

Niger cancels French operating permit for major uranium mine



A file photo of Imouraren Mine situated in northern Niger

Niamey, June 21 (RHC)-- Niger has canceled the operational permit of French nuclear fuel producer Orano at one of the largest uranium mines globally amid the African country's strained relations with the West.

The company announced on Thursday that it was not included in the operations at the Imouraren mine in northern Niger, where approximately 200,000 tons of the metal are located, primarily utilized for nuclear power and weaponry.

"Orano takes note of the decision by the Niger authorities to withdraw from its subsidiary Imouraren SA its license to work the deposit," the company said in a statement.

The decision came after Niger made a commitment to reassess mining agreements within the nation. The mining ministry had issued a cautionary statement stating that Orano's license would be revoked if progress on development had not commenced by June 19.

Imouraren was scheduled to commence mining operations in 2015; however, progress was halted due to the decline in global uranium prices following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident.

The presence of the French company in Niger dates back to 1971. While the uranium mine at Arkokan has been shut down since 2021, Orano continues to operate another uranium mine in the northern region of Arlit, despite the challenges it refers to as "logistical" in nature.

The country situated in West Africa, possesses the highest-quality uranium ores on the African continent. Additionally, it holds the position of being the seventh-largest producer of uranium globally. In 2022, Niger supplied approximately 25% of the natural uranium to European nuclear power plants, as reported by Euratom.

Niger's military led by General Abdourahamane Tiani ousted the Western-backed former president Mohamed Bazoum last July, and formed a government that has strained relations with some Western countries.

The Nigerian government has also taken a stance against France by expelling French troops stationed in the country, slamming the colonial history of the European state in their country.

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