

# The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

## Friends of Niger Seeking New and Rejuvenated Leadership

FON needs new and younger leadership! Some current Board members would now like to step aside. They were volunteers in the 60's and have served on the Board for many years. Now is the time for others to step forward! Maybe your time living and working in Niger changed your life and has inspired you to commit to the people of Niger. Friends of Niger is 720 souls strong — we can still make a difference!

### Nominations are Open

Please self-nominate. The FON bylaws establish an indirect nomination/election process. The Board consists of a minimum of five members, and can have up to 11 members. From the nominees, the current Board will select the four officers and appoint up to seven additional members-at-large. If there are more than eleven nominations, the Board will post an election with ballots sent to FON members in good standing by the end of May 2016. Please see: <http://www.friendsofniger.org/about/friends-of-niger-bylaws/>

### FON Board Needs

The positions of Board president and vice-president are open. We need new people in these positions. The president tends to the overall management of Friends of Niger, and the vice-president is traditionally the person who oversees the Projects Committee. Realistically, both positions normally require attention several times a month to the affairs of FON; occasionally daily. The Board has quarterly Skype/phone conference meetings and communicates via email otherwise.

### Other Board and Volunteer Needs

Many current Board members are willing to continue and

Please see **Leadership**, Page 4

## Maman Sidikou faces a new challenge: Peace-making for the United Nations in the DRC

By Peter Easton

Dr. Maman Sidikou -- former Niger Ambassador to the United States, recipient of degrees in communication and in educational development from the University of Texas and Florida State University and a longtime FON ally -- began another stage in his career of crisis resolution around the globe this last October. On the heels of a year's work as Chair of the African Union Mission to Somalia, he was named Head of the UN Mission of Stabilization to the Congo and Special Representative of the UN Secretary General to the DRC.

It was not Dr. Sidikou's first mission for United Nations agencies. Since the year 2000, he has served twice with UNICEF in Nigeria, once as UNICEF Team Leader in Afghanistan and once as UN Cluster Coordinator for Education and Culture in Iraq, not to



Maman Sidikou with Ban Ki Moon, UN General Secretary, just last February on a tour of operations in the DRC.

**“The only solution is dialogue”**

Please see **Sidikou**, Page 5

## Letter from the FON President

Dear Friends of Niger Members,

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger is pleased to announce the upcoming nomination/election process for the FON Board of Directors 2016. Board members serve for two-year terms.

Nominations are now open to all FON members in good standing – not just to Returned Peace Corps Volunteers. **We particularly encourage nominations from those who served between 1980 and 2011.** The FON Board oversees the following activities:

- publishing The Camel Express newsletter – soliciting and gathering news stories
- maintaining the FON Website, social media accounts
- fostering connections between members
- fundraising to support projects in Niger
- selecting Niger projects to support and distributing funds to said projects

Self-nominations are accepted and encouraged, including for open leadership positions. Our leadership is composed of the following officers: President, Vice President, Recording Secretary, and Treasurer, plus up to seven additional members-at-large. The deadline to apply is May 1, 2016. Please see the front page article for the link to the Nomination Form. Current open Board positions include president and vice-president.

Additionally, we are seeking volunteers to assist with the following committees: Fundraising committee, Membership committee, Niger Relations Committee, and the proposed Outreach/Communications committee. Individuals who have the following skills would be especially helpful with these efforts: fundraising/grants management, website content management, French transcription, and experience maintaining databases. Please use the nomination form to tell us more about the skills you will bring to FON and what projects/activities interest you.

Thank you for your continued support of Friends of Niger and FON activities.

John W. Soloninka  
President, Friends of Niger

## Board of Directors

**John W. Soloninka**, *President*

**Gabriella Maertens**, *Vice-President*

**Penni St. Hilaire**, *Recording Secretary*

**Larry Koff**, *Treasurer*

**John Baird**, *Membership*

**John Hutchison**, *Niger Relations Liaison*

**Steve Bushell**, *Webmaster*

**Saley Tahirou**, *CONUSA*

*National President*

**Rabiou Yari**, *CONUSA*

*National Secretary*

**Teri Wilson**, *CEX Editor*

**Leah LaCivita**, *Assistant Editor*

The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of Friends of Niger (FON). FON can be contacted via the post at P.O. Box 5823 Washington, D. C. 20016-1423. Or by e-mail at [president@friendsofniger.org](mailto:president@friendsofniger.org) and you will find FON on the web and this newsletter in full color at: [www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org). Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to The Camel Express at the address above. Friends of Niger is an affiliate group of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) Website: [www.peacecorpsconnect.org](http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org)

## FON Welcomes Boston University Niger Alumni

Boston University's International Development Study Abroad Program in Niger spanned 24 years – from 1987 through 2010. More than 350 spent time in Niger through this program! Their former program director, Sue Rosenfeld, who still lives in Niamey, speaks so proudly of the BU/Niger alumni and their passion and commitment to Niger. Sue is also a member of Friends of Niger, and she is helping us tap into those feelings by inviting BU Niger Alumni to join our FON community – we have reached 71 of them so far!

**“We are part of a unique group who came to love this country”**

The number of Americans who have ever lived in Niger is very small. We are part of a unique group who came to love this country and its people, and who continues looking for ways to help. We look forward to staying connected with each other and with our shared

experiences there.

Note: Both Boston University and Peace Corps Niger had to suspend their programs in January 2011 when two young Frenchmen were kidnapped from a Niamey bar/restaurant, and later killed. After that, neither BU nor the Peace Corps felt they could continue to assure family members that it was safe to send their students or volunteers to Niger.

### No More NPCA Dues

Beginning with 2016, the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) no longer collects \$35 dues from individuals. However, when you get the notice from NPCA to renew your membership, please do. The notice will likely ask you to also renew your affiliate group membership – that's us, Friends of Niger! You can either send your \$20 dues for FON to NPCA (they will send your money to us) or you can mail payment directly to FON with the Membership Form.

## Greetings to FON from Ambassador Alidou

Jan 16 2016

To: Friends of Niger  
From: Embassy of the Republic of Niger,  
Washington DC



“Best wishes, Peace and Blessing for 2016 from Her Excellency Professor Hassana Alidou and the Staff of the Embassy of Niger Republic in Washington DC”

*Professor Hassana Alidou*

## FON Website Analytics

Take a look at the number of hits various items on our website got during 2015. Here we show only the top nine lines of the 74-line report, (to see the entire report go to: [http://www.friendsofniger.org/pdf/FON\\_Website\\_Analytics\\_2015.pdf](http://www.friendsofniger.org/pdf/FON_Website_Analytics_2015.pdf) ). Far and away the most popular, with 1,459 hits, was Niger RPCV Guy Immega's book, *Ancient Egypt's Lost Legacy? The Buduma Culture of Lake Chad*. You can access this book as well as see the list of other books about Niger, many written by Niger RPCVs, at this link: <http://www.friendsofniger.org/features/books/> The Friends of Niger website also has movies (including the full feature film Niger '66 – A Peace Corps Diary), travel information, past newsletters (some going all the back to 1979), and much more.

FON Downloads 2015	Hits	Band- width	Average size
/pdf/Buduma_Master_V4.pdf	1,459	11.76 GB	520.73 KB
/pdf/CEX_Dec_2014.pdf	656	1.38 GB	324.67 KB
2014NigerReunionEstesParkReport1	646	133.08 MB	197.79 KB
/pdf/CEX_Sep_2014.pdf	551	910.42 MB	1.26 MB
/pdf/CEX_Jun_2015.pdf	532	996.59 MB	301.66 KB
/pdf/CEX_Aug_2011.pdf	520	931.19 MB	1.71 MB
/pdf/CEX_Sep_2012.pdf 497	497	1.09 GB	888.29 KB
/pdf/CEX_Dec_2007.pdf	453	966.35 MB	1.32 MB
/pdf/CEX_Nov_2015.pdf	421	1.25 GB	275.30 KB

## Leadership

From Page 1

provide continuity, but they are seeking new and visionary members to take on various leadership positions and special projects. For example, they are looking for people to help

- Raise funds in support of projects in Niger
- Generate news articles about Niger and Niger RPCVs
- Review grant requests for FON funding
- Board leadership

### Current FON Board

The Board currently has nine members (see the list on page 2). This group has had many accomplishments identifying and funding Nigerien partner organizations that promote development projects including education, agriculture, health, and water. In addition, they have solicited timely and interesting articles about the current situation in Niger, and they have helped former volunteers re-connect with each other by means of the newsletter, website, membership services, and Facebook. They are eager to infuse the innovation and energy that new Board members can bring to the enterprise. Please consider serving on the Board or assisting in the good work of our committees.

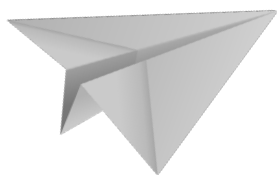
### How to Apply

If you are interested in serving on the Board or volunteering for specific FON projects, please follow the nomination process outlined below:

- (1) Download the Guidelines & Nomination Form posted on the FON website:  
[http://www.friendsofniger.org/pdf/FON\\_Elections\\_2016.pdf](http://www.friendsofniger.org/pdf/FON_Elections_2016.pdf)
- (2) Submit your nomination anytime before the May 1, 2016 deadline, either by:
  - *Snail mail to:* FON Recording Secretary, PO Box 5823, Washington DC 20016-1423
  - *Email to:* [tommy@erols.com](mailto:tommy@erols.com).

### All Helping Hands are Welcome

We understand that serving on a Board can be time consuming. If you have limited time but would like to assist with a specific activity, such as reviewing grant proposals or fundraising, please indicate on the nomination form the project/activity that would best meet both your time constraints and interests.



## Where does the CEX go?

Ever wonder how many people receive and read the CEX? If so check out some of these stats.

### March 2016 Circulation of The Camel Express

175 paper copies sent by US Mail

538 copies sent by email

**713 Total distributed**

### December 2015 Circulation of The Camel Express

(Note: Distribution is by email except for those requesting paper copies, but for fundraising in December we primarily mail paper copies.)

487 paper copies sent by US Mail (373 of these received the email version as well)

3 paper copies by International Mail

144 copies sent by email only

**634 Total distributed**



## Sidikou

From Page 1

speak of a stint as Save the Children Country Director in Rwanda and the DRC.

Dr. Sidikou's responsibilities now focus on bringing peace to the conflict-ridden eastern regions of the DRC, where guerillas driven out of Uganda and Somalia clash with Congolese armed forces and exploit the local population, while refugees pour across the country's nine borders, often dispersing into its endless forests. The UN Mission and its 20,000 member-strong international security force are trying to help protect the population, disarm the rebels, repatriate refugees, promote human rights, support the Congolese government in its assumption of these roles and – most fundamentally – get people talking to each other at a time when the forthcoming presidential elections open a window on democracy.

Yet Dr. Sidikou remains optimistic: "The only solution is dialogue," he says; "otherwise we go back to violence." And he senses immense capacity in the DRC. "I see the country really playing the role we wanted African countries to play," he points out. "It is so well endowed with natural resources that it could provide electricity for the whole continent." The stability attained in the west of the country and the modern polish of Kinshasa show what the DRC can do.

But dialogue comes first. "People just don't listen enough."

## Planned Giving to Friends of Niger



As the Peace Corps approaches its 6th decade many of us who served during its earliest years are now advancing into our senior years and approaching that time in our lives when it is worthwhile to develop our Personal Legacy and plan for the giving that will be carried out at the end of life – once in a lifetime! One day it will be our turn, so it is a good idea to prepare for that day. The Peace Corps has been a blessing to our lives, and in keeping with the Peace Corps spirit, a gift to Niger is a way of perpetuating that spirit, and also our relationship with Niger.

Planned gifts can take the form of a bequest that is recorded in your will or, possibly, a charitable gift annuity. When making a gift in your will (this is known as a bequest), the process can involve donating a specified sum of money, a particular property, or perhaps a percentage of your remaining estate (once all other bequests are fulfilled). This form of giving takes place after your lifetime and, like other aspects of a will, can be revoked at any time if you change your mind about it.

Niger RPCV's who may be interested in supporting programs that benefit the people of Niger even after their death can do so through planned giving to Friends of Niger in the form of an annuity. An annuity is an agreement between a donor and a charity enabling you as the donor to contribute to the ongoing activities of the charity, while you also receive fixed payments from your gift for your lifetime. This is appropriate when one makes a significant and irrevocable gift of cash or marketable securities. The donor (the annuitant) then receives a fixed amount every year (an annuity) for the rest of one's life. Subsequently, the remaining balance can be designated for Friends of Niger and even for a specific project in Niger if so desired. There can be significant tax advantages to making a gift to FON from your estate, There can be significant tax advantages to making a gift to FON from your estate, but you should consult your own tax advisor to make sure a charitable annuity is right for you.

Friends of Niger is a 501(c)3 charitable and tax-exempt organization. If you would like to explore any of these options for yourself, or have expertise to offer, please contact: **John P. Hutchison, Professor Emeritus, Boston U. African Studies Center: [hutch@bu.edu](mailto:hutch@bu.edu)**

## Brothers of the Road

### THERE ARE WORSE PLACES TO FALL OFF A MOTORCYCLE THAN IN A MUSLIM COUNTRY

BY BILL MILES

PHOTOGRAPH BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM

I knew it was a bad idea to get back on Bawa's motorbike in the middle of a torrential rainstorm that night. Some of the potholes in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, the West African nation in which I was conducting ethnographic interviews, had turned into veritable ponds. But Bawa, my host, had been kind enough to ferry me between migrant neighborhoods for my research, and now it was time to head back to my lodgings. On top of that, Bawa was the eldest son of the chief I had first met seventeen years before, who

had since died. I was in Bawa's care now, and it would have been gauche to question his judgment.

So even as warnings like "This is not a good idea," "I am taking a chance," and "*C'est dangereux*" formed in my mind, we set off on the drenching ride across this city of two-wheel transport and no helmets. I reminded myself of the statistical unlikelihood that a road accident would occur while I was actually contemplating it—a talisman I hoped would ward off the frightful event. Rather than watching the pavement as we bumped along it, I shielded my face from the unremitting rain in the hood of my jacket. That is, until the bike began swerving violently from side to side. "It is happening," I then had to admit to myself. "It really is happening."

Bawa and I flew off his motorbike onto the hard pavement, and I did a kind of bounce and flip before scrambling to my feet to avoid being hit by oncoming traffic. My watch and glasses were smashed to smithereens. When I saw the grimace on Bawa's face and blood spilling from mine, I knew I had been pretty badly smashed, too. "I want to bring you to the local clinic," Bawa declared, in the Hausa language we had in common. But how? His bike was mangled.

"*Frère!*" he yelled into the pitch-black night, waving to those of his Muslim brethren who were foolhardy enough to be plying the highway. "*Frère! Frère!*" And a brother responded. A man in a flowing robe and kufi—the pillbox cap favored by the Muslim community—did a turnaround to see what the fuss was about. He too grimaced when he saw my face.



The two spoke in what I took to be Mossi, the most common language in Burkina Faso, of which I know not a word. I was reluctant to be "rescued" on yet another motorbike, by a stranger with whom I could barely speak. Nor did I wish to be separated from my host, or to be treated in the kind of facility the Peace Corps, which had first brought me to West Africa thirty-seven years before, had warned us to avoid. But what choice did I have? My host's scooter was broken, and I was bleeding. We sped off, then stopped to ask a woman on another scooter for directions. She looked at me, grimaced, and instructed my new driver.

When the "doctor" (really, a paramedic) at the clinic saw me, he grimaced in the manner to which I was becoming accustomed. "We'll have to sew him up," he said to the pharmacist on call, "to avoid infection." I thought that avoidance of infection might have warranted some cover on the examining table; but I was not sent here to give advice. I would happily have paid for it, just as I had to pay for the medic's disposable

rubber gloves, the bandage, and antiseptic. And in this land of scarcity, they had me purchase in advance the same items for my follow-up appointment, just in case they ran out.

My Good Muslim Samaritan left me after Bawa arrived, apologizing in rudimentary French that he had to “continue.” But he phoned me at one a.m. to ask how I was doing, and again the following day.

Two weeks later, when I limped into my classroom in Boston at the start of the fall term—a plastic boot on my foot to protect a fractured fibula, and my left eye crowned by five cordlike sutures reminiscent of Frankenstein’s—my accident turned into a lesson. Last summer, when these events occurred, two American journalists had just been beheaded in the name of Islam. The Muslim Brotherhood was being vilified as a terrorist organization in Egypt. And American culture was infected, as it still is, with Islamophobia. Even though I wondered how much an instructor should tell students about his health travails, I knew I had to share my experiences with Islam.

Having lived for years in Muslim West Africa—first as a Peace Corps volunteer, then as a Fulbright scholar, with intermediate stints thanks to the State Department and various research sponsors—I had come to rely on the communitarian spirit fostered by Islam. I tried to impress upon students the most important thing I had learned: that the real “Muslim brotherhood” is one that extends its assistance to all in need, including the white stranger from America.

*WILLIAM F.S. MILES, F82, is a professor of political science and former Stotsky Professor of Jewish Historical and Cultural Studies at Northeastern University. His most recent book is the aptly titled Scars of Partition: Postcolonial Legacies in French and British Borderlands.*

See more at: [http://www.tufts.edu/alumni/magazine/summer2015/act/brothers\\_of\\_the\\_road.html#sthash.KQVWz13u.dpuf](http://www.tufts.edu/alumni/magazine/summer2015/act/brothers_of_the_road.html#sthash.KQVWz13u.dpuf)

## Boy Gangs of Niger

FON member, John Hutchison, wrote that when he was in Niger in December, he heard talk of these gangs that are referred to as “Palais” in Zinder and possibly also in the Maradi area, and of the assaults on girls and women that they organize. He learned of this when having a discussion with a Nigerien colleague about how the North African and Middle Eastern water pipe or “houka” has become popular among young Nigeriens. John saw it being widely used in a Lebanese restaurant that he went to in Niamey.

This article, entitled “Dead Man’s Market and the Boy Gangs of Niger”, provides the details of some of the activities of the palais, and describes how widespread that has become in certain parts of Niger.

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/08/dead-mans-market-and-the-boy-gangs-of-niger-boko-haram/>

Recently FON sent this article to a young Nigerien friend in Maradi. His response: “Yes, everything you read about these gangs and houka is real. Now it is very bad that young boys in Niger use this houka to inhale some type of drugs inside it. But there are more activities happening in Niger that are a lot more scary and more dangerous than these gangs of palais (I had never been aware of these gangs called palais until this article). But I know there are a lot of bad people out here attacking people in the night and in the bush. Niger is not really safe as it used to be. But every day we pray to God for his protection.”



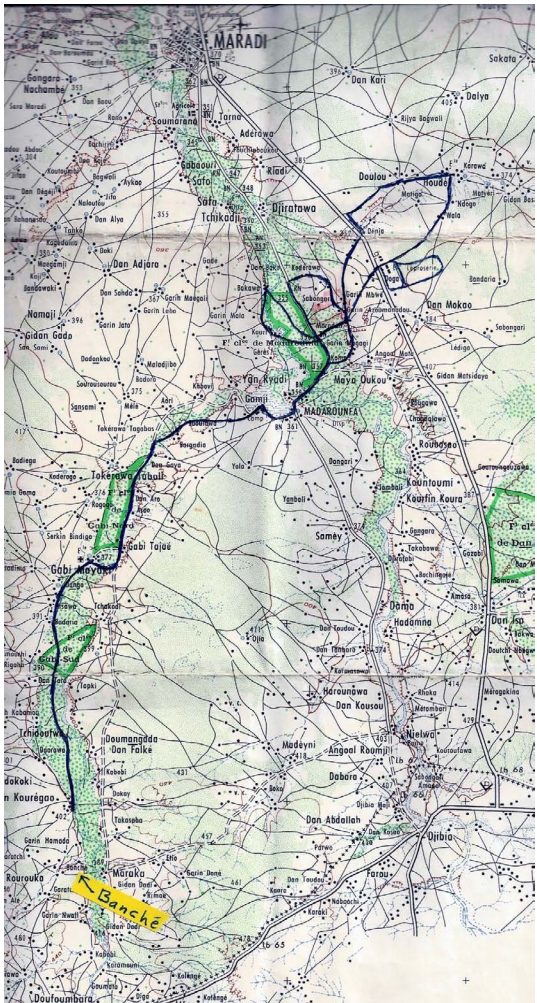


## Rabiou Yari's Update on the Banché Project

On December 3, 2015 I called Bawa Mati in Banché to follow up with him on the food bank project funded by Rebecca Mandell and three others through Friends of Niger. Please find my summary of that conversation below:

Bawa explained to me how they have been using the 850.000 FCFA they received a couple of months ago.

- Elders of Banché village under the leadership of Chief Bawa Mati created a local "cooperative" to collectively manage the fund.
- They selected 25 women and divided them into 5 groups of 5 and they lent 100.000 FCFA to each group for a total of 500.000 FCFA.
- Each group member has agreed to use the money to promote her small business and then reimburse the total amount plus 10% of the 100.000 or (110.000) FCFA in total.
- For the 5 groups, the cooperative intends to collect the 500.000 FCFA plus the lending fees (50.000) FCFA from the groups.
- Some of the economic activities that the women have initiated include selling local food for breakfast, lunch and dinner, local beverages and so on.



- The director of the cooperative Malam Boubacar told me on the phone that they lent the money for 6 months and they have already started collecting the capital and the lending fees and they plan to finish the collection by the end of December.
- Bawa told me that they will buy bags of beans with the total revenue estimated at 550.000 FCFA in January and keep them in a community storage in Banché until July 2016 when they will resell them at higher prices to farmers.
- Both Bawa and Malam Aboubacar told me they need some additional funds to "remodel" the place where they store the grains (food bank). They want to add a second layer of concrete to better protect the facility against the rain.
- Furthermore, they want to replace the door and windows of the storage building.
- Bawa expressed his gratitude to Rebecca, Rabiou Yari, and FON in his name and in the name of the whole Banché community for this "human and noble initiative," to quote him.

Mun godé kuma a gaishé ku!  
Yari

Location of Banché close to the Nigerian border. Map from John Baird – lines show trips on horseback back in 1968-70.



## Moringa: Niger RPCV Realizing Her Dream

We all know how our experiences as Peace Corps Volunteers in Niger have affected our later lives. Here's the story of Niger RPCV Lisa Curtis (2010-11) who saw the devastating effects of malnutrition all around her during her time in Niger. Lisa discovered that moringa, a local tree with highly nutritious leaves, was used in some villages with kuli-kuli, which are lightly fried Hausa peanut balls, to make a highly nutritious moringa nut snack. Her further research revealed that moringa is one of the most nutritious plants in the world.

Lisa soon had a dream to use the nutritious leaves of the moringa tree to improve the lives of people around the world. Today, Lisa is the founder and CEO of Kuli Kuli Inc., which she calls a mission-driven business. In two short years, it has grown from just an idea in a Peace Corps village to a thriving social enterprise. They sell healthy moringa products through hundreds of outlets in the US, and they work with women-owned farming cooperatives in West Africa.

Their mission is to support farmers in the developing world to grow more moringa, to utilize its nutrients locally, and to earn a livelihood. They currently are supporting 500 women farmers in Ghana, working closely via a non-profit partner, and recently partnered with the Clinton Foundation to expand to Haiti. They have also helped to train farmers in Tanzania and plant moringa trees in Kenya.

Niger is not an easy source for a fledgling company, but Lisa says that that are in an ongoing conversation with Haoua Diatta of MICA about making something happen there.

For more information about moringa and background to Lisa's story, visit: [www.kulikulifoods.com](http://www.kulikulifoods.com)



### MORINGA RECIPE

Kopto (Nigerien moringa-based salad)

Submitted by Amina Kaza and translated by John Hutchison (who, last June, saw Kopto being used as favorite way of breaking fast).

#### Directions

Tear the moringa into bite-sized pieces and rinse with water.

Immerse the moringa in a pot of boiling water until tender, remove, and press or towel out the water.

In a salad bowl put in 3-4 tablespoons of peanut butter, a pinch of red habanero or jalapeño pepper (adjust according to your preference), one tablespoon of ground sumbala (locust bean flour), and a half teaspoon of salt or so. Add fine wedges of raw onion, 1-2 cloves of mashed fresh garlic, and a whole diced tomato.

Add a bit of water to the salad bowl and mix all the ingredients together.

Add the moringa leaves to the salad bowl and fatiquer la salade! (Toss the salad!)

This story was written and shared by John Baird

Personal Note: "When I traveled to Niger in January 2011, I stayed a week at the Peace Corps hostel in Maradi. I arrived in the middle of the night, and that first morning I woke up to a houseful of PC trainees. They had just returned from a one-month immersion in their future villages, and one of them, Lisa Curtis, volunteered to cook some breakfast for me! I was still there just a week later when all PCVs in Niger received the text message from the home office in Niamey that the program was being suspended, and that they would all either go home or be reassigned to another country."

## Soccer Fundraising for Niger

Friends of Niger continues to work with Mike Mitchell and his program of bringing soccer balls to the Eastern part of Niger- Mayahi, Maradi, Zinder and Diffa. These specially manufactured balls - no pumping required, and indestructible, cost about \$40 each. Pictured below is one of the girls middle school soccer teams from Mayahi. The balls sent to Mayahi are distributed to a number of the teachers. A schedule of team play between the various school levels, boys and girls, has been developed for the next two months. Mike Mitchell is hoping to have additional balls this fall and work with Board member and former professional soccer player Rabiou Yari, to find schools in these other cities for an expanded soccer program. Funding this initiative is essential.




## 3N Rice Project Lettre de Remerciement from Abdou Kasso

The 3N Initiative represents a willingness and a political engagement by the President of the Republic of Niger, Issoufou Mahamadou, to keep Nigeriens safe from famine and thirst. The 3N credo stands for Les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens, thus capturing Niger’s commitment to supplying the nutritional needs of their own people themselves.


Abdou Kasso is a product of the School of Agriculture at the University of Oklahoma. He works to find new ways to help make Niger self-sufficient in supplying its alimentary needs. During a meeting with John Hutchison of FON, Kasso raised the problem of Nigeriens preferring to buy imported rice from the Middle East rather than their own rice grown in Niger. He wanted to remedy this situation by importing interesting new rice seed varieties from the US that could be grown in Niger and might be accepted. Friends of Niger became involved when Hutchison presented Kasso’s proposal to the FON Board.

To make a long story short, FON was able to provide the funds necessary to transport new rice seeds varieties from Arkansas and Texas to the Niger Embassy in Washington DC, and on to Niger. This letter from Abdou Kasso expresses his gratitude to FON for their role .

John Hutchison, Niger Liaison



REPUBLIQUE DU NIGER  
 République - Démocratie - Justice  
 PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE  
 HAUT COMMISSARIAT A L'INITIATIVE 3N



Niamey, Niger March 3, 2016

To : The Friends Of Niger  
 RE: Appreciation letter


As you well know Niger is a vast dry ,arid country. It rains only 3 months a year, between the months of June and August. After September 15<sup>th</sup>, you can almost bet there won't be another drop of rain until the following year .In Niger It may rain a lot at the beginning of the planting season and even experience flooding, then at the crucial flowering time of millet and sorghum the( main staple of Nigeriens),the rainy season stops all of the sudden and for good. Then you have droughts and ensuing famines. A cycle that occurs every 2 to 3 years. These terrible occurrences will intensify with climate change. For this reason the government of Niger created 3N :Les Nigeriens nourrissent Les Nigeriens in French. its sole and main objective is to insure food security for Nigerien People. And to make sure lack of rainfall and the ensuing drought does not equate with famine.

To shield the country from this chronic cycle of droughts and famines the government turned its focus towards irrigated agriculture. Mainly irrigated rice. Niger imports annually up to 100 milliards of CFA francs a year from Asia and in a minor quantity from the US to feed its people.to make sure the money goes to Nigerien farmers instead of Asian farmers, varieties of rice where imported from the US to be tested here.

The rice varieties came from 2 states in the US: Texas and Arkansas. Now this is where the friends of Niger really helped out .I asked the Nigerien Ambassador to the US the permission to stock the rice seeds somewhere in the embassy while trying to figure out how to get these seeds to Niger. once the permission was granted, Professor Hutchison with financial aid from Friends of Niger ,not only had the rice seeds shipped from el Campo, Texas and from North Little Rock ,Arkansas to Washington, DC, but also From Washington, DC all the Way to Niamey, Niger, for testing. The University of Niger / in Tillaberi in conjunction with the Agronomic Institute of Niger(INRAN) will do the testing Beginning in May/June of this year. This would never had happened without the financial contribution from the Friends of Niger and the energy , dedication and love of Niger of professor Hutchison The challenges were tremendous. The logistics were daunting. But you the Friends of Niger did it. Once the rice is planted I will forward to you a monthly report on the experiment. If this experiment were to becomes successful, our farmers will benefit from it and our recurring famine problem will forever be solved.

Thank you so much for your help and generosity. We could not have done it without you.

Sincerely,  
 Abdou Kasso  
 Advisor to the President  
 Advisor to the 3N High Commissioner  
 Cc: Niger Embassy in Washington



**Friends of Niger Membership Form** *(Please print clearly)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ City / State / Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone Numbers (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (C) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email \_\_\_\_\_  
 Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_ Dates in Niger (Years) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location in Niger \_\_\_\_\_ Program or Involvement \_\_\_\_\_

PRIVACY POLICY: Your contact information is requested and maintained by FON so that we can contact you. FON does not share your information with any third party other than with the National Peace Corps Association with whom we have a reciprocity agreement.

- Please send paper copies of The Camel Express newsletter by US Mail
- Please send links to the PDF version of The Camel Express by email

Membership dues & donations help fund FON activities including The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON archives, and local Nigerien projects. The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3). Membership and contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

**Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON**

In addition to my membership, I have enclosed a General Contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ OR

Instead of joining FON at this time, I enclose a General Contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_

I would like to support FON Matching projects:  Goats,  RAIN,  Well,  Banche food \$\_\_\_\_\_ Merchandise

Please send \_\_\_\_ Friends of Niger T-Shirts at \$15 each (shipping included) \$\_\_\_\_\_

T-Shirt Sizes: S \_\_\_\_ M \_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_ XL \_\_\_\_ T-Shirt Color: brown \_\_\_\_ beige \_\_\_\_

**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$\_\_\_\_\_**

Make check or money order payable to Friends of Niger, and mail with this form to:

PO Box 5823, Washington DC 20016-1423

To pay FON dues with credit card through NPCA, please contact us for further instructions.



Friends of Niger helped BFR (“Well-Being of the Rural Woman”) buy two additional sewing machines (note the Friends of Niger logo in the photo).

Photo by Tom Dechert  
 March 2016





Friends of Niger  
P.O. Box 5823  
Washington, D.C. 20016-1423

Address Service Requested

*"There is no way to peace.  
Peace is the way."*  
- A.J. Muste

## Inside the Camel

- PAGE 1 - FON Seeking New Leadership; Maman Sidikou with the UN in the DRC
- PAGE 2 - Letter from the FON President; Board of Directors
- PAGE 3 - Boston U Niger Alumni; Greetings from Ambassador Alidou; Website Analytics
- PAGE 4 - The Camel Express circulation numbers
- PAGE 5 - Planned Giving to Friends of Niger
- PAGE 6 - Brothers of the Road
- PAGE 7 - Boy Gangs of Niger
- PAGE 8 - Banché Project Update
- PAGE 9 - Moringa: Niger RPCV Realizing Her Dream
- PAGE 10 - Soccer Fundraising; Rice Project
- PAGE 11 - Membership From: Photo BFR Sewing Machines
- PAGE 12 - Inside The Camel
- PAGE 13 - Extra - Tom Dechert's Recent Trip to Niger
- PAGE 14 - Recent Trip continued

An electronic full color version of this newsletter and previous editions  
can be accessed at [www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org)



## EXTRA EXTRA - HOT OFF THE PRESS

### Recent Trip to Burkina Faso & Niger

-- good, bad, and in between; connecting with FON-funded projects; security risks

by Tom Dechert

[Editor's Note: This informative and stimulating article was written on March 20, 2016 somewhere in the Languedoc wine region in France shortly after Tom ended his 11-day visit to Niger. He hopes this might help RPCVs to stay involved even though PC is no longer there – the need is greater than ever. When asked how he fared health-wise, he said he was quite lucky and had good health while he was there, despite eating some “pretty sketchy” foods and drinks. It was hot every day – over 100 degrees. Tom served as a PCV in Niger from 1966-1968. (Photos by Tom Dechert, March 2016)]

I travelled to Niger & Burkina Faso after the attack on the hotel and coffee shop in Burkina Faso, during the attack on the beach in Cote d'Ivoire, and left Niger just a day before attacks by Boko Haram and ISM killed several police officers and military people in Niger. One of the goals of my trip was to get a better idea of what's going on as a result of the Islamic Statist attacks, and I pretty much got to see results first hand.

It was my first time to Burkina Faso, so I didn't have much background to understand how the attack has affected people. But generally I'd say that the Burkinabe are stunned and angry that they are being dragged into this craziness. The attack struck at their view of themselves as being an independent, multicultural country doing relatively well on their own. There are some refugees in Burkina Faso from the crisis in Mali, but for the most part the country had not taken much notice or made many changes since they felt they were beyond the conflict. The attack in Ouagadougou changed all that, and at the time I was there, I'd say people were still processing what it meant and what Burkina should do about it. Certainly there was a lot of police presence in Ouaga and throughout the parts of the country where I travelled. Certain parts of the country were off limits to travel by foreigners like me, including Parc W which is considered by both Burkina Faso and Niger to be a staging area for jihadists.

In Niger, on the other hand, people generally know without a doubt that they are caught up in this larger regional conflict and are being dragged into it pretty much against their will. There are refugee camps for refugees from both Mali and Boko Haram/Nigeria. In addition, there are large numbers of refugees scattered throughout the country, but mainly along the borders with Mali and northeastern Nigeria, and in Niamey. I was surprised to learn of the large number of disenfranchised Nigeriens now back in Niger that resulted from the downfall of Khadafi – many of them now widows and their kids with no means of support because their husbands/fathers had been killed in Libya. Apparently large numbers of Nigeriens served as the working class in Libya.

Originally, I had hoped to travel to see the FON-funded projects in Tchénoua, but figured out even before I left the States that it would be impossible for security reasons. People from Tchénoua came to Niamey to meet me and we talked some of the security situation there. To them, being there is not a security issue, stating that it's only an issue for expats. Their issues are focused on water, food, and figuring out how to take care of the refugees. I had secondary plans to travel to Tahoua and Keita where I was stationed as a PCV. I was told that it could be a kidnapping risk for me to travel even that far north. The only part of the country considered safe for my travel was the National route from Niamey to Zinder, and areas south of this route, excluding Parc W.

I did make the trip from Niamey to Birnin Koni and then a little north to Guidan Ider where I was a PCV my second year. And I also made trips southwest of Niamey to villages near the Burkina border. During none of these trips did I get any feeling from people I encountered that they thought I was out of place, at any risk. The bigger risk was of getting wrapped into some presidential election political rally and getting delayed for hours, or hit up for money to be able to pass.

Having said that, there is considerable reason to be concerned about security in Niger, not only by expatriates, but by Nigeriens as well. While I have not yet heard the details of the attacks of 17 Mar, most all people are aware that Niger is caught in the crosshairs of regional conflicts, and it's probably only a matter of time before some major sort of attack/catastrophe will occur in Niger. In the east Boko Haram has destabilized/terrorized the whole region, including southeast Niger, and has now reportedly destroyed the food support system to the point they themselves are starving

and are having to strike out in different directions to find food for themselves. This into an area of Niger that was already food insufficient and even more so now with the refugees it has to support. The ISM undoubtedly considers most, if not all of Niger, as a major part its Caliphate. Libya shows signs of devolving into long term civil war or even full control by the jihadists. In Niger, disenchanted young men are reportedly leaving in sizeable numbers to join either the ISM or Boko Haram. And by some people's opinion, the government of Niger



Tom Dechert visited BFR organized women's group meeting in Aminatou's compound.

itself is hanging by a thread, with many people expecting a coup at any time. The current Nigerian presidential election cycle has Nigeriens in the same sort of disbelief and turmoil as many of us are experiencing here in the U.S. with ours.

Life in Niamey and in the parts of Niger I visited goes on pretty much at a normal pace. The so-called modern economic transformations that are being reported for African countries don't appear to be much in effect in Niger. I was hoping to see much more change in terms of social well-being after a 48 year absence. There are a lot more people, a lot more cell phones, a lot more electricity, a lot more paved roads, and Niamey has all the trappings of a fine third world capital city. For all of that, Niger ranks nearly dead last in the world in terms of economic well-being, and it shows everywhere. I don't know if the rich are getting richer, but the poor are definitely becoming more numerous at an alarming rate. The leader of one of FON's funded projects stated bluntly that for the 30% or so of the food insecure population, the famine is already here. But for those of us with the means, it's still way cool to sit on the terrace of the Grand Hotel to watch the sun set over the Niger River while drinking Bière Niger and eating brochettes.



Smock sewn and being sold by Nassifatou's group "Bien-être de Femme Rurale"



# The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

**CARE International Niger: Our support is needed. Assisting refugees throughout Niger. Please consider making a donation.**

Friends of Niger is raising support for CARE International, Niger (CARE Niger) to help with the refugee situation in Niger. CARE Niger assists refugees who have been displaced by the violence in neighboring countries of Mali, Chad, and Nigeria. CARE Niger often provides refugees with the basic necessities since camp inhabitants arrive only with what they are wearing and have been traumatized from being



forced to leave their villages. In most cases, it has also become unsafe for refugees to return to their villages and so they must settle into the camps as their new home. The camps provide refugees with water, tents, sanitary facilities, medical and vaccination huts, and a maternity center. Schools are established on-site so that children can continue to receive an education. Newly arrived residents are registered in order to manage assistance and identify the residents. Please see **CARE**, Page 3



**URGENT! FON looking for an Editor "in chief" for The Camel Express newsletter!**

Please see Page 6

**Letter from the FON President: Meredith McGehee**

Dear Friends of Niger Members,

As your new president of Friends of Niger (FON), I am reaching out to urge you to increase your engagement with us at a time when Niger is facing new challenges. It is a time to ensure that the connections that each of us has made with Nigeriens are strengthened. And if those connections have slipped away over the years, let's work together to renew them.

I understand that each person's connection to Niger and FON is different -- some mix of wanting to reconnect with old friends and of wanting to help those among whom we used to live. And maybe part of it is hoping to find more information about what is going on in Niger and the Sahel.

Together, our challenge is to revitalize FON and to increase FON's ability to make a difference. FON's new vice president Tom Corcoran has years of experience in fundraising and Lindsay Randall, the new head of the Projects Committee, works in the field. Joining with the returning Board members -- and with your increased support and participation, FON is positioned to have even greater impact. But the FON Board can't do it alone!

Please see **Letter**, Page 2

## Letter

From Page 1

The challenges facing Niger are a concern to all of us: the Boko Haram attacks in the east that have caused more than 50,000 Nigeriens to flee to refugee camps near Diffa, the growing threats of ISIS and Al Qaeda in the Maghreb in Libya, as well as problems which have erupted in Mali. Other challenges continue to be those involving the economy, health, education, and population growth. Much remains to be done – Niger still ranks 188 of the 188 countries on the U.N. Human Development Index. But we can do our part to help.

Since its inception, FON has funded numerous projects in Niger. When the FON Board asked me to serve as president, I felt moved to step forward because I am excited about the role that I believe FON can play in strengthening ties between Americans and Nigeriens, and I am hopeful about finding ways to increase FON’s assistance.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any thoughts or ideas. I look forward to hearing from you. Na gode.

Meredith McGehee  
President, Friends of Niger



## Peace Corps Beyond

Peace Corps Connect is the Peace Corps community’s annual conference hosted by the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) and its affiliate groups to connect, advocate and impact. At this year’s conference – Peace Corps Beyond – we look forward to celebrating 55 years of Peace Corps and the limitless potential of our community to continue to create change. The conference will highlight work being done by our community members and partner organizations and explore how, through increased collaboration, we can continue to champion Peace Corps ideals. Find more information here:

<http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org/cpages/peace-corps-connect>

If you attend and would like to share your experience with an CEX article email [tcwilsoncal@gmail.com](mailto:tcwilsoncal@gmail.com)

## Board of Directors

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Meredith McGehee</b> , <i>President</i>                              | <b>Lindsay Randall</b> , <i>Projects Committee</i> |
| <b>Tom Corcoran</b> , <i>Vice-President &amp; Fundraising Committee</i> | <b>Saley Tahirou</b> , <i>CONUSA President</i>     |
| <b>Larry Koff</b> , <i>Treasurer</i>                                    | <b>Rabiou Yari</b> , <i>Niger Diaspora Liaison</i> |
| <b>Penni St. Hilaire</b> , <i>Recording Secretary</i>                   | <b>OPEN</b> , <i>Newsletter Editor</i>             |
| <b>John Hutchison</b> , <i>Niger Relations Liaison</i>                  | *****  |
| <b>John Baird</b> , <i>Membership</i>                                   | <b>Teri Wilson</b> , <i>Layout Editor</i>          |
| <b>Steve Bushell</b> , <i>Webmaster</i>                                 | <b>Leah LaCivita</b> , <i>Text Editor</i>          |

The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of Friends of Niger (FON). FON can be contacted via the post at P.O. Box 5823 Washington, D. C. 20016-1423. Or by e-mail at [president@friendsofniger.org](mailto:president@friendsofniger.org) and you will find FON on the web and this newsletter in full color at: [www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org). Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to The Camel Express at the address above. Friends of Niger is an affiliate group of the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) Website: [www.peacecorpsconnect.org](http://www.peacecorpsconnect.org)

## Correspondence from Zoolkoski For Vitamins



With the holiday, we only have to tend to emergencies today thus allowing for some down time to acknowledge your gift of vitamins that Tom transported to us.

We have been distributing them to our malnourished patients and recently to the children in one of the neighboring villages (see photo).

Thank you for this gift on behalf of the needy children in the Tahoua region.

Gratefully serving with you,

Christopher D. Zoolkoski, MD  
RPCV Tahoua 88-90

## FON Financial Report:

FON continues to minimize its overhead while expending the majority of its resources on funding local projects run by local Nigerien organizations. The major overhead expenses are the cost of wiring funds and the printing and mailing of our newsletter, and these represent less than 6% of the \$13,000 spent since January. We have funded 5 projects to date in 2016 including sheep and goat husbandry projects, a pilot Moringa growing/education project, one well digging project and a donation of \$500 to address hunger at the time of Ramadan. Our current balance based primarily on funds saved from previous years is \$13,700.

## CARE

From Page 1

CARE Niger distributes the following kits to refugees:

- **NFI kit:** 3 blankets, 3 mats, 2 buckets, and 2 Jerry cans.
- **Kitchen kit:** 1 bucket, 5 bowls/cups, 5 plates, 2 ladles, 2 spatulas, 2 agitators, 2 pots of different sizes and 1 knife.

Other resources that are distributed when available include hygiene kits and vouchers to purchase basic necessities.

Some of the new camps include members of the diverse ethnic groups that comprise Niger and its neighboring countries including Kanuri, Fulani, Hausa, Muchika and Mandara.

Aishata Hadmalik (see photo), is 46 years old, a Malian refugee, and has been living in Mangaizé for 4 years. She says that she is really thankful for everything that CARE has done for her. Her family has been provided with hygiene and NFI kits, and she has received cash for work done onsite. Thanks to her time at Mangaizé and to the support provided by CARE Niger, Aishata has been able to overcome the trauma she experienced during the crisis in Mali and is now worry-free. Aishata says CARE Niger is unique because of all the help provided to her and her fellow refugees.

Please consider making a donation to CARE via Friends of Niger. All donations raised through this appeal will be bundled and sent to CARE Niger as an “emergency” donation from FON and its members.





## Tribute to John Soloninka for Many Years of Leadership to Friends Of Niger

Thank you John Soloninka for your 18 years of dedicated service to the Friends of Niger serving first as recording secretary and then for 11 years as president.

Many may not know that John was never a Peace Corps Volunteer, but rather that his service in Niger was as the representative of the Lutheran World Relief for 6 years (1990-1996). John was well known to the Peace Corps Community. When the Friends of Niger was reconstituted in 1998 under the leadership of Jim Schneider, John Soloninka assumed the position of recording secretary. At that time FON had a working budget of about \$4,000 and some 60 dues paying members.

In June of 2005 with the retirement of Jim Schneider, John Soloninka, with the full support of the Board, assumed the position of president. John managed quarterly conference calls, an expanded Board with the positions of Membership, Web-master, Niger Liaison, CONUSA, and Projects. He led us in an evolving role in advocacy and fund raising, and in dedicating a strong focus on programs addressing young girls' education.

If one looks at the FON archives, it will be apparent that for most of the past years under John's leadership FON was able to deliver three newsletters per year. When newsletter editors were unable to assist, John stepped in and took over the role of editor. John also made sure that FON filed annual financial reports and minimized overhead expenses. John was also responsible for ordering and mailing out the FON T-shirts and keeping track of all donations.

With the suspension of both the Boston University and Peace Corps programs, Friends of Niger suddenly found itself cut off from an array of resources and contacts in the country, but under John's leadership we were able to find our footing and continue to provide an important role for our members. John made sure we followed our bylaws and held elections every two years.

Lastly, as John's increasing responsibilities at work began claiming more of his time, we are grateful that he continued to provide needed continuity and support during the process of identifying new leadership.

John Soloninka, Friends of Niger thanks you for your dedication, guidance, and service to this organization and to the country and people of Niger whom we all came to love during our time living and working there.

**URGENT! FON looking for  
an Editor "in chief" for  
The Camel Express  
newsletter!**

**Please see Page 6**

## Thank you Gabriella Maertens for Your Years of Service to Friends Of Niger

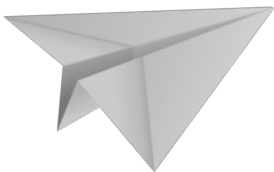
Gabriella Maertens, we are most appreciative of your 18 years of dedicated service as Vice President for the Friends of Niger.

Gabriella's interest and connection to Niger and West Africa has been continuous since her Peace Corps Service. Gabriella was a member of Niger III, that hard core group of volunteers (1964-66) serving as a physical education and TEFL teacher in Zinder. Gabriella subsequently married a Togolese, who had worked for Peace Corps, and they lived in Niamey for six more years. Their three children were born there and Gabriella continued teaching TEFL. Subsequently they moved to Togo where she taught TEFL for six more years.

Gabriella returned to the states and lived in Portland, Oregon where she was active with the Columbia River Peace Corps Association. After the visit to Niger in 1997 to celebrate the 35th anniversary of Peace Corps in Niger, Gabriella used her experience with CRPCA to assist with the re-activation of the Friends of Niger, assuming the position of Vice President serving along Jim Schneider, President.

With the assistance of Gabriella, FON expanded its membership, helped organize a second trip to Niger of former volunteers and parents of volunteers in 2002, started the newsletter and began funding projects proposed by primarily local NGOs. Funding of local projects whether in education for girls or women, distribution of chewable vitamins to the National Hospital, well digging, micro credit, and animal husbandry; there was no project which did not receive full consideration. Gabriella developed a form to review projects, spent extensive time working with local NGOs in Niger to facilitate the review of their projects, and subsequently developed the current list of former volunteers to assist her and the Board in evaluating projects.

Gabriella, in reflecting on her past years of service, has told us, "Thank you, Friends of Niger, for the opportunity to serve on the board these many years. It has been a thrill! I've enjoyed staying in touch with the broader Niger RPCV community and working with many Nigeriens in developing projects to benefit the people of Niger. I am grateful that Meredith, Tom and Lindsay have now stepped forward, and I share their excitement for finding new and effective ways to help the people of Niger."



### Where does the CEX go?

Ever wonder how many people receive and read the CEX? If so check out some of these stats.

#### March 2016 Circulation of The Camel Express

175 paper copies sent by US Mail

538 copies sent by email

**713 Total distributed**

#### September 2016 Circulation of The Camel Express

177 paper copies sent by US Mail

554 copies sent by email

**731 Total distributed**

Want to get more involved with the CEX? See the perfect opportunity to lead the communication as the Editor In Chief on Page 6.

## URGENT! FON Needs an Editor In Chief URGENT!

Dear Friends of Niger,

Over the last three issues we've been putting together a new team for publishing the newsletter. Although short-handed, we've managed with the help of two Niger RPCVs who have stepped forward:

Teri Wilson (Niger 08-10) has been helping us as layout editor. In addition to organizing the pages, Teri has been playing with some style changes to give us a new look. Teri is also looking at using social media more. We also have Leah LaCivita (Niger '93-'96) as text editor. As a professional editor, Leah takes submitted articles and works her magic so that they read better.

But we need someone to oversee the whole process — we need to fill the Friends of Niger Board position of Newsletter Editor. Please note that all board positions are volunteer and unpaid.

### What does the job of Editor entail?

- Solicit/coordinate articles
- Familiarity with publishing software (currently using Apple Pages; MS Publisher in the past)
- Diplomatically guide the discussion of what the CEX will look like and what to include.
- Oversee the printing, mailing, and emailing of each issue (although others can do the actual work). Circulation is currently 713.
- Participate in quarterly 1-hour long board meeting conference calls.

### Why would you want the job of editor of The Camel Express?

It's a stimulating job that will give you the opportunity to further the mission of Friends of Niger and to interact with Niger RPCVs.

We would not expect you to jump in and assume all responsibility at once. The Board will always be at your side to assist and help you learn the ropes, and that might take 1-2 years.

If you would like to be considered for the job of CEX Editor, or if you would like to help with the newsletter in some other way, please contact John Baird, [JBairdRPT@cs.com](mailto:JBairdRPT@cs.com)

## Reunion Celebration By Joel Neuberg

The traditional quinquennial Niger V and VI RPCV reunion celebration of the Fête tournante du 3 août was held August 5-7, 2016 at the bucolic Northern California estate of Bob (Niger V) and Gayle (Niger VI) Reid. From Friday evening through Sunday lunch, a total of forty-six former volunteers and nearly twenty dedicated partners caught up on the lives of friends, some of whom they had not seen in years or decades. Wendy Wallin (VI) and Norma Hyatt (V) had tracked down and invited over eighty former volunteers, and many who could not attend sent messages. West African cuisine was cooked by genuine West Africans; Northern California wines were consumed, old and less old stories swapped.

Janice Gulley Blumenkrantz invited people she had met in Berkeley who are working on development, population and climate change mitigation issues in Niger and neighboring countries.

Before dinner on Saturday, the assembled multitude heard presentations on current projects in Niger from:

- Clark Kerr regarding a program of Association Au Coeur du Niger to rescue, house and educate albino children, “ the poorest of the poor” in Zinder
- Alisha Graves and Abdoukader Issoufou for The Oasis Initiative, a project of the University of California (Berkeley) organizing to advance solutions in the Sahel;
- Joel Neuberg regarding current programs supported by FON.



Several of those present pledged financial support to these initiatives as well as to FON's general fund. The OASIS Initiative: <http://oasisinitiative.berkeley.edu/> Albino Project: [http://www.aucoeurduniger.ch/association\\_e.html](http://www.aucoeurduniger.ch/association_e.html). Bob Potter showed a moving photo montage of John Lewis and Mike Parish, deceased since the last reunion: "Parrish & Lewis Remembered" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN4eSOz6LgI> and made available previous film he and Judy Irola had done on the groups: "After 37 Years—Niger PC Reunion 2005" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8C6CmTG2rU> "Niger '66— A Peace Corps Diary" (full) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zFfvSlme1U> Also, Chips Norcross put online PDFs of the 1960s "SHA" newsletter we used to read: <https://www.dropbox.com/s/tg7ce1higrn39sl/SHA%20COPIES%202.pdf?dl=0>



## Meet Meredith McGehee, our new FON president

On June 1, 2016 Meredith McGehee became the new president of Friends of Niger. She served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Niger from 1978 to 1980 in Zinder in the Youth Development program and also taught English at College Fatima. She currently lives in Maryland with her husband, Jeff Drumtra, who served as a PCV in Mirriah, Niger.

Meredith is enthusiastic about returning to serve as FON's new president. After founding the group in the late 1980s she ran the group for about 10 years, handing over the reins shortly after her son came along in the mid 1990s. She gives much credit to Joel Mayer –"PCV extraordinaire"– for keeping things going through the transition to new leadership. Meredith is pleased to have this opportunity again to be more active in helping guide the organization now that her family is raised.

Meredith says, "My hope is that FON can continue to fund worthwhile development projects, to build strong bonds between Americans and Nigeriens on a people-to-people basis, and to help educate Americans about Niger."

Professionally, Meredith McGehee is an expert of democracy issues such as campaign finance, ethics in government and nonprofit lobbying and serves as the principal of McGehee Strategies, which specializes in public interest advocacy campaigns.

Meredith has been named nine times, including 2015, by The Hill as one of the top nonprofit/grassroots lobbyists in Washington. She speaks at universities and organizations around the country, has testified before Congress, and is frequently quoted in national newspapers including The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, Salon, Broadcasting & Cable, The Washington Examiner and The Des Moines Register. She also has appeared on national news shows, including ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Bloomberg TV, C-Span and MSNBC.

You can find this C-SPAN interview and more about her work life at: <http://www.mcgeheestrategies.com>



## New Sun Rises on Our Projects Committee by Lindsay Randall

My favorite Hausa proverb is one that I learned after leaving Niger: yawa shi kan sa zarre ya ja duchi / quantity makes the cotton draw a stone. Unity is strength.

As the new Committee Chair for Projects, I write to share with you information about our Projects Committee and to ask your support for the ongoing work of Friends of Niger. We hope that you can make contributions to FON to help fund projects recommended for funding by the FON Board and Projects and the Projects Committee. Also, we hope that if you have time and expertise, you'd be willing to join in assisting the work of the Projects Committee.

Unlike the other former volunteers who serve on the Projects committee, many of whom are RPCVs, I lived in Niger with the Boston University program in 2009. For those of us who hold Niger dear, we know there's a lot of work to be done. Recent flooding has only added to the teetering food security crisis and the ever-dynamic, ever-evolving threats from fundamentalist organizations flanking Niamey from the north and south. Despite all obstacles, however, Nigeriens persevere. FON only adds to the profound strength that already radiates from our Nigerien counterparts.

Our current Projects Committee members responded to a request for interest, which was emailed to FON members nearly a year ago by our former Vice President and Projects Committee Chairperson, Gabriella Maertens. The current members are:

Steve Anderson, Tom Dechert, Tina Shield, Phoebe Kitson-Davis, Christopher Knapp, Amy Wilson, John Hutchinson (as John Hutchinson also serves on the FON Board, he will not be involved in evaluating any projects that are submitted on his behalf), Geoffrey Guerts, Cheryl Turner.

They bring a wealth of experience in proposal review, impact assessment, and negotiation on projects ranging in size from local, community-based NGOs to USAID funded initiatives. Those on the committee have already evaluated many projects that passed through FON's inboxes, and many maintain close relationships with grantees. The Committee is bolstered by impressive years of experience in Niger, the Sahel, and international development. Our evaluators, most of whom are RPCVs, are skilled in community arts, health education, women's literacy, Sahelian agriculture, fishing practices, animal husbandry, small enterprise development, girls education, and refugee issues.

While the Projects Committee is exceptionally strong, we are looking for additional support in the following technical areas: education (all levels, including vocational), public health, water supply and environmental infrastructure, microfinance (specifically women-targeted economic empowerment opportunities).

The FON Board is also in the process of reviewing some potential changes in our grant process, such as setting deadlines and thresholds for proposals, which are aimed to both streamline our process but also better serve our Nigerien applicants through increased transparency and clearer timelines for decisions. As we move forward, I will endeavor to make the relationships that grantees and those who submit proposals to FON as positive and familiar as possible – something that the steadfast Board and FON members have already worked so hard to do.

The Projects Committee is currently reviewing 3 grant requests for a total of \$8,294. We look forward to your support – financially or by lending your technical expertise to our Committee.



## FON Welcomes Tom Corcoran

Tom Corcoran was born and raised in Chicago, IL. Upon graduation from Loyola University, he joined the Peace Corps as part of the first group of volunteers in Chad. He was assigned to the village of Baga Sola on Lake Chad, where he worked on irrigation projects with local farmers. After his volunteer service, Tom was then selected as a Peace Corps Fellow and spent one year as a management intern in Washington DC. He became Assistant Country Director in the Republic of Dahomey (now Benin), and then Country Director. Altogether he spent seven years of his life in the Peace Corps, and regards that period as one of the highlights of his life.



Upon his return to the US, Tom attended the Wharton Graduate School where he earned a Master's in Public Administration, specializing in public finance.

Upon graduation he went to work for the City of Camden, NJ, one of the poorest cities in America. For eight years he worked in a variety of governmental jobs, becoming the city's business administrator, the highest appointed official. In 1984 Tom founded and became executive director of a non-profit corporation established to redevelop Camden's almost totally abandoned downtown waterfront. Working with his board of directors and a variety of local, state, and federal agencies over a twenty-five year period, the organization was able to attract \$550 million in new public and private investment and established the waterfront as a new center of economic activity. His organization also worked with neighborhood groups throughout the city to help develop community-based plans and obtain government grants.



Tom in 1966 in the town of Baga Sola on Lake Chad.

In 2009 Tom was recruited to lead a similar start-up non-profit whose goal was to stimulate new public and private investment on the post-industrial Philadelphia side of the Delaware River, which had been cut off from the rest of the city forty years earlier by the construction of I-95. During his tenure, the waterfront has become a destination for local residents and regional visitors alike and there is now a significant amount of new private stimulated by the construction of a growing network of parks and trails and seasonal attractions. Tom is the newly elected vice-president of FON's board of directors, and also chairs the organization's fund raising committee. In his words,

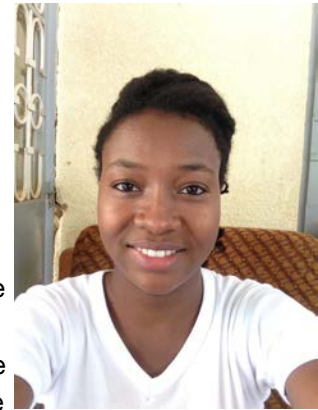
*I am very excited about this opportunity to be involved in grass roots activities in Niger. I think FON has a very good track record of funding successful demonstration projects, and benefits from having a dedicated board and a committed membership. I have always believed that money eventually finds its way to good projects, and I am optimistic that we will be able to secure new and increased funding for FON's many activities in Niger. - Tom Corcoran*



## Nigerienne Wins Partial Scholarship to U.S. College

Africa's Tomorrow, an Oregon-based NGO founded by a returned Peace Corps volunteer to help finance college education in the U.S. for qualified young African women, selected its first-ever Nigerienne scholarship recipient this summer.

*Africa's Tomorrow* (AT) selected Niamey resident Maimouna Bio Gado and has pledged to provide her annual modest financial support once she successfully enrolls at an American college. AT selected Maimouna based on her written essay and academic record. Maimouna, 25, previously earned an Associate of Arts degree during two years at Pima Community College in Arizona, where she majored in political science with a 4.0 grade point average. Maimouna was unable to complete her college education due to lack of funds and returned to Niger in 2015 without the four-year college degree she dreamed of achieving.



*Africa's Tomorrow* selects a handful of aspiring African female college students who usually are sponsored by Peace Corps volunteers. Maimouna is sponsored by FON President Meredith McGehee. AT awards the young women a modest grant to assist with the college application process and defray expenses such as TOEFL exams. Scholarship recipients are responsible for gaining acceptance to a U.S. college and finding additional funding to pay for their education, usually a combination of assistance from the school and donations from individuals. Grant recipients are expected to return to Africa within 10 years of completing college.

"Both my parents are educators and value education very much," Maimouna explained. "My dad used to tell us that education was the only real heritage that he could give us, because it couldn't be taken away from us, be lost or broken. So he saved up as much as he could and sent me to study to the U.S. But American education being expensive and us not having the means, I couldn't go as far as we wanted, and I had to come back to my country."



"There is a lot of pressure, from religious leaders and society, on young girls to abandon school and get married. The religious leaders preach that school depraves girls, and men in our society prefer young girls for marriage. In Niger there are a lot of forced marriages of girls, as early as age 13."

"I hope to fight for women's and children's rights as well as their education. I hope to be a role model for young girls, not only in my country, but beyond my country's boundaries. Young African girls need more examples of strong female leaders. There is a saying that when a woman is educated, all the family [becomes educated] because she is the nurturer and the teacher of the family. My goal is to have all women and children educated. I would like to be part of the government that advocates for them. Development comes from education.

Encouraged by her support from Africa's Tomorrow, Maimouna has begun the college application process. To help Maimouna achieve her desire to complete her college education, go to [www.africastomorrow.org](http://www.africastomorrow.org), find the link for Maimouna on the 2016 students list, and make a contribution.

**Friends of Niger Membership Form** *(Please print clearly)*

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_ City / State / Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone Numbers (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (C) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email \_\_\_\_\_  
 Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_ Dates in Niger (Years) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Location in Niger \_\_\_\_\_ Program or Involvement \_\_\_\_\_

PRIVACY POLICY: Your contact information is requested and maintained by FON so that we can contact you. FON does not share your information with any third party other than with the National Peace Corps Association with whom we have a reciprocity agreement.

- Please send paper copies of The Camel Express newsletter by US Mail
- Please send links to the PDF version of The Camel Express by email

Membership dues & donations help fund FON activities including The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON archives, and local Nigerien projects. The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3). Membership and contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

- Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON**
  - In addition to my membership, I have enclosed a General Contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ OR
  - Instead of joining FON at this time, I enclose a General Contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - I would like to support FON Matching projects:  Goats,  RAIN,  Well,  CARE \$\_\_\_\_\_
- Merchandise
- Please send \_\_\_ Friends of Niger T-Shirts at \$15 each (shipping included) \$\_\_\_\_\_
  - T-Shirt Sizes: S \_\_\_ M \_\_\_ L \_\_\_ XL \_\_\_ T-Shirt Color: brown \_\_\_ beige \_\_\_
- TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$\_\_\_\_\_**

Make check or money order payable to Friends of Niger, and mail with this form to:  
 PO Box 5823, Washington DC 20016-1423  
 To pay FON dues with credit card through NPCA, please contact us for further instructions.

## Bad boys not Boko Haram: How the Media Misinterprets African Violence

In the March 2016 Camel Express newsletter we referred you to an article in the Foreign Policy Magazine called, “Dead Man’s Market and the Boy Gangs of Niger.” Since then, residents in Niger have rejected that report on youth violence in Niger saying that it gave too extreme a characterization of the “bad boys.” Here’s the link to this new article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/20/bad-boys-not-boko-haram-how-the-media-misinterprets-african-violence>



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*"There is no way to peace.  
Peace is the way."*  
- A.J. Muste

## Inside the Camel

- PAGE 1 - Letter from the FON President; CARE update article
- PAGE 2 - Letter from the FON President continued; Peace Corps Beyond; Board of Directors
- PAGE 3 - Correspondence from Zoolkoski for Vitamins; FON Financial report, CARE continued
- PAGE 4 - Tribute to John Soloninka
- PAGE 5 - Thank you Gabriella Maertens; CEX distribution
- PAGE 6 - FON Needs an Editor; Reunion Celebration
- PAGE 7 - Meet Meredith McGehee, our new FON president; Reunion Celebration continued
- PAGE 8 - New Sun Rises on Our Projects Committee
- PAGE 9 - FON Welcomes Tom Corcoran
- PAGE 10 - Nigerienne Wins Partial Scholarship to U.S. College
- PAGE 11 - Membership Form; Bad boys not Boko Haram
- PAGE 12 - Inside The Camel

An electronic full color version of this newsletter and previous editions  
can be accessed at [www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org)

