

The African Union (AU) announced on Tuesday the suspension of Niger following a coup by the West African state's military in late July.

The AU also reiterated calls for the coup leaders to release elected President Mohamed Bazoum and stand down.

The AU Peace and Security Council said in a communique that it had noted the decision to activate an ECOWAS standby force and asked the AU Commission to assess the economic, social, and security implications of deploying such a force.

It called on all member states to "reject this unconstitutional change of government and to refrain from any action likely to grant legitimacy to the illegal regime in Niger."

The coup last month has caused alarm among Western allies and democratic African states who fear it could allow Islamist groups active in the Sahel region to expand their reach, and give Russia a foothold to increase its influence.

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been trying to negotiate with the junta but says it is ready to send troops into Niger to restore constitutional order if diplomatic efforts fail.