

## Orano signs partnership agreement with government of Niger

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The general agreement covers the Imouraren project, the continued operation of the Somaïr mine, the remediation of the Cominak mine, and Orano's social commitment in Niger.



The agreement was signed in Naimey by Maes and Yacouba (pictured) and Niger's Minister of Finance Ahmat Jidou (Image: Orano)

The agreement reflects the parties' efforts to reinforce a strong, sustainable relationship, and combines Niger's desire to maximise the economic and financial outcomes of its operating mines, preserve Somaïr's economic sustainability, and limit the socio-economic impact of the closure of Cominak in 2021, Orano said.

The agreement confirms that Orano "will pursue the search for future options" for mining the Imouraren deposit, for which a roadmap has been drawn up with an investment budget of EUR85 million (USD94 million) to demonstrate the technical, environmental, and economic applicability of using in-situ leach (ISL) methods, in which uranium is recovered from an ore body by dissolving it and pumping it to the surface. "This method would enable improving the project's economic balance, making it less risky for all actors while reducing its environmental footprint very significantly, Orano said.

The Imouraren SA joint venture has already announced plans to begin a pilot programme to investigate using ISL at the project in Niger next year, with a view to making an investment decision in 2028 if feasibility is confirmed. However, according to *Africanews*, Minister of Mines Ousseini Hadizatou Yacouba said the partners were looking roughly at "a horizon of 10 years" before the start of mining.

The agreement also means that Somaïr, which has been in operation since 1971, will be able to continue operating until 2040, 11 years beyond its currently expected closure, Ousseini said.

As part of the agreement, Orano has committed to invest EUR40 million in social projects, to be implemented by 2030. These will focus on three areas: improving skills; education opportunities for girls; and economic development in the area of energy.

Orano CEO Nicolas Maes said the agreement "confirms the major role of Niger in the global uranium industry" and "renews and sets out future directions" for Orano's industrial and social commitment in Niger. "It is also a testament to our responsible approach, both in the quality of the work to rehabilitate the Cominak site and in the ambitious plan for the Imouraren deposit," he said.

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Somaïr (Société des Mines de l'Air) is 63.4% owned by Orano and 36.66% owned by the State of Niger through Sopamin (Société du Patrimoine des Mines du Niger). The open-pit mine near Arlit has a production capacity of 2000-2500 tU per year. It produced 1996 tU in 2021. Cominak (Compagnie Minière d'Akouta), 59% owned by Orano, 31% by Sopamin (Niger) and 10% by Spanish company Enusa, produced more than 75,000 tU during 47 years of mining. Production ceased in March 2021 following depletion of the mine's resources, and is now undergoing remediation.

Imouraren SA is 66.65% owned by Orano and 33.35% by Sopamin and the State of Niger. Orano was awarded an operating permit to mine the deposit in 2009, but development of the project was suspended in 2015 pending more favourable market conditions.

Researched and written by World Nuclear News

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