

## A Message from Peace Corps Director Mary Abrams

Mary Abrams was appointed the Niger Peace Corps Director last June. She sent us this message:

*Dear Friends of Niger; Welcome to 2007. I believe it is going to be a great year for Peace Corps Niger even given the tight budget situation. We have been through some pretty disruptive and tough times but we are still on our feet and I believe we have turned the corner. Hopefully 2007, 45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger's uninterrupted service to Niger, will prove to be the year of the rebound.*

*I'm writing this as I head down the road from Niamey to Zinder, glad to be out of the office doing the fun part of the job - visiting Volunteers. The last time I wrote I had been as far east as Maradi but hadn't made it to Zinder so it is great to finally be making the trip out to the far east country. We welcomed a group of stagiaires in July. I was touched by the swearing in ceremony. I particularly loved*



New Peace Corps Director Mary Abrams enjoys a meal with freinds in Niamey.

*seeing Tondi [Training Director] so obviously proud of the stagiaires and all the work they had done over the previous 8 weeks. And beside me for this delightful event was Henry McKoy, Regional Director for the Africa Region, and Mary Angelini, Director of the Crisis Corps. Little did we know that just a few weeks later the halls of the Bureau would suddenly be hushed by the absence of Tondi's booming*

voice and great laughter. Tondi got sick in mid-November and in late December we were finally able to get him to Marseille for much needed medical treatment - carrying with him as moral support a packet of emails and cards from many of you. He is now back and regaining the weight he lost. Julien Denakpo arrived to bridge the gap from Lee's departure to the arrival of our next "permanent" Admin Officer, Pat Nuwanyakpa. Then Yves Toudonou showed up to run the winter stage while Tondi was recovering. Julien has done everything from getting the electricity up to Hamdallaye to reorganizing the Admin Section for greater efficiency. His smile and all his great ties have definitely lit up the Bureau. We are incredibly lucky to have both of these Porto Novoians until March.

There have been a number of other happenings in my first 6 months - we have formed a Volunteer Advisory Committee; we have had a record-earning fundraiser; I have learned how to ask people to speak more slowly in Hausa. And through all these various changes and stases, Peace Corps Niger is still moving along its own bumpy road and I'm still happily enjoying the ride.

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## Visit with Nigerien Ambassador Touré

On March 9, Penni St. Hilaire (FON Recording Secretary) and Jude Andreasen (newsletter editor) met for the first time with Mme. Toure Maiga, Ambassador for the Republic of Niger to the United States. Also present was her Counselor, Mr. Amadou Sounna. Penni and Jude summarizing the goals and activities of Friends of Niger, and Mme. Toure indicated that she was eager to cultivate a robust communication with the organization. She said she had met the previous day with the Miami-based organization, **Educate Tomorrow**, which is sending a

delegation to Niger in April. ([www.educatetomorrow.org](http://www.educatetomorrow.org)) The organization was co-founded by Virginia Emmons, a Niger RPCV.

Mme. Ambassador noted that collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution to promote Niger was being considered, and that she had met with Niger's Tourism Minister on promoting tourism, and particularly ecotourism, in Niger. She believes two of the worst environmental problems in Niger are desertification and proliferation of the water hyacinth, which is clogging the Niger River. (See follow-up story on pages 6-7). The meeting was congenial and a great start to what promises to be an active and open collaboration.

Later, the Ambassador's secretary, Maimouna Iro, joined the discussion. Many RPCVs may remember her, as did Jude, since she served for 25 years in the Niamey Peace Corps Office.

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## Update on FON's Micro-Credit Project in Niger : Tin-Hinan

### Your Donation Requested!

Tin-Hinan is a non-profit registered with the government of Niger. The founder and president of this organization is a Tuarag woman, Habsatou Aboubacar. Rural women in Niger encounter enormous difficulties, among others, the dearth of revenue sources due to lack of means and time to take part in activities that will generate revenue and permit them to be financially independent. Our donation has helped finance the micro-credit operation for the women of Goroubi in the Tillabery Region to enable them to provide for their needs and the needs of their children. An important focus of this project is literacy and numeracy, since the women need these skills for any income-generating project. Women spend mornings with these classes and afternoons with the craft projects. Your donations will help purchase more materials for the women to work with and for the basic costs of the project. Sue Rosenfeld, our FON liaison in Niger, reports that she recently purchased a wonderful bag from Tin-Hinan that she uses every day.

Donating through FON is now 100% tax-deductible since we have attained tax-exempt status. For more information on this project, email Gabriella Maertens at [gmaertens@earthlink.net](mailto:gmaertens@earthlink.net)

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## Other Projects Supported by FON

FON continues to contribute to other worthwhile projects in Niger, including a school well project, a children's vitamins project, and a health manual project. Former volunteers have initiated other projects, such as Educate Tomorrow, and fund-raising events. We can all help with bringing our Peace Corps experience back home and maintaining support for the people of a country that changed our perspectives forever. If you know of an RPCV effort you would like to see reported here, write or e-mail and let us know.

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# Niger's National Guinea Worm Eradication Program Enters Critical Period

**By Stephanie Palmer**

Stephanie Palmer worked as a consultant with the Carter Center to Niger's National Guinea Worm Eradication Program from June - December 2006 and will be returning in May 2007. She reports on the program's progress and funding needs to eradicate the disease by 2009.

*"May Allah spit upon you!"* the young girl cursed at Sani as he pressed upon the reservoir of pus that had formed in her knee where the guinea worm had been removed. Awa's mother took hold of her hands as Sani continued with the treatment. Despite antibiotics and daily bandagings, the infection had slowly grown worse until the girl could no longer walk and howled in pain at every touch. Her father worried that she would never be able to walk again, meaning that she could no longer follow the herds and would not be able to find a husband. It also meant, Sani later explained, that the family would be forced to abandon her, as each member in the nomadic Bellah tribes must be able to contribute to the family in order to ensure its survival.



Removal of a guinea worm.

Guinea worm is transmitted when an infected person enters a stagnant pond and the worm releases thousands of larvae into that water source. An intermediate host, the cyclops, then eats the larvae, which are then consumed in drinking water by humans. Although the gastric juices destroy the cyclops, they do not harm the larvae, which grow and develop in the person's abdomen. Eventually, the mature females and males mate. After mating, the males die, while the females

continue to thrive in the human's body. After 9-12 months, the female is ready to release her larvae and moves to an appropriate place in the body, often in the feet or legs. A few larvae are initially released, which causes a blister to form. This blister, once it comes in contact with water, will burst, releasing the larvae into the water source starting the cycle once again.

Although the guinea worm itself is not lethal, the wounds where the worm emerges often become infected, incapacitating the afflicted person. This means that farmers cannot take care of their

fields, herders cannot guard their animals, women cannot care for their families, and children cannot attend school. This problem is especially serious in Niger, where food supplies are tenuous and any interruption to these supplies could result in a catastrophe.

Guinea worm contamination is easy to prevent and can be achieved in several ways: those afflicted must not enter water sources to contaminate them; filters can be used to strain out the cyclops; ABATE® larvicide can be used to kill the cyclops; or, where available, the population can consume pump or well water.

Since the inception of Niger's National Guinea Worm Eradication Program (GWEP), the number of those afflicted by the disease has been reduced dramatically: from over 35,000 cases in 1994 to 110 in 2006. It has also been eradicated in all areas but the Tillaberi region, where it is still endemic to 4 districts: Tillaberi, Tera, Ouallam, and Kollo. The World Health Organization, the Carter Center, and other health agencies have demanded that Niger stop all transmission of guinea worm in 2007, which will allow the country to completely eradicate the disease by 2009. This means that the GWEP needs additional funding to provide the filters, ABATE® larvicide, and education in order to meet this deadline.



Supervisor holds a newly extracted worm.

Please support Niger's effort to eradicate this horrible disease. Donations can be made online at [www.cartercenter.org](http://www.cartercenter.org) under the box "Donate Now." To earmark funds specifically to Niger's GWEP, indicate in the "comments" box that the donation is to go to Niger's guinea worm eradication program. Donations can also be mailed to:

Becky Brookshire  
Associate Director of Development, Health Programs  
The Carter Center  
453 Freedom Parkway  
Atlanta, GA 30307

Checks should be made out to the Carter Center and a short note should be included that indicates the donation is to be used for Niger's GWEP. For more information on Guinea worm disease, please visit [www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea\\_worm/location.html](http://www.cartercenter.org/health/guinea_worm/location.html)

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## "Bank for the Poor" Arrives in Niger

**NIAMEY** - Tucked inside a nook in the capital city's bustling Grand Marché, Niger Mutual Credit (CMI) opened its doors in October to a clientele that other banks turn away: the very poor. With microcredit, a concept pioneered in Bangladesh by economist Muhammad Yunus, entrepreneurs too poor to qualify for traditional bank loans are provided very small sums to start their own enterprises. Here in Niger CMI relies on financial backing from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation and receives additional support from the International Mutual Credit Centre (CICM). Created in 1979 with the goal of promoting banking services for people in developing countries, the CICM has more than 17 mutual credit federations operating in central and west Africa including Senegal, Mali and Cameroon. It will cost around 3,000 CFA francs (4.50 euros) to open a bank account at one of CMI's new branches, and all banking operations, such as deposits and withdrawals are free. After three months of regular deposits, a client will be

able to obtain a 12-month loan with an interest rate of less than 2.0 percent per month.

Reported by Natasha Burley to Business in Africa

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## Local Populations Struggle to Diffuse Longstanding Border Disputes

In January, tensions rose between Niger and Burkina Faso as they accused each other's security forces of crossing the border to rob and harass villagers. The dispute has simmered quietly for years with government officials having held talks on border issues since 2000. But only in recent weeks had local officials started making accusations against each other. "The situation is very difficult as the exact location of the border has not been agreed on," the governor of the Sahel Region of Burkina Faso, Bila Dipama, told the UN media 'IRIN.' "Therefore we think that we must peacefully manage a buffer zone until a definitive solution can be found," he said. The buffer zone should run between the Tillaberi Region in Niger and the Eastern and Sahel regions of Burkina Faso and should be controlled jointly by the two countries' security forces. The officials also agreed to call on the International Court of Justice in the Hague to arbitrate the border dispute.

Tensions at the meeting were eventually diffused, said Mr Dipama. "Since that day local officials have started talking to one another again." Previous meetings over border issues had been between government ministers and other senior officials; this one featured mayors and prefects in the border area as well as local officials from two countries' departments of customs and forestry and wildlife services. "Many on both sides of the border were born in the region and so they know the problem very well," Mr Dipama said. "It is also going to be easier for them to get support of the population to solve the problems." The officials agreed to inform each other in advance of starting any infrastructural projects and to increase cooperation to facilitate free movement as well as to control rising banditry.

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## Niger's Adoption Policy Under Review

In January, adoptionblogs.com reported that although Nigerien law does not technically permit adoptions by couples with biological children, a longstanding policy of granting exceptions is under review by the Direction de la Protection de l'Enfant. The report stated that in the last seven years, no Nigerien children have received U.S. immigrant visas on the basis of being orphans adopted by U.S. citizens, and that there are no U.S. agencies placing children from Niger.

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## Niger Abandons Energy Privatizations After Reform

Niger has abandoned plans to privatise its state electricity and fuel distribution companies,

following World Bank agreement that reforms undertaken make privatisation unnecessary, Finance and Economy Minister Ali Mahamane Lamine Zeine said.

Niger has been under pressure for over a decade to privatise state industries under reform programmes overseen by foreign donors like the World Bank and its sister institution, the International Monetary Fund. "What is privatisation for? Better management, a better product for the consumer. So if you have all this, why push people to privatise?" Lamine Zeine said in a state television broadcast at the weekend. He said the World Bank had agreed to the abandoning of plans to privatise power utility NIGELEC and fuel importer SONIDEP after the government discussed the likely benefits and drawbacks of privatisation, including the possibility of exchanging a state-controlled monopoly for a privately-owned monopoly. NIGELEC imports 95% of its power consumption from neighbouring Nigeria, Africa's top oil producer. Niger has already privatised its water and telecommunications industries.

Reported in [www.engineeringnews.co.za](http://www.engineeringnews.co.za) on March 12, 2007.

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## Trees and Crops Turn Back the Desert

The front page of February 11 *New York Sunday Times* featured a color photograph from Ague, Niger, showing young men operating a foot pump to draw water for irrigation. The following are excerpts from the article.

GUIDAN BAKOYE, Niger - In this dust-choked region, long seen as an increasingly barren wasteland decaying into desert, millions of trees are flourishing, thanks in part to poor farmers whose simple methods cost little or nothing at all. Better conservation and improved rainfall have led to at least 7.4 million newly tree-covered acres in Niger, researchers have found, achieved largely without relying on the large-scale planting of trees or other expensive methods. Recent studies of vegetation patterns, based on detailed satellite images and on-the-ground inventories of trees, have found that Niger, a place of persistent hunger and deprivation, has recently added millions of new trees and is now far greener than it was 30 years ago.

About 20 years ago, farmers like Ibrahim Danjimo realized something terrible was happening to their fields. "Suddenly, the trees were all gone." So Mr. Danjimo and other farmers in Guidan Bakoye took a small but radical step. No longer would they clear the saplings from their fields before planting, as they had for generations. Instead they would protect and nurture them, carefully plowing around them when sowing millet, sorghum, peanuts and beans.

Today, the success in growing new trees suggests that the harm to much of the Sahel may not have been permanent, but a temporary loss of fertility. The evidence, scientists say, demonstrates how relatively small changes in human behavior can transform the regional ecology. Another change was the way trees were regarded by law. From colonial times, all trees in Niger had been regarded as the property of the state, which gave farmers little incentive to protect them. But over time, farmers began to regard the trees in their fields as their property, and in recent years the government has recognized the benefits of that outlook by allowing individuals to own trees. Farmers make money from the trees by selling branches, pods, fruit and

bark. Because those sales are more lucrative over time than simply chopping down the tree for firewood, the farmers preserve them.

They also have extraordinary ecological benefits. Their roots fix the soil in place, preventing it from being carried off with the fierce Sahelian winds and preserving arable land. The roots also help hold water in the ground, rather than letting it run off across rocky, barren fields into gullies where it floods villages and destroys crops.

Ibrahim Idy, a farmer in Dahirou, a village in the Zinder region, has 20 baobab trees in his fields. Selling the leaves and fruit brings him about \$300 a year in additional income. He has used that money to buy a motorized pump to draw water from his well to irrigate his cabbage and lettuce fields. His neighbors, who have fewer baobabs, use their children to draw water and dig and direct the mud channels that send water coursing to the beds. While their children work the fields, Mr. Idy's children attend school.

"It really requires the effort of the whole community," said Dr. Larwanou. "If farmers don't take action themselves and the community doesn't support it, farmer-managed regeneration cannot work." Still, more trees mean that Niger's people are in a better position to withstand whatever changes the climate might bring. "This is something the farmers control, and something they do for themselves," said Dr. Larwanou. "It demonstrates that with a little effort and foresight, you can reduce poverty in the Sahel. It is not impossible or hopeless, and does not have to cost a lot of money. It can be done."

## **Letter from an RPCV to the NY Times Editor regarding this article.**

*As a former Niger Peace Corps volunteer, I was gratified to read your article about local progress in reforesting the country. But I disagree that these results have come about without the efforts of the government or aid organizations. During my time in the country, I worked as an agro-forestry volunteer in a rural village educating farmers on the benefits of trees for improving soil fertility, raising water tables and deterring erosion.*

*In fact, for almost 40 years, hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers and government agents have worked at the grass-roots level to get farmers to adopt the practices your article describes. The fact that a Peace Corps volunteer costs the American taxpayer less than 10 percent the cost of the average soldier reinforces a lesson all volunteers learn during their time in service: how you help can be far more significant than how much.*

M. Masaya Seltzer, New York, Feb. 14, 2007

## **RPCVs Communicate with FON regarding the NY Times Article**

*Joel Neuberg, Jack Saunders and I visited our old Niger PC villages last year on our way to see the March 29, 2006 Total Solar Eclipse. Along the way we met Chris, a*



*current PCV. Between the four of us, through many e-mails, we developed a tree planting program. (Chris did and will do most all of the work.) Two types of Acacia trees will be planted, Australian Acacia for food bearing seed and the other, for Gum Arabic, a cash crop. And neither is harvested by chopping down trees. The three of us are the initial sponsors, providing the funding for this Peace Corps project. Fields have been dedicated and the first plantings are to begin shortly. Even if the trees are not a miracle, at least the project is providing direct employment to a few Nigeriens; rather, than to the Washington DC experts. In addition to funding this PC project, or others, via the PC web site, in this modern age, we can wire funds directly to people via Western Union and we can text message our old friends and houseboys etc. Even current PC Vols have e-mail. As retirement approaches we can to continue our worldly involvement, even if only from our computers.*

Sandy

*I recall spending the first month of my Peace Corps service in West Africa some forty years ago working on a new USAID-funded farm school south of Maradi, Niger, while waiting for the regional office of adult literacy where I was assigned to open up. Our job consisted of putting a fence around the extensive property of the farm school; and in the evening we would chat with the newly-appointed Director on the veranda of the main building about his future plans, which included planting trees on the sparsely wooded land in an attempt to reforest that corner of the Sahel. I ended staying in Niger long beyond my volunteer duty and did not happen to see the farm school director again until five years later, at a meeting in the capital. I asked him, then, what had become of his plans for reforestation. He thought a moment, then burst out laughing. "I didn't have to do anything," he said. "Your fence was enough. The seeds were already there in the ground. The problem was that all the young plants were grazed off by goats and cattle. Once the fence cut down on the grazing, the property reforested itself."*

Peter Easton, Niger 1964-1967

*Very interesting, how ecology works if we let it. And I am impressed with the economic angle too. The farmers "owning" their own trees makes them better stewards, puts added value on the trees in the minds of the people. I would like to know more about this story.*

Robert Potter, Niger 19

## **From the BBC: Niger Taking Ownership of Disrupted Island**

Niger is officially taking ownership of the disputed island of Lete located on the banks of the Niger River, where its flag is to be raised shortly.

Niger and Benin have disputed the island for decades but the disagreement was finally settled in the International Court of Justice in 2005. Lete is some 60km square and its floods plains are used by nomads for grazing. There are also unconfirmed reports that the island may be rich in oil and other minerals like iron. The Niger River forms a natural border between Niger and

Benin.

The BBC's Idy Baraou, who is attending the ceremony, says hundreds of soldiers, republican guards, gendarmes, and university scholars and lecturers are expected at the event. Three government ministers will conduct the ceremony, he says.

Our correspondent says the case was referred to the ICJ in 2000 after the two countries closed their borders following a raid by Niger's army, in which infrastructure built by Benin was destroyed. The ICJ based its rulings on grazing permits awarded by the French colonial authorities in 1914. Both countries became independent in 1960 but they did not agree on sovereignty over Lete and 15 smaller islands. The ICJ awarded Benin ownership of nine of the other islands.

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## Nigerien Film Maker Seeks Niger RPCVs for Video Documentary

A Nigerien who was a language teacher for PC Niger (1990) is currently in the U.S. on a fellowship for foreign journalists. He sends the following message:

*Since 1990, I've been a journalist and a communicator, owning a communications agency called Les Echos du Sahel, and dealing rural world and development (printing, broadcasting, training, advising, etc.). I arrived in the U.S. last June on a fellowship funded by the State Department to allow mid-career professionals from the developing world a year of rewarding experiences and studies in the U.S. One of my projects is to make a video documentary about RPCVs who are still involved with Niger in one way or another. But all my attempts to reach these folks have been unsuccessful. The idea is: after 45 years of a successful presence in Niger, some RPCVs have kept contact with their host country, in the spirit of the program created by President Kennedy. Whether they work in civil society or as individuals, I want to portray them in their daily life and show how they continue to impact and improve the reality or the image of Niger. I am currently enrolled in Broadcasting and International Development studies. I will be staying in the US until next June. Please feel free to contact me for questions if you would like to participate. I look forward to hearing from you.*

*Sai An Jima!*

*Ibbo Daddy Abdoulaye  
Hubert H. Humphrey Fellow  
Philip Merrill School of Journalism  
1117 Journalism Building  
University of Maryland-College Park  
Maryland, MD 20742  
Phone: 301-405-2003  
Fax: 301-405-9385  
ibbo\_daddy@yahoo.com*

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# Zarma & Hausa on the Web

By doing a quick search on the Internet for "Zarma Dictionary" and "Hausa Dictionary", you can find several resources. The Peace Corps Zarma Dictionary is now "officially" on the web at: <http://www.bisharat.net/Zarma/> Many sites for "Hausa Dictionary" exist. One helpful site supported by UCLA is:

[http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/hausarbaka/Download\\_vocabulary.html](http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/aflang/hausarbaka/Download_vocabulary.html)

*Calling all Zarmaphones and Hausaphones to take notice!*

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## Peace Match

Are you a returned Peace Corps Volunteer eager to share your experiences with others? Or are you a classroom teacher looking for first-hand information on the culture and way of life of the people in countries served by the Peace Corps? If you or someone you know would answer yes to either of these questions, register as a speaker or as a host at: <http://www.peacematch.org>

The Peace Match Program is sponsored and administered by the National Peace Corps Association under a cooperative agreement with the Peace Corps. The goal is to increase the number of classroom presentations made by RPCVs and help teachers find speakers to visit their classrooms.

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*There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.*

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## FON Responds to Peace Corps Niger's Girls' Education Scholarship Program

Girls' education is a problem throughout Africa, particularly in Niger. In Niger, only one in ten women can read and write; and one in three girls attends secondary school. Most villages in Niger do not have secondary schools. If girls do finish primary school in or near their village, most do not continue their studies. Secondary schools are located far from remote villages in towns and cities where families cannot afford to send their daughters. Girls tend to stay near their villages and marry young. In 2000 Peace Corps Niger decided to do its part in ending this cycle. The Peace Corps Niger's support of "Young Girls' Scholarship Program" (YGSP) began in 2000, allowing some talented and needy girls to attend secondary school.

### **Selection**

With assistance from local teachers and school directors, Peace Corps Volunteers distribute YGSP applications to schools in the areas where they serve. To qualify for the scholarship, girls must pass the comprehensive nationwide test. After reviewing the results of the test and

applications, PCVs and school officials select the recipients, based on talent and need.

## Support

The scholarship covers the cost of books, supplies, living and tutoring expenses. Peace Corps Niger also tries to hold an annual conference for all of the scholarship recipients, which helps increase their peer support network. The director of Peace Corps Niger's education sector, Assalama Sidi, a mentor to all of the girls in the program, supervises the program and the conference.

## Success

Going to school secures a better life for each girl. It has been shown that for each year of school that a girl completes, she is significantly less likely to raise a family in poverty. Even if she does not become Niger's first female president, she might be the only literate woman in her village. Her peers will respect her and listen to her. Most of all, her children will have no choice but to go to school.

## How to Support the Program

A donation of \$200 supports one girl's scholarship for one year. Friends of Niger has agreed to fully fund the program for 2007, but more sustainable mechanisms must be found for future funding. If you are interested in supporting this program, you may donate to FON (which now has attained tax-exempt status) and note that your donation, 100% tax-deductible, is targeted for the Girls' Scholarship Program.

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# Remerciements de Tondi

In December, 2006, FON received word that Aboubacar (Tondi) Mahaman, the Peace Corps Niger training director, was gravely ill, suffering from a misdiagnosed case of hepatitis. He had been in the National Hospital in Niamey for a month with a serious liver condition, and told he would die without immediate surgery -- in France. The new PCD, Mary Abrams, generously covered his plane ticket, and volunteers, PRPCVs, friends and relatives raised more than \$20,000 more to cover his surgery, medicine and care. He has now returned to his post in Niamey, and sent the following:

*Hi all, bonjour or bonsoir,*

*I would like to inform all of you that I am back to work after a long sick leave and I am doing well. My story is a sad one and that is the reason why I do not want to get into details, but it has been really hard for me, my family and all of you. All I know is that I would not have been sending this email today if many of you have not stepped in, in order to take the lead and give the help and support needed. When I first heard from the doctor (after a long hold at the clinic and the national hospital) that I needed to be Medvaced, it sounded to me as an impossible dream because I knew at that time I simply could not afford to do so by my own, knowing that we do not have any Medevac insurance coverage.*

*In my mind it was just IMPOSSIBLE. But you know my story has shown that*

*nothing is impossible if you do have true friends who truly love you and care truly about your health. Day after day, I just realized that if your friends care about you, they will do whatever they can to help get you out of trouble. That was how the impossible became possible and here I am.*

*I would like to use this note as an opportunity to thank all of you who have helped in that process and thank God. I would like to extend my thanks and recognition to the PCVs, RPCVs and their friends and families for all the help and support, especially those who have taken the lead to make this happen. One of the lessons that I have learned is that not only is it good to have true friends but also it is good to be LOVED BY PEOPLE and to have the opportunity and the chance to witness it.*

*I hope you will understand the feeling I am expressing here because there is no way I can thank you enough for what you have done for me. May God give me the health and strength needed to help those who have helped me. Even though life is short it really feels good to be loved. Thank you all and may God bless you. I love you all and wish you all the best.*

*Your friend, Tondi*

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## **West Africa's Mightiest River at Risk**

### **The Niger River's Human and Environmental Stress Factors Being Addressed**

Ambassador Toure indicated to FON that a major environmental problem in Niger is that the water flow and ecosystems of the Niger River are at risk. FON researched the extent of the problem and found that World Wildlife Fund addressed the problem recently on their Web site

[http://www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/where\\_we\\_work/africa/where/niger/niger\\_river/index.cfm](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/africa/where/niger/niger_river/index.cfm)

The following is an excerpt from the article:

River flows in Africa's Niger basin are decreasing at the same time as fishing pressure is increasing, leading to drastic declines in fishery yields. Deforestation and farming of fragile soils is leading to siltation of river channels. Maintaining natural flow regimes in the river, and associated sediment dynamics, could go a long way toward relieving the pressures on the Niger River's ecology without exacerbating regional tensions over food and water security.



The original Tuareg name of the river, the third largest river in Africa, was "egerou nigereou" which means "river of rivers." The river has made human survival possible even in times of desolate drought. The river harbors nearly 250 species of freshwater fish, of which 20 are found nowhere else on earth. In the floodplains and delta wetlands along the river, a specialized flora has evolved that is adapted to extreme fluctuations in water levels. These communities support a wide variety of fascinating animals, including hundreds of

thousands of trans migratory birds.

A combination of human population growth, unsustainable resource use and development, and desertification are threatening the Niger River's ability to supply crucially needed natural resources to the people of West Africa. Habitat alterations are also threatening the rich tapestry of the ecosystem. These include dams, which drastically alter the flow and sediment regimes and destroy aquatic habitats, as well as irrigated agriculture and discharge of sewage and other pollutants into the river. The combination of these changes are creating ideal conditions for the spread of the water hyacinth, an invasive species that chokes the river channels and increases evaporative losses by up to ten-fold. Future water development in the Niger basin is likely to generate political tensions as the nine basin nations compete for control of an increasingly important resource. WWF is promoting adoption of a regional strategy for the sustainable use and development of the Niger River and related resources.

## Wikipedia on Water Hyacinth

According to the online dictionary, Wikipedia, there are seven species of water hyacinth, an invasive, pernicious plant that can double its population in two weeks. They reproduce primarily by way of runners or stolons, eventually forming daughter plants, but may also reproduce via seeds. Native to South America, water hyacinths have been widely introduced throughout North America, Asia, Australia and Africa. When not controlled, water hyacinth will cover lakes and ponds entirely; this dramatically impacts water flow, blocks sunlight from reaching native aquatic plants, and starves the water of oxygen. Directly blamed for starving subsistence farmers in Papua New Guinea and Australia, water hyacinth remains a major problem where effective control programs are not in place. In some areas, the plants are being harvested for cattle food. The plants also create a prime habitat for mosquitoes, the classic vectors of disease, and a species of snail known to host the worm which causes schistosomiasis.

As chemical and mechanical removal is often too expensive and ineffective, researchers have turned to biological control agents to deal with water hyacinth. The effort began in the 1970s when USDA researchers released three species of weevil known to feed on water hyacinth into the United States: *Neochetina bruchi*, *N. eichhorniae*, and the water hyacinth borer, *Sameodes albiguttalis*. Although meeting with limited success, the weevils have since been released in more than 20 other countries.

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## Our Next Camel Express

You can have a by-line in the next edition of Camel Express:

Tell us something interesting about yourself since you left Niger.

Tell us something about your favorite person, place, and occasion in Niger.

Tell us about an event or gathering your "stage" or group of Nigerien friends is planning.

Tell us about any current event in Niger.

Send your information/story to:

John Soloninka  
[j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net](mailto:j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)  
2388 Glenmawr Ave.  
Columbus, OH 43202

## **The Camel Express is the Friends of Niger Newsletter**

Visit us at: [www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org)

Or Write to us at:

**Friends of Niger**  
**P.O. Box 5823**  
**Washington, D.C.**  
**20016-9998**

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# **Call For Support From *Friends of Niger***

May 13, 2007

Dear Friends of Niger,

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger (FON) is requesting your support for a wonderful program in Niger. For the past several years, Peace Corps Niger (PCN) has sponsored scholarships and support for 18 Nigerien girls to complete their secondary education. The Board members of FON have assisted with this program in the past with donations from our members. PCN and the FON Board members consider this program an essential investment in the future of Niger because more than 60% of all poverty in Africa is found among women, less than 1/3 of girls who complete primary school in Niger are able to attend secondary school, every year of school a girl completes dramatically reduces the chances she will live in poverty, and recent studies suggest that improvements in female literacy are crucial to development in traditional societies. In the future, the girls who participate in this Peace Corps program could become leaders in the development of their communities and resources and support for other girls.

Peace Corps Niger has reported that sources of funding for this program have diminished and has requested that FON increase our funding support for the program. Because of its importance, the FON Board members have pledged to contribute \$3,600 which is equal to a year's budget for the program. The financial support for the scholarship program amounts to \$200/girl per year, and currently there are 18 girls in the program. PCN is committed to providing the on-going infrastructure and Peace Corps volunteer to support the program. We are approaching you, the Friends of Niger, to join with us in guaranteeing the future of this crucial program. We are requesting that you pledge a contribution of 10, 15, or 20 dollars a year to this program. In addition to our financial support the FON Board of Directors has committed FON to researching with Peace Corps Niger alternative and more permanent sources of funding for this program.

As I write to you on this Mother's Day, 2007, I am reflecting on the lyrics of "Daughters" a

popular song by John Mayer that speak to taking care of the girls because our girls one day become mothers... In honor of all our mothers including our Nigerien "host" mothers, I am appealing to you for your support of this program. With your assistance, we continue to make a contribution to the development of Niger and the people we love so deeply.

Sincerely,

John W. Soloninka

President, Friends of Niger

The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.

Please use this pledge form:

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To: John Soloninka, President

FRIENDS of NIGER  
P.O. Box 5823  
Washington, D.C. 20016-9998

Dear John,

\_\_\_ Yes, I want to contribute to the Peace Corps Niger/FON Girls' Scholarship Program:  
Please receive my contribution of \_\_\_\_\_  
(checks should be made to the order of Friends of Niger)

\_\_\_ Yes, I want to contribute to the Peace Corps Niger/FON Girls' Scholarship Program  
and am pledging the following annual amount: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Yes, I want to help PCN/FON raise awareness of this program and  
will distribute information about this program  
among my Niger RPCV contacts and others.

\_\_\_ Yes, I want to help PCN/FON with this program  
by coordinating a fund raising event in my community.

\_\_\_ Yes, I want to help PCN/FON with this program by submitting an article  
(and/or photos) to the FON newsletter, Camel Express, about my experiences  
with girls' education while I was in service in Niger.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please note that a list of donations and pledges will be distributed to Peace Corps Niger and FON members.

For your donation, please indicate one or more of the following:

My donation to this program is given:

\_\_\_ In memory of \_\_\_\_\_ by: \_\_\_\_\_



\_\_\_ In honor of \_\_\_\_\_ by: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ Anonymously

The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.  
Contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.