I understood from the tasks I was assigned, from the attitudes and behaviour that I observed and from the treatment I received, that I had the status of a different type of person. I had been told that I would be joining my new husband, but that was a lie. I realised that I was the victim of a pure, but disguised, trade in people. People made money out of it. It was the sale of 'slave' people on an invisible market – not a physical market, but one that was fully operational.

Considered to be a kind of machine, I'd fetch water and firewood for the master's family and take care of his two legal wives and children. I washed clothes and kitchenware and cleaned the courtyard and the houses of the two legal wives. They were different from me in their dress; they wore the veil while I just had a piece of cloth on my head.

My master, a man named Bouwèye, would secretly have relations with me and I had a boy and a girl. My children and I were mistreated: we were constantly called slaves, even when being asked to do chores or favours. The master, his wives and their children all called us slaves, first because I am a slave by descent and second because I was bought by Bouwèye. We would spend every waking moment doing endless work and being taunted with insults and injustices. Neighbours and other people in the village saw us in the same way and said it at every opportunity. We had no right to defend ourselves, even if we were attacked. It was our duty to be insulted without responding or to be beaten without fighting back. We were only appreciated when we responded to such humiliation with resignation.

It became unbearable for me and for my children. They needed protection and affection from me but all they got was this kind of treatment. I could never show them any moral support, which I'm sure they needed from me. With the children increasingly aware of my inability to be a mother to them, I began preparing a plan to get us out of our worsening situation. I wanted to escape with my children. But it wasn't possible. So when Peulh cattle-herds arrived from Niger, I took the opportunity to flee, abandoning my children.

I haven't seen them since, and I don't even know if they're still alive. No one has ever spoken of them to me; no one has said that they have seen them anywhere. I have always regretted this, but there's nothing I can do now. When I think about it, I want to die, even though according to tradition and practice, the children belong to their father. He alone gets custody in cases of separation or if the mother leaves the household.

Since arriving in the village of Zongon Ablo, I feel free. I am single with no children but I admit that I much prefer my life now to the one that my children and I had in my ex-master's compound. These days, I do everything by myself and for myself. I depend on no one. Materially, I am poor but I am fiercely proud of my freedom. Still, time has taken its toll on me – after 80 years of living in a foreign land, without children or close family, life is difficult. I find it hard to bear my current situation, which is just suffering: mistreated in childhood having been sold, and a long life without a husband or children. I resent my parents for having allowed their master to give me such an awful life.

TAGAT AJAKOKE

55 years of slavery. Age unknown; mother of a wahaya and grandmother of two wahayu.

I was born in Nobi [6km east of Malbaza in the district of Konni]. I am a slave by descent. I grew up with my parents in full slavery and no one ever told me how we got our slave status. My mother is the slave of Ajad, who was called to Tambaye by his uncle Illikou, chief of the Ekelane (now Idinet) tribe. Illikou was getting old and didn't have a son, so he called on Ajad, his nephew, to lead the tribe. That is how my mother and I ended up in Tambaye, when I was still a baby.

My mother was married to my father when she had to leave with her master. But in practice a slave isn't considered to have a husband, just a sexual partner, a sire to produce more slaves for the master. So my father had to watch helplessly as his 'wife' and daughter were taken away. My mother was forced to leave my father and follow her master because the master said so. A female slave does not take orders from a slave husband because he has no rights over her. My father could do nothing, just like all the other slaves abused in this way. The Touareg masters were like gods on earth.

I learned that my father remarried after we went to live in Nobi, and I have younger siblings. But I've never been back to Nobi, so I don't know my father or the children he had after we left. Really, at that time the Touareg had such power that even if your mother and father were around, you'd only look to your masters. I don't know what they did to us to make us like that ... Some people think that they used black magic or sorcery on our food to make us completely indifferent to our real parents. So that's how my mother was made to forget my father. A slave doesn't marry for love, but because her master has told her to. She's like a mare that is bred with a horse for offspring.

So I was a baby when the master Ajad took us from Nobi. My mother was mostly in charge of preparing Ajad's meals. He liked 'goumba' – a ball of uncooked millet. Ajad liked it so much that even when he woke up in the night, he'd want some. It was like cigarettes for him. So I inherited the task from my mother. It became my main task. I would prepare his 'goumba' every day and take it to his wife and then go back to my mother. I was never allowed to get the meal wrong; if I did I'd be humiliated, beaten and punished by being deprived of food. Ajad did not want to taste or find a single grain of sand in his millet, so we had to sort through the millet for his ball in the mortar, however much there was. Whenever he had to travel, even if it was to Madaoua, as long as he was staying overnight, I had to go with him. I would prepare the millet ball and carry it on my head, whatever the distance.

I went to the Azawak seven times with him and Ahar, the slave who would carry the ropes to tie up the camels (which they made him wear, rather than the animals, who were not yet carrying anything). The first four times, I went as a girl, and the three others as a 'married' woman. But my 'husband' Ajakoke was never asked whether he wanted to go with me or not for the seasonal migration and salt collection. As he is also a slave for the same master on his mother's side, we're a slave couple – just instruments for the master's gratification.

Of the seven times that I went to the Azawak, I can count the number of times that Ahar and I rode on an animal on the tip of my finger. We would travel in a caravan: the master would be on horseback with the other Touaregs; us slaves had to go on foot. We were never allowed to say that we were tired; if you did you'd be in trouble. I remember Ahar once said he was tired and they chased him with a camel. The master tried to kill him by making the camel lie on him; luckily he is small and he managed to dodge the camel that they were trying to force on him. Another time, we met an acquaintance of the master from near Bouza while we were walking and herding dozens of camels that were not carrying anything, and she told him, joking, to let us ride the camels. But when he saw us getting up on the camel, Ajad ordered us to get down, shouting, "Hey, get down! A slave shouldn't be tiring out a camel, and anyway, a good slave doesn't get tired." I will never forget that incident and those words.

Another year, after locusts had ruined all our crops, we went with him to buy supplies in Dogondoutchi, a town in the Dosso region in Arewa country. The master Ajad did the same thing all the way to Dogondoutchi. Ahar and I were on foot all the way there. It was only on the way back that we were allowed to ride on the

camels, and even then it was just to make sure that the supplies didn't fall off. In all my life as a slave, that was the trip that upset me the most: imagine where Ingall, Abalak, Tchintabaraden and Dogondoutchi are in relation to Madaoua (Tambaye) ... Dogondoutchi is at least 400km and Tchintabaraden is at least 300km from where we lived.

My good fortune came when, after 20 years of pure slavery, Taridat, my 'husband's' older sister, was chosen to be the wahaya of the master. This meant that we became his in-laws and that the abuse should stop. And so it was for the rest of his life. He freed the whole family. But he died young. His son Achekou, who doesn't know the rules and has no sense of honour, went back on all the privileges his father had given us.

When Achekou took over the village, he expressly said that anyone who wanted to be free would have to buy their freedom, as his father had not consulted the family before liberating the slaves en masse. He was essentially looking to get money to reclaim leadership of the chiefdom, which had been taken over by another family. He was young when his father died and didn't live in Tambaye. He had sought refuge in Tabotaki (north Bouza) and had declined the offer of being chief of the tribe. His mother had to pray a lot to get him to come back to the village. But on his return he really took back control. So he was looking for money off the backs of all the slaves that his father had already freed. He went back on the release of all my relatives, who are actually the in-laws of his half-brother Achik. That was the basis of all the conflicts up until Achekou's death. One after the other, he sold:

- Tast and her three children: Moukourou, Ibiliss and Tikirit;
- two of Tikirit's daughters: Tekawelt (in Sokoto) and Talli (in Kiri);
- two of Tekawelt's daughters who are currently in Sokoto;
- Tazawalt, my own daughter, and her two daughters Akarat and Abada, all sold in Sokoto,
- and me (I bought my freedom).

As you can see, in our family alone, Achekou and his son Amalaye (the current village chief) have sold 12 people, of whom four have died. The eight others still live with their buyers, who are both their master and 'husband'.

My husband Ajakoke was a slave until his death in 1996. He was Illikou's groom or 'Zagui' and then Ajad's shepherd, until his older sister became Ajad's wahaya and he was freed. When Achekou then denied the releases granted by his father, my husband rebelled and challenged Achekou to come and take him to market to sell him. Achekou got scared and left him alone.

I spent 55 years in slavery before I bought my freedom with seven goats, six bags of millet and a donkey. I already had a son (Ailale) and a daughter (Tazawalt) when I freed myself. My son Ailale died at the age of 45 with the status of slave; he was no longer working specifically for the masters (as his father had rebelled), but they regarded him as their slave. From time to time they gave him certain tasks and missions, without payment.

Tazawalt, his older sister, married a slave (Idimi Na Sarki) with whom she had four slave children – two girls (Akarat and Abada) and two boys (Elou and Bilal). But even after she produced four slave children for the master (Achekou), he still sold her as a wahaya to El Hadj Akinichi in Sokoto. Some years later, her daughters grew up and had the same fate as their mother. Akarat was sold as a wahaya to Sarkin Koudou, a nobleman from the family of the Sultan of Sokoto. She 'divorced' him after eight years of so-called 'marriage' because he refused to let her parents visit. The 'husband' did not want family visits at all and like all slave-owners, he refused to let Akarat leave to visit her parents. Today she is a free woman, married to Ofène and mother to four children, all of whom are free.

Abada, her younger sister, was sold to El Hadj Azawèye from Tabani, Sokoto. She got 'divorced' later and remarried in Niamey, where she still lives. She is currently free and mother to four children. She fled her 'husband' for treating her unequally to the other wahaya, who was also from Tambaye. She is the last of my line to be a wahaya (until 1996). Furthermore, this girl wasn't even a slave; the master Achekou and his marabout [spiritual guide] made her a slave. Her mother was freed when Abada was nursing, and a baby who has the milk of a free woman is automatically free. Unfortunately Amalaye, Achekou's son, completely rejected this principle.

In brief, my whole life has been made up of frustrations related to slavery:

- separation from my father at the age of one, and then a refusal to let me visit my father, younger siblings and uncles;
- the sale of my only daughter. After she had four children here in the village, she was led like a goat to Nigeria where she was sold in Sokoto;
- the sale of my two granddaughters, the daughters of my only daughter Tazawalt;
- my own purchase of my freedom, which has impoverished me permanently; since I gave away my goats, my donkey and my food supplies, I still haven't been able to rebuild my herd;
- current threats to take away my children's fields by the former slave-owners.

The slave really never has what we call a life of honour. Even now, parents teach their children that such a person or such a group of people have been born to be their slaves, so they can use them how and when they want. I would argue that we haven't seen the end of slavery yet. If it hadn't been for the intervention of Timidria, our children wouldn't have farmland because the slave-owners said that the fields that they currently farm belong to their great-grandparents – even though, as I said at the beginning, I first came to Nobi with their grandfather. When he arrived, the grandfather of my children was already farming his fields, which he cleared himself with his two brothers. All of them left for Nigeria to escape the horrors of slavery. But *they* still say that the fields belong to them. That means that slavery is not over.

Free for 17 years

I come from the family of Ahole Ayass, who was the slave of Illikou, the slave-master who created the Ekelane (formerly Idinet) tribe. Ahole Ayass is my maternal grandfather, the father of my mother Tantout who is also a slave. My grandmother Tagat, the wife of Ahole Ayass, is a slave of Ajad, Illikou's nephew, who came from Nobi.

There was a collective liberation after the 'marriage' of Taridat, the older sister of my grandfather Ajakoke, to their master Ajad. She had a child with him, named Azorog Ajad. Now in the Touareg tradition, when a wahaya gives a master a child, he inherits all his own relatives who are the slaves of his father, and as he cannot own his own relatives, our whole line is automatically freed. But after Ajad's death, his son Achekou went back on all the releases granted by his father, which forced our family line back into slavery. After this act of betrayal, Achekou demanded that all the aunts and uncles of his younger brother Azorog (son of the wahaya Taridat) should buy their freedom if they want to be free. This led to the re-enslavement of:

- Tast, the younger sister of Azorog's mother;
- Ajakoke, my grandfather
- Tagat, my grandmother;
- Tikirit, Tast's daughter, and her two daughters and two brothers;
- Tantout, my mother, who was given to El Hadj Akinichi, a Sokoto businessman;
- my sister, given to El Hadj Azawèye Sokoto;
- and myself, given to Sarkin Koudou, one of the nobles of the court of the Sultan of Sokoto, who died last year [2007].

That is to say that our family is made up of both freed slaves and captive slaves, except for those born after our relatives freed themselves. Our lineage apparently came from the Aïr, with the Touaregs. But according to reliable sources, our great-grandfather was not a slave. He apparently came with the white Touaregs and he was rich, so they tried to make him come and settle with them in Tambaye. When he did come, they threatened him into becoming their slave, saying they would take away all his animals. They knew he had no bargaining power. Betrayal is in the nature of the Touaregs.

As a young child, I didn't know that our family had the stigma of slavery. I grew up in Zango, a hamlet of Idinet, with my father Idimi and my mother Tantout. It was when I became a teenager and the young men of the village began to ask for my hand in marriage that everyone found out. The first young man who came forward to marry me was Amadal Alako, but he had to withdraw his offer because he was told I was a slave and so any children he had with me would be slaves. I found out and asked my mother to explain. It was only then that I understood.

When the master, the late Achekou, saw that I had lots of suitors, he went to Sokoto to sell me as a 'wahaya' to Sarkin Koudou, without even informing my parents and grandparents, who were still alive and living just next door to him. Nobody in my family has ever known my exact price, let alone received a penny. He spent his money and didn't purchase anything for the young so-called bride (no bed, mattress, cups, pots – nothing). It was my father Idimi, the slave of Moukourou, who was responsible for taking me to Sokoto with my grandmother Tagat. It was the darkest day of my life. While we usually accompany friends who are getting married with camels loaded with goods for the bride and with songs, drumming and griots, I had only a mattress and three mats, no ceremony, and the marriage was not made official. We had also left by night to avoid stares and critical comments. It was really a third-rate marriage.

When we left the village, I was overtaken with panic, distress and disappointment at the thought of what awaited me while all other friends would get married in the village to young men of their choice. My grandmother, who had lived in slavery all her life, consoled me and told me that I would be happy because I would live in the palace of Sarkin Musulmi (the Sultan of Sokoto) where life would be good. My 'husband' would be Sarkin Koudou, a relative of the Sultan who was a nobleman of the Sultanate.

When I arrived at the house I found four legal wives and nine other wahayu, and I became the 10th. All the wahayu came from the Tahoua region. Both the legal wives and wahayu had not been informed of my arrival and they were shocked. They later told me that Sarkin Koudou had promised them not to buy any more wahayu. I was set up in an alcove that was too small even for a bed. We spent the night there and two days later, my grandmother went home. I then learned that I had been bought to allow the oldest of the nine slaves to rest. It was a kind of reward and consolation for her.

Overall, life wasn't easy because 10 wahayu living together led to little more than arguments and sneaky tactics, resulting in regular fights and endless conflicts. I had a good relationship with Chidit and Tililit, who were from Tambaye, and also with Tabarat, the master's wife whom I served (each wahaya was appointed to one of the wives). Tabarat was the oldest of the master's wives, and the wisest. But in general, the interaction between the wahayu and the mistresses (the master's wives) was full of tensions. There were endless fights, especially between the legal wives. I remember, in my second year at Sokoto, the third wife Abada and Chidit fought for almost a day. Sarkin Koudou was away on a trip. The Sultan had to send Galadima to mediate. As soon as he left, they started again. This did not please our 'husband' on his return and he sent both of them away. It was not until weeks later and after much negotiation that he accepted them back.

Another feature of life in our home was the suspicion around spells and sorcery. The wives suspected each other of casting spells, especially the legal wives. Our main problem with them was that they did not want any wahaya to give birth to a boy. For them, boys would be future competitors for the royalty reserved for their children. This meant that our children would have problems living with theirs later. They considered that only their children were entitled to future royalty.

Their father made no distinction between the children, whether at naming ceremonies or in any interaction, or with food and clothing. He didn't have much time for the children in general, but when he was there, they received the same treatment. He had his own courtyard and only received the wife whose turn it was, or the woman he wanted. He would sometimes come and sit in the courtyard to talk and laugh with the whole family without distinction, especially on Sundays and Fridays. He would give advice and bring up and deal with cases of conflict when he was informed of them. He was not often informed about household matters; only when there were incidents or situations such as illnesses, pregnancies, births or fights. He was benevolent and hated fights. To avoid conflict, he found a marabout [spiritual guide] for us, who taught us at home.

When it came to pocket money, called the petty cash supply, he entrusted the senior wife with money in his absence. A little money was reserved for the care of family members in case of illness or other unforeseen circumstances. The senior wife would give us a third (1/3) of the amount she reserved for herself and the three other legal wives. The wahayu and our children were left in desperate need. Sometimes we wouldn't have soap or breakfast for the children and we had no right to ask for it.

That was at the heart of my problems with the senior wife. One day my five-month old child was seriously ill and Sarki (the 'chief') was in Kaduna, so I had asked for money for a taxi and doctor's fee, or otherwise, I asked her to tell the family driver to take us to the clinic. The wife in question, Abaggue, refused, saying she could not part with the family's money for 'the health of a slave'. She said it just to hurt me and she succeeded. We often heard upsetting words like this from the four legal wives of our master, but never from him. My child's health then got much worse. I had to approach Abada, the third wife, whose brother was a nurse who was sympathetic to me. When the master arrived, I complained to him. The other nine wahayu supported me. It was then that he began to give our share of the money to Chidit, the oldest wahaya of the 10 of us. She is from the same village as me (Tambaye).

Another incident that upset me was after the death of this child, as a result of another illness. Four of my relatives came to present their condolences. Sarki was generally against visits from relatives; he never wanted to hear that a relative of one of his wahaya had come. Our relatives from Niger did not know that in Nigeria, women are closed away and inaccessible, even to women. So they come from time to time. Once, my mother came to visit with her younger brother Ilitinine, who was going on to Lagos in Nigeria. The master told me through Abaggue, the senior wife, that: "Sarki has had enough of your relatives' visits. It costs him money and it's against the principles of our religion. You must stop all this."

This was a blow to me, especially as it was in front of my mother, who was ashamed. I spent the day crying. I sold my skirts to help her travel back to Tambaye and two weeks later, during my eighth year there, I decided to leave. I gave my clothes and shoes and skirts to a woman who wouldn't tell on me. Then I took advantage of the marriage ceremonies of the master's eldest daughter, which were happening in another neighbourhood of Sokoto. On the morning of the wedding, we had to go and greet the bride's relatives. I slipped into the group and once we arrived at the bride's house I took advantage of the crowd to get away. I took a taxi to the station, and by the night I was already in Gada. I spent the night with an uncle in Gada and the next day I continued on foot, reaching Tambaye after six hours of walking.

When the other women noticed my absence, they quickly sent the driver to inform the dogaris [guards] in charge of the security of the home. The chief was informed and a search began. The day after my arrival, a dogari came to Amalaye's house, the son of my late master, to see if I had come back to my native village, which I had. Amalaye sent for me, but I told the messenger that my patience was at its limit and that I could not continue in a life in which neither my relatives nor I had any respect.

My parents recognised the abuse that my family and I had suffered at Sarkin Koudou's house and didn't send me back. And while my so-called 'husband' was counting on my master to send me back, the latter no longer had any control over me because he had already sold me. I didn't have to answer to him any more. That's what the Hausa from Sokoto didn't understand. In their view, the slave is part of a human herd that the master can draw on as he wishes. So that is how my so-called marriage ended, because I categorically refused to return to it.

After the separation from my 'husband' (master) Sarkin Koudou, I moved in properly with my parents in Idinet. After four months and 10 days, I married Elou Sarkin Noma, with whom I spent two years before divorcing him and remarrying Ofène, to whom I am still married today. The divorce from my second husband was solely due to the difficulty of living with his first wife, who was almost unbearable. In her insults and provocations, she kept on calling me a slave in need of a husband who came to cause trouble in her family. I repeatedly complained to our husband so that she would end her insults, but it didn't work. We brought our differences to the village chief, who gave her a warning. But as her objective was to make me leave, she persisted. One day, in the absence of the husband and his brothers, we fought and I hit her. As she knows that my husband loved me, she told him to choose between me and her. But as he has older children with her, he divorced me.

Since I've been with Ofène, I haven't had this kind of problem. We have now been married for 15 years and my life is acceptable, even though my husband is extremely poor.

Enslaved in Sokoto at the time of the interview.

I was sold in 2007 after coming to visit my sister Chilek, the wahaya of Soho Dan Amali from Sokoto. My sister had also been sold by our father in Sokoto. Then I was sold to an old neighbourhood marabout [spiritual guide] called Malam Bouwèye, who is originally from the village of Womo, but is living in Sokoto. I was sold by my own father who made a lot of money. Soho Dan Amali negotiated my sale.

It was a plot devised by my father, Soho Dan Amali and Malam Bouwèye of Womo. I had come to Sokoto with my father. He then went back to Tambaye and left me with my older sister. During my stay, I became very ill for about 35 days. I had awful nightmares in which I thought I was being strangled. After I recovered, my sister told me to return home. She promised to give my money for my transport, because I was about to be sold. That's when my father returned. He spoke with the other two men, then he got the money and left. Next, I was sent 'to the mill'. As I didn't know the neighbourhood, I was told to go to the house of the old marabout, Malam Bouwèye, as I would find the mill there. I was naive.

Once in the courtyard, I was locked in and told that I would now be the wife (wahaya) of this old marabout, who was as old as my father. I would say that not only was I forced into this situation, but I was also abducted. I wanted to cry for help but I didn't want to cause trouble for my father. But I said that I had to see my sister to understand what was happening. I was told to wait for Malam.

That evening after the maghrib, the dusk prayer, my sister came and took me to a room and told me not to make a fuss as our father had already taken the money and left. She told me to accept the situation because it was better that our father should get the money from selling us, rather than being sold by our mother's masters. I spent the whole night crying. My sister spent the night with me to comfort me, explaining that it would be better to live in Sokoto with an old man than to live in the bush with a young man. The old man also made many promises and said he would pay for my father to go on pilgrimage to Mecca in 2010. So that's how I ended up as the wahaya of the old man Malam Bouwèye. All hope of marrying a young man of my choice vanished. But I have decided that I will leave here sooner or later.

What hurts me most is that it was my own father who played the role of the slave-owner, as if he does not want me in Tambaye. It's as if the money is worth more to him than me. Worse, my older sister Chilek, who talked me into staying by convincing me that life is good here, has just run away herself. She recently remarried a man of her choice in Tambaye.

There is a kind of harmony between me and Malam's legitimate wives. His first wife is already old. The second wife is young, but we get along well. I get along especially well with the first wahaya. She does everything for me; she's really nice to me. Although they are my co-wives, I am very well-liked by the two mistresses. I think of them as my mothers; I always tell them the truth, and I do anything they ask of me happily. I know that my father got me into this awful situation. Also, the two women see me as their daughter and encourage me to stay, saying that God is in control of everything. They say they want me to stay so that they can teach me the Qur'an and religious practice. I think it's because these women are educated and have studied the Qur'an a great deal that they are not like other mistresses.

But as for my husband, I don't like him for various reasons. I am only living with this marabout because I don't have a choice – I was sold by my own father. First, I was supposed to marry a young man from my village whom I really loved. Secondly, I am ashamed of my status as a wahaya, mainly because of how people perceive me. There was no religious marriage ceremony. And finally, he is so old for me; too old to be my husband.

However, he loves me very much. He does things for me that he doesn't do for his legitimate wives. He is negotiating with me so that I stay with him, but I'm looking for a way out. As soon as I get the chance, I'll leave. We're kept like prisoners. It's only because the guard knows that Malam Bouwèye has gone to Mecca that I'm able to talk to you; otherwise the guard would be in trouble. He is a fanatical man.

Sold in 2000 by the Chief of Nobu; currently a wahaya with 4 children

I learned at a very young age that we were the slaves of the Chief of Tajayé. I have only seen my father twice. He works for the master with the other slaves, and as I got older I went into domestic work. But I didn't understand the real extent of the situation: I thought we were working for our relatives. Each year we (the whole family) would move to Gorongo, Sokoto, for 6-7 months for the seasonal migration. Every so often I would learn that some young girl had been sold or some other person had bought his freedom. But it was only when I was sold myself that I realised the true extent of slavery.

I was sold in 2000 when I came to Guiyawa with my relatives for the seasonal migration. I didn't know what was happening. The same day I was sent to an owner, Elhadj Ajagol. I was told that I would have to live with him as his wife. It was there that I learned that I was a wahaya. There was also another wahaya called Tantout who came from Touboutt and the Tajayé tribe like me (abused by the master, she later fled back to her parents). Then there was a third wahaya called Mass with whom I currently live. Mass is now 25 and has two children.

The compound is large with bedrooms separated by walls. There's one woman in each of these. As soon as you come in, you see two courtyards facing each other: one belongs to the first wife and the other is mine. On the right there is another courtyard, separated by a door, belonging to the second wahaya. A little further along is the legitimate wife. Before Tantout's escape, us three wahayu all lived together in one room, but now we have our own rooms. The legal wives' rooms are all decorated up to the ceiling, with beds and other furniture. My room just has an old, dirty mattress.

Before, the wahayu did all the household chores for the legitimate wives, but today, given the size of the family and the vast amount of domestic chores, all legitimate wives and wahayu work together. Each woman prepares her food individually, and the one who is receiving her husband/master that night is the one who has to cook his meal; the others just cook for their children. Our master takes care of the family's needs and doesn't discriminate. He wanted harmony in the home, which is why he decided that all his wives should do domestic chores together and engage in a little trade, so that they can all take care of their day-to-day needs. So in addition to household chores, we have small businesses.

Our children are treated the same by their father as the children of the legitimate wives. They have the same privileges and their father loves them equally. Still, the legitimate wives boast about their status to the wahayu. They consider themselves superior to the wahayu. For example, if they want to make my son cry, they call him 'the bouzoua's son', or 'son of a slave'. He doesn't like that term, and he often ends up crying and saying, "I am Hausa like my father".

TABALOLE BOUWÈYE

Wahaya of three successive masters, originally from the village of Tadamawa, Sabon Guida

- First master: the late chief Aïlale III (Sarkin Muslim, Sokoto)
- Second master: Sarkin Zaborakn, chief Chéhou Idriss of Zaria
- Current 'husband': Bouwèye, an immigrant from Niger in Sokoto

I was sold by my own father when the family went to Sokoto, Nigeria, for the seasonal migration. At that time, the chief Aïlale used to order his guards to search the region to find girls for sale. I was very small then, but age didn't matter. So I was presented and selected to go and live with the chief as a slave. A few years later, I was given to the Sultan's daughter as a slave to accompany her to the home of her husband, the Sultan of Zaria's son, Chief Idriss. When I arrived at the house of my new mistress's husband, the Sultan decided to take me as a wahaya.

At that time, there were three other wahayu, including Choukalte from Guidan Iddar (Dogueraoua commune, Niger), Tamolate and Tadarast (from Malbaza), who all went on to escape. I also ended up escaping 17 years ago. I returned to live with the late Aïlale III of Sokoto, which was the only home I knew because I had been raised there. I didn't know any of my own family. I was sold young. At that time, my mother was no longer living; I was raised by my stepmother. You know how it feels to be raised by a woman who is not your mother; I was the only one in my family to go through that. When my father went back to his native village, he told everyone I was dead, but he'd actually sold me with the help of my stepmother.

I got on well with the other wahayu at Sarkin Zazan's because we were all from the same region. We were even related, as we found out later through many conversations and relatives' visits. We were also united because of the hostility and meanness of the chief's legal wives. They didn't want us there; they believed that our children would be their children's rivals for the Sultanate. They would humiliate us and hold us in contempt. As soon as a wahaya gives birth, she is no longer welcome in the house. The legal wives made it clear that we were not allowed to have more than two children; if we did, they'd do something about it. They'd put spells on us until we went mad or got seriously ill. That's how they got us all to leave after we gave birth.

As I said before, I was a servant for the daughter of Chief Aïlale III of Sokoto. He would buy girls to re-sell or as servants for his daughters. Of course I was doing all the housework (cleaning the compound, childcare, cooking). I looked after the legitimate wives' children with the other wahayu. There was no room for error when we did the housework; if we made the slightest mistake, we'd be told off and humiliated and we wouldn't be allowed to speak to justify ourselves. We were forced to remain silent and suffer.

I was loved by my 'husband'. He would do everything for me. I was more loved than the other women; I was only forced to leave the house because of the threats from his legal wives, and also because I had understood my situation as a wahaya was a sham marriage without any religious ceremony. I got into that situation because I was young and naive because of the ignorance of parents who sell their own daughters for money. What shocks me is that I was the only girl in my family to be sold.

The wahayu's children are under the care of their father and have the same privileges as the other children. My child Eguèf was raised by the legitimate wives of the Chief. As he grew up, he looked for me and found me. Thank God, today he does everything for me. He keeps me. He is not looked down on by his social circle. At the moment, he is leading a campaign to be elected into a political post, which makes me very proud. It shows that there is no difference between our children. In fact, traditionally it is thought that certain political posts and titles are reserved for the sons of wahayu. Most chiefs, like the Emir of Sokoto, are born to wahayu.

After the birth of my son and over time, the other legitimate wives started to resent me. They were quick to remind me of my wahaya status if we had a minor argument. It disgusted me and led us to leave 17 years ago. I left Zaria to return and settle in Sokoto at the Sultan's, which was the only home I knew. I was remarried to a Hausa from Sokoto, and then to a Touareg named Bouwèye, with whom I still live. He helped

me to find my family. They were horrified when I went back. Until she died, my grandmother was still grieving the despicable thing my father did in selling me for a bit of money. My grandmother swore never to forgive my father for what he did.

Petrol supplier and farmer; owner of two wahayu

My family are Hausa from Dogueraoua, free men. They were in business and agriculture and used to travel all the way to Nigeria, across the border from Niger. Through them, I got involved in trade, which is profitable in this area. I was making from 2,000 to 2,500 bales of grain (millet, sorghum, etc). That's how I established a life of ease for myself. My means allowed me to become wealthy and to own slaves, like all the rich men in the region.

The idea of holding a 'second class wife' was raised to me by a blacksmith whose name I've forgotten. He had approached me to see if I were interested in owning a wahaya. At the time, you just had to be rich and you could own as much as you wanted. I certainly had the means to procure a wahaya. According to the intermediary, one obtained a wahaya from a system of false marriage ceremonies to which people would be invited and they'd act just like it was a normal marriage. People gather and are publicly offered kola nuts and dates. The master and the intermediary of the sale usually live in the same village. The existence of an intermediary for the sale is necessary. Parents of the girls sold under this disguised form of marriage were always aware of what their master had in store for their daughters, but they never had any objections. It was seen as normal and didn't bother anyone.

Myself, the intermediary and the master of my two wahayu all lived in Ayawane. The parents of my wahayu knew that their daughter had been sold to me by Awayass, their master. The first was about 10 years old when she was sold to me. I 'groomed' her for three years before I started sleeping with her. The second was already grown up when I bought her.

I used to own four legal wives and two wahayu. These wahayu were responsible for all kinds of jobs and chores for the upkeep of the extended family. They used to fetch water, cook for everyone in my compound, do the washing and the washing up, and they'd go into the bush to gather and bring home firewood.

To be honest, because I had bought them, I strongly felt that they were slaves that I had paid for and that it was their duty to obey my orders under all circumstances. They are always visible because they are always busy, while my legal wives are housed at the back of my compound and are not accessible to just anyone, as our religion prescribes. No one is surprised by this, and everyone was happy with their situation. I would occasionally go to the wahayu for relations, and I would also take turns with my legal wives. In this way I had two children with my first wahaya, including one girl, but unfortunately both died, and then two more when I released her and married her, who both survived.

I already knew that the wahaya practice was contrary to Islam. But the situation was such that Touareg chiefs and scholars profited from the sale of those people considered to be 'low class' (called 'bouzayé' [slave]) and therefore continued to practise the phenomenon, which was practised in the time of 'Jihad', or holy wars. The ignorance of victims of slavery has really contributed to the perpetuation of the wahaya practice.

I was shamefully benefitting from the practice, but it was on my conscience, right up until I learned that civil society organizations like Timidria, whose local representative I used to know well, are fighting against the phenomenon. Indeed, I was a Muslim and yet I had six wives (or four wives and two wahayu) in my compound, even though I only had the right to four. To keep in accordance with the law, I would have to release two of them. So that's how I first divorced one of my four legal wives and then married my first wahaya after freeing her. In 2008, I made a deal with my older wife (who had already reached menopause), where I offered her a ticket to go on pilgrimage to the holy places of Islam (Mecca) and in exchange, she accepts that on her return from Saudi Arabia, she will not be considered as one of my heirs. Above all, she gives up the right to be included in the division of 'turns' between my wives. My intention now is to free and then immediately marry my second wahaya.

I actually have a plan to have one hundred (100) children. This might sound utopian in modern society, as spacing between births is recommended, not only because of the physical suffering of women, but also more importantly, in my view, to ensure that the children have a good upbringing. But I personally am not worried

about the size of my family. I have the means, in the broadest sense, to meet the material and socio-educational needs of my children.

ENDING THE WAHAYA PRACTICE

In the 21st century, it is hard to believe that there are still people who oppress others by taking them as slaves. We now focus on how to develop human rights, end child labour, eradicate the serfdom practised by certain landowners and save women from forced prostitution. But through the accounts here we can learn about practices that we considered long abolished. Yet the wahaya practice is considered normal in many social groups in Niger and Nigeria. It took the heroic fight of Hadidjatou Mani Koro, after which the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice ruled against the State of Niger, before many people in Niger and across Africa even knew such a horrific practice existed.

The personal stories here give us an insight into a world in which young girls are sold, where repeated sexual abuse is considered normal, where certain women are believed to have no soul, and where certain children are treated as inferior to others. It is a world of endless work, cruelty and attempts to flee in destitution in the hope of starting a new life.

Among the women victims who shared their traumatic experiences was Tabalolte Bouwèye, who was sold to three different masters and lived in palaces even as she slaved away for her masters' wives. She is comforted now that her son, fathered by her master, has overcome many obstacles to obtain a senior political position. But she will always resent being sold by her own father. Another girl, aged only 17, shares Tabalolte's bitterness as she was also sold by her own father. She had to accept that it was better to be sold by her own father than by her mother's masters, as slavery traditions would usually dictate. At just 17, she was forced to live with a 'husband' that she did not like. And Tagat Sala did not know how old she was, but she knew that she had endured 55 years of slavery. She has watched helplessly as her daughter and granddaughters have become wahayu. 160 other cases of wahayu were documented in this research project.

Timidria and Anti-Slavery International are committed to eradicating the wahaya practice, both in Niger and elsewhere. To do so, we urge everyone to play their part.

10 action points:

- 1) **Organise regular information and awareness-raising campaigns** on slavery throughout Niger, with a focus on regions where slavery or slavery-like practices persist. The campaigns should highlight the illegality of slavery and of the wahaya practice as a form of slavery. It should also promote the rights of women, especially relating to marriage.
- 2) **Enforce law no. 2003-25 of 13 June 2003**, which criminalises slavery, as well as anti-trafficking legislation and international standards against slavery. Civil society and international actors must also hold the Niger government accountable for its compliance with the international conventions it has ratified.
- 3) **Organise training on slavery practices for the judiciary, police and border officials** as well as national consultations on the eradication of slavery including state actors, traditional chiefs, religious leaders and civil society to guide and inform the work of a national anti-slavery agency.
- 4) **Investigate slavery practices to identify and prevent the activities of individuals and networks involved** (e.g. further investigation into the wahaya practice in Tahoua and other regions; the establishment of monitoring groups in affected areas to alert the State to cases).
- 5) **Provide assistance to wahayu** identified through investigations and monitoring activities (for example, facilitating releases; developing existing programmes of legal clinics; support for socio-economic integration including income-generating activities, vocational training, etc). The State must set up a compensation fund for victims so that they can start a new life without the prospect of destitution forcing them back into slavery. For wahayu identified in Nigeria, the government must take the requisite diplomatic measures for their repatriation.

- 6) **Support the children of wahayu** as wards of the State, to ensure their access to school or vocational training.
- 7) **Promote socio-economic investment** in the regions affected by slavery, to empower vulnerable families of slave descent and to promote the economic independence of women. Civil society and international organizations should also implement socio-economic development projects for communities vulnerable to this practice.
- 8) **Invest in education** and ensure universal access to education, especially in areas where slavery practices persist. The national curriculum should include a focus on non-discrimination and gender equality.
- 9) Civil society, particularly human rights defenders, must continue to fight against slavery and the wahaya practice, in particular by **denouncing perpetrators and others complicit in the practice to the political and judicial authorities**. The government should support the work of these actors. Such action will help ensure the release of wahayu, bring perpetrators to justice and empower vulnerable women and wahayu, so that they might demand their rights themselves with the support of their communities.
- 10) **Create a national anti-slavery agency** to coordinate and oversee all the strategic action points recommended here.

JUSTICE

The best way to end the wahaya practice is to enforce the law. Human rights organizations advocate law enforcement as a means to liberate and successfully reintegrate wahayu, so that their children might suffer no ill effects of the life of cruelty endured by their mothers.

Hadidjatou Mani Koraou took the legal route and won an incontestable victory. Hadidjatou was a wahaya from the age of 12, when she was sold for 240,000 CFA to Elhadj Souleymane Naroua, who was 46 years old at the time (1996). He already had four wives and seven other wahayu. Hadidjatou carried out domestic and agricultural work, for which she was never paid, and was subjected to regular beatings and rape. She had four children, of whom only two survived.

In August 2005, Timidria led a campaign to promote the new law against slavery in Niger. Elhadj Souleymane became aware of this and to avoid falling foul of the law, he gave Hadidjatou a certificate of release, with the intention of marrying her immediately. But as soon as Hadidjatou realised that she was being freed, she took her certificate and escaped with the help of her brother. She was just 21 at the time and had endured nine years of slavery.

In 2006, Hadidjatou submitted a request to the civil and customary court to recover her full freedom. The court granted this on the grounds that there had never been a real marriage between her and Elhadj Souleymane, as there had been no ceremony or dowry. Hadidjatou was allowed to rebuild her life. But Elhadj Souleymane appealed to the family court of Konni and obtained a reversal of the first ruling; Hadidjatou should not be allowed to live independently from Elhadj Souleymane. Hadidjatou appealed to the Supreme Court of Niger, which revoked the decision of the Konni court and requested that it should rule on the case again. While awaiting the decision of the Konni court, Hadidjatou married a man of her own choice and had a baby soon afterwards.

As soon as Elhadj Souleymane discovered this in January 2007, he filed a complaint with the Konni police department, which led to charges of bigamy being brought against Hadidjatou. He also laid claim to her new baby as his property. In May 2007 the family court of Konni sentenced Hadidjatou, her husband and her brother to six months' imprisonment and set a fine of 50,000 CFA for bigamy. Even though they appealed this, they were still imprisoned while the process continued.

In May 2007, Hadidjatou filed a complaint against Elhadj Souleymane for the crime of slavery. At the same time, the family court of Konni, which had been instructed by the Supreme Court to review its decision, finally granted Hadidjatou the right to divorce Elhadj Souleymane; a ruling he appealed.

On April 7, 2008, Hadidjatou took her case to the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the grounds that the government had failed to implement the law against slavery. The Government of Niger was accused not only of failing to protect Hadidjatou from slavery, but also of continuing to legitimise the practice through its customary law, which discriminates against women and is in direct conflict with its own criminal code and various international standards. On October 27, 2008, this Court ruled against the State of Niger for failing to protect Hadidjatou from slavery. Aged 24, she was finally free and received compensation of 10,000,000 CFA from the State of Niger.

However, Elhadj Souleymane, who was given a sentence of one year in prison and a fine of \$1,000, has yet to be located and detained. The status of the seven other wahayu is unknown, as are the whereabouts of Hadidjatou's first two children with Elhadj Souleymane. All may still be enslaved.

This is the story of one woman's fight for justice, but there are many women who remain enslaved. We are now calling on the government of Niger to take the necessary steps to ensure that each wahaya is freed and compensated, as Hadidjatou was. Timidria urges all citizens to join their voices to this call for enforcement of the law of the Republic.