

# The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

May 2021

Friends of Niger PO Box 452 Haverford, PA 19041

In this issue:

1. Board of Directors News
2. Grant Making News and Project Opportunities
3. Niger News Roundup
4. Passing of Judy Irola
5. Zinder nonprofit entrepreneur looking for a business advisor
6. Music & Culture News

## *From the Editors*

---

Dear Readers,

We send our encouragement to those observing Ramadan, especially those in Niger during the height of the hot season this year. The FON Board is excited about launching a new process for projects and we encourage you to check out the introductory info and ways to get involved below. A full announcement with details about our new grant making process will be coming out very soon and will be posted on our website as well as distributed via a distinct email. We've had fun and informative discussions with colleagues in other 'Friends of' groups like Tanzania, Nepal, Burkina Faso and the Portland Oregon RPCV group. Please help us move ahead with your ideas, feedback and enthusiasm.

*Ismaghil Ag Moussa, Amy Wilson*

## **1) Board of Directors News: grateful for active members!** *from President John Baird*

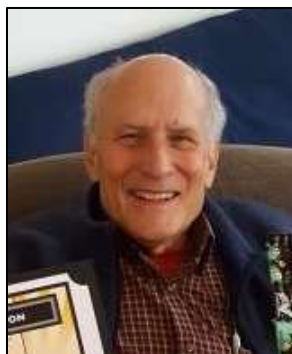
---

### **Appreciation of those who have stepped down**

A huge shout out to Cheryl Turner, Larry Koff and Phyllis Dichter Forbes who have stepped down from the board recently after contributing so much to our organization. Cheryl came on the board in July 2018. She volunteered to serve as Secretary and actively supported the Project Committee work. She was a huge help in getting our records more organized and was able to do some on-site work in Niger through her own work travel. Larry has been all in for the long haul, serving for at least 20 years as Treasurer, investing countless hours in overseeing projects and participating in events celebrating Niger and Peace Corps service. Phyllis came to the board in July 2018 also and graciously applied her leadership skills and vast experience in development and project implementation to our Project Committee. She led the charge to a more systematic and committee-oriented approach. The board is very grateful for the dedication and generosity of these three super board members.



Cheryl Turner



Larry Koff



Phyllis Dichter Forbes (and Richard)

Members can be proud that our small, all-volunteer organization, continues to move toward better management practices and accountability as we work together to serve Niger and its people.

### **Anticipation of those who will step up**

Last year we recruited a great cohort of new board members and this year we are eager to recruit a few more. We believe as we fine-tune the organization, it will become easier for members to jump in to serve in various capacities that advance our mission. Engaging members is an important part of our mission and we believe it is vital to maintaining a productive organization which is an honor and pleasure to serve.

Please consider throwing your hat in the ring for a board position this year.

If you would like to dip your toe in the water, consider volunteering on one of our committees to help advance the mission. Committee members need not be on the board.

- **Finance Committee** – advises on policy, budget, and financial accountability.
- **Project Committee** – manages grant making process to support projects in Niger, reviews proposals, tracks implementation and reports results to board and membership
- **Member Engagement & Outreach Committee**– manages Facebook, newsletter, tracks membership and organizes engagement activities
- **Nominating Committee** – recruits board and committee members, assists with orientation of new board members

Please consider joining our effort through one of these committees. We are stronger and have a wider impact with your involvement! Contact me at [president@friendsofniger.org](mailto:president@friendsofniger.org) or reply to this newsletter to connect and discuss possibilities.

## **2) Grant Making News and Project Opportunities**

---

Friends of Niger is excited to be launching a call for proposals and competitive grant making process in May. We are moving to a twice yearly cycle to receive applications and award funds after a competitive review. The subtle shift will be toward more of a grant-making organization where our committee focuses on selecting projects to fund and sharing the results back with members, donors and the board. We reached out to other *Friends of* groups to borrow best practices and found that others are also retooling to compensate for the absence of PCVs in their host countries.

We reflected back on input you provided in recent surveys to put forward these values and priorities:

### **FON gives priority to projects that:**

- Address a locally identified need
- Are feasible and likely to be successful
- Benefit many people
- Have community support and contributions
- Have a plan to sustain the benefits into the future
- Build local capacity and leadership
- Involve or engage FON member(s) and Niger diaspora
- Can be replicated and adopted by others

Here are some new opportunities for involvement of FON members in supporting project work.

**PROJECT REVIEW** – First, we will be asking for volunteers to help with the review and selection of projects using the detailed criteria we have developed. This revised process will create the opportunity for more folks to participate in project review without necessarily signing on for project management or oversight.

**APPLICANT MENTORING**—With the recognition that some applications will present ideas with merit, yet may not be ready for funding, we want to offer the possibility of identifying mentors to work with applicants to improve proposals. Mentoring would be a voluntary,

limited assignment to work with an applicant to improve a proposal or project idea. Offering this option to applicants will offer some capacity building and in the long run improve the caliber of applications and projects. We feel that this developmental function is best accomplished outside of the committee structure, leaving the committee dedicated to grant making and reporting.

We look forward to doing a test run of this new process and we welcome your involvement, your comments and suggestions.

**Please note**, at the moment we are focusing our attention on funding regular, planned projects and have not decided how we may proceed with more urgent type requests—stay tuned.

We can't leave this topic without recognizing the fantastic help of JoAnn Lewis, who has provided tons of insight and ideas for this effort. **Thank you JoAnn!**

### 3) Niger News Roundup

#### Elections

The new president, Bazoum Mohamed, 61-year-old former interior minister, won 55.75% of the votes against the opposition candidate Mahamane Ousmane who had 44.25%, according to CENI the Election Commission. Mahamane Ousmane, 71 yrs. old, was Niger's first democratically elected president in 1993 until he was toppled in a coup three years later. He contested the results and denounced an electoral hold-up. Right after the presidential results, violent protests erupted in the country especially in Niamey. Supporters of the losing presidential candidate set several buildings on fire, burned tires, and came into heavy exchanges with police.



This election marks the first peaceful transition of power between two democratically elected presidents in Niger.

Former president Mahamadou Issoufou promised that he will not try to change the constitution to remain in power. On February 21st, Issoufou stated that, "I am proud to be the first democratically elected president in our history who will be handing over power to another democratically elected president."

Former president Issoufou, has been awarded the 2020 Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership. The annual prize is granted by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, named after the Sudanese billionaire businessman and philanthropist who founded it. The prize – which includes a US\$5 million award – aims to showcase exceptional role models from the continent and “recognize leaders who have strengthened democracy and human rights for the shared benefit of their people,” Africa News.

The presidential election was dominated by the deaths of eight election officials in the Tillabéri Region, after a mine explosion. The President-elect faces many challenges, education, health, nutrition, poverty, security and corruption.

Links to related news:

Niger ruling party's Bazoum declared winner of presidential election

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-niger-election/niger-ruling-partys-bazoum-declared-winner-of-presidential-election-idUSKBN2AN0JP>

Niger's Issoufou wins \$5 million African leadership prize

<https://www.africanews.com/2021/03/08/niger-s-issoufou-wins-5-million-african-leadership-prize/>

## Deadly Protests Rock Niger Over Contested Election Result

<https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-02-25/violent-protests-rock-niger-over-contested-election-result>

### **Terrorist Attack in Tillaberi Region**

Terrorists have killed around 100 people in two villages in Tillaberi region. The attackers split into two columns to carry out simultaneous attacks on the two villages, which lie seven kilometers (four miles) apart.

The attacks on the villages of Tchoma Bangou and Zaroumadareye occurred on Saturday just as first-round presidential election results were announced. They were waged by terrorists who came riding about 100 motorcycles. The terrorists left 70 civilians dead in Tchoma Bangou and 30 dead in Zaroumadareye. The two villages are 120km (75 miles) north of the capital, Niamey.

The two villages are in the vast and unstable Tillaberi region, which is located in the “tri-border” area, where the porous borders of Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso converge. The area has suffered jihadist assaults for years.

Seven Nigerien soldiers were killed in an ambush in Tillaberi on 21 December. Travel by motorbike has been banned in Tillaberi since last January in a bid to prevent incursions by jihadists riding them.

### **Terrorist Attack in Tahoua Region**

Attacks by suspected jihadists in villages in Niger’s Tahoua region have left 137 people dead, in another massacre that has underscored the huge security challenges facing new President Mohamed Bazoum.

Gunmen arriving on motorbikes attacked the villages of Intazayene, Bakorat and Wistane near the border with Mali, shooting at everything which moved.

Niger's Tillaberi and Tahoua regions, bordering northern Mali, have been facing recurrent armed attacks since 2017 attributed to terrorist groups operating in northern Mali.

Links to related news:

137 killed in deadly attacks on Niger villages <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/africa/137-killed-in-deadly-attacks-on-niger-villages>

100 Civilians Are Reported Dead After Attacks in Niger  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/03/world/africa/niger-attack.html>

### **School Burning in Niamey**

A fire fueled by high winds swept through an elementary school in Niamey, killing 20 children, hospital officials said Wednesday. The kids were attending class at the time the blaze erupted around 4 p.m. and quickly consumed the huts and damaged adjacent buildings. Straw huts that housed some of the classrooms outdoors were completely burned, while there was significant damage to the building itself, leaving scorched classroom furniture scattered in ash.

Straw huts are commonly used to make additional room for students in overcrowded schools throughout the country in urban and rural areas. Schools chronically lack supplies and furniture to meet the demand, and forced to make do with children seated on the floor, sharing supplies and lacking books.





#### Links to related news:

Niger: ‘Total mourning’ as 20 pre-school children perish in fire

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/14/niger-mourns-death-of-20-children-in-school-blaze>

Niger school blaze: Trapped children die in Niamey <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56743719>

#### **4) Passing of Judy Irola**

---

It is with great sadness that we let you know that Judy Irola passed away February 20, 2021 from COVID-19 complications. After serving in Peace Corps in Niger, Judy had a long, celebrated career as a cinematographer with 17 feature films and 40 documentaries, including many award winning productions. Her film, Niger '66 A Peace Corps Diary, reflects this filmmaking experience with its very professional production of a topic near and dear to us. This film can be viewed at our website: <http://www.friendsofniger.org/features/movies/niger-66-a-peace-corps-diary/>

Her colleague Robert Potter created this tribute for her: [https://youtube/-fO\\_TCV7K1I](https://youtube/-fO_TCV7K1I)

More recognition of her career:

- From the International Documentary Association: <https://www.documentary.org/online-feature/judy-irola-trailblazing-filmmaker-and-educator-dies-covid>
- American Society of Cinematographers: <https://theasc.com/news/in-memoriam-judy-irola-asc-1943-2021>
- MS Magazine: Rest In Power: Judy Irola, Trailblazing Feminist Cinematographer: <https://msmagazine.com/2021/03/26/judy-irola-dead-obituary-feminist-cinematographer-women-film/>
- Imdb profile: <https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0410062/>
- USC cinematic arts awards listing: <https://cinema.usc.edu/search.cfm?tokenS=D44D2D573A367EF24765A2AF2B77200361CD4EB5&q=irola>
- Commentary about Niger '66: A Peace Corps Diary 2010: <https://emro.libraries.psu.edu/record/index.php?id=4215>

#### **5) Zinder nonprofit entrepreneur looking for a business advisor**

---

FON member Binta Moustapha, who lives in Zinder, is looking for candidates to act as advisors to her fledgling entrepreneurship program. Ideally candidates would have skills or experience working with design/art work companies or organizations. Her goal is to promote establishment of small scale businesses founded by young Nigeriens based in Zinder, who have acquired a minimum of 10 ten years of formal schooling, an effort she is calling “AFRICAN Street Business School and Entrepreneurship Development Hub”. She is planning to provide training followed by placing students in apprenticeship situations in order to provide more local employment opportunities for young people.

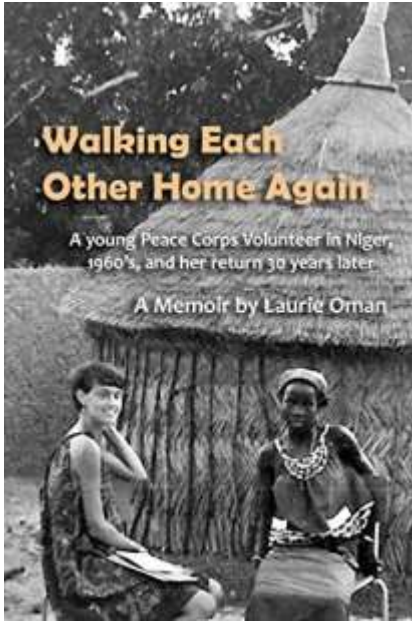
Binta, who is also pursuing a Master’s Degree online, is hoping to be able to communicate with her chosen Business Advisors via some internet-based platform about every two weeks to get advice, coaching and mentorship for her program—and she speaks English for those of you whose French may have gone rusty.

Her project outline can be viewed at:

[https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ttUP\\_VnILUaILwLqRF\\_UvuNcMuQMqMOOtsMrmNPoB2k/e/dit#slide=id.p1](https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1ttUP_VnILUaILwLqRF_UvuNcMuQMqMOOtsMrmNPoB2k/e/dit#slide=id.p1)

Please reply to the Camel Express editor [camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com)

## 6) Music & Culture News



**Walking Each other Home Again, A young Peace Corps Volunteer in Niger, 1960's, and her return 30 years later**

**A Memoir by Laurie Oman**

**Publisher: Oman Publishing 2021**

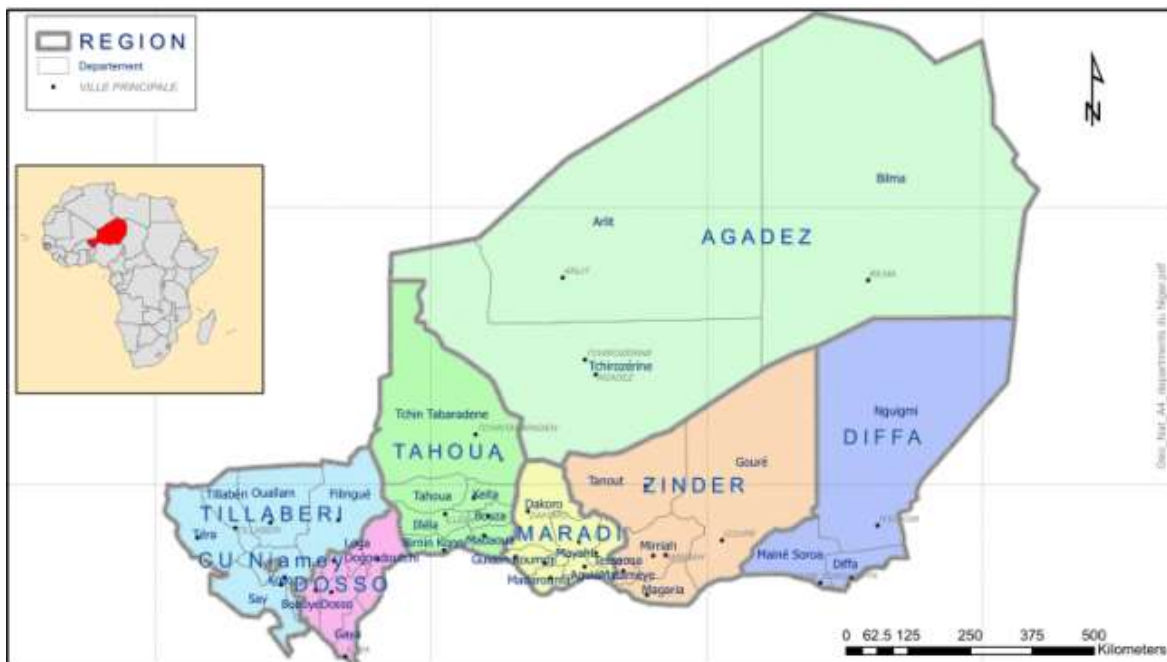
**ISBN 978-0-578-81697-5**

*In her delightful and insightful memoir of a mid-century American girl coming of age as a new bride in a remote Hausa village, Laurie Oman generously shares a unique place and time that will live on in our hearts forever. We are right there with her as she fumbles and faux pas her way into the role of a valued member of the community as a health educator, unprepared emergency midwife, and ultimately trusted friend. So deep were the bonds from her two-year Peace Corps stay in the 1960s, that thirty years later she was invited to return to her beloved village. So we readers get a second chance to meet the dear friends we had come to love, to experience the changes in the village and its inhabitants, and to be with Laurie as her own life is again enriched and transformed by her experiences in Africa.*

## CONNECTING YOU, OUR MEMBERS

WHERE were you?? Can we share?

These are two important questions for which we don't have good answers. Our information for members is spotty and mixed. With updated information about the regions you know and love, we can better help connect and engage members. Please take a moment to go to our website <http://www.friendsofniger.org/about/join-fon/> and fill out a membership form to help provide better info about members. And please indicate if we may share your contact information with other members.



## YOUR DONATIONS FUEL THIS WORK

You may make a donation at any time. To donate now, you can either go to [www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org) to use PayPal, or write a check payable to Friends of Niger and mail to: Friends of Niger PO Box 452 Haverford, PA 19041. Thank you very much!

For more about Friends of Niger:

- Our website (volunteers needed to help with the website): <http://www.friendsofniger.org/>
- Join & follow us at: <https://www.facebook.com/FriendsOfNiger/>
- Submit news topics and articles: [camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:camelexpressnewsletter@gmail.com)
- Contact President John Baird, [president@friendsofniger.org](mailto:president@friendsofniger.org)

***“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.”***

