

The Camel Express

Volume 26 Issue 2

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger



August 2011

FON Plans Efforts to Lobby for Reinstatement of Peace Corps Niger **Your Input Needed for a Strategy Meeting in September**

Niger is not the first country to experience a Peace Corps suspension due to local unrest. Those of us who love Niger and its people must advocate for a reinstatement as soon and as vocally as possible to attract the attention of Congress and the administration. FON board and members hope to generate substantial interest from supporters as we talk to various decision makers in Washington in September, including Congress and representatives from Senior PC Staff. Supporters of the Bolivia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia programs have undertaken concerted efforts to reinstate their programs, and Peace Corps has just begun a re-entry to Guinea. FON can use learn from their experiences in advocacy.

All are invited to attend an important meeting on September 23 (details not final yet) in Washington, DC, to discuss a strategy for advocating and lobbying for reinstatement of PC Niger, as well as plans to identify and continue support for local NGOs in Niger. FON continues this support, as seen in this issue of the Camel Express. Details on time and location for meetings and reunion dinner on 9/24/11 are provided on page 5. If you cannot attend the meeting, send your ideas and suggestions to the e-mail on page 5.

FON Funds Nigerien NGOs



The Organisation pour un Développement Inclusif (ODI) is a Nigerien NGO comprised of a small cadre of dedicated individuals assisting Niger's disabled population. Their target population is broadly defined, and includes individuals suffering from blindness, schizophrenia and other mental illness, polio, epilepsy, cerebral palsy, birth defects, and Downs syndrome, among others. Their work has periodically been sponsored by various international NGO's, but the needs far outstrip the funding. Harouna Salifou, the field agent responsible for the Balayera Commune, has been serving the disabled for more than 15 years with a small cadre of dedicated staff. They dispense medication, do physical therapy, educate families about caring for their handicapped members, and help develop gardens to encourage self-sufficiency. Harouna conducts quarterly mental health clinics on market day in Balayera, and travels to 160 surrounding villages on his motorbike. People seek him from as far away as Nigeria.

(continued on page 4)

ABOVE: Harouna examines an infant with club feet.
RIGHT: Harouna smiles at his patient.





Letter from the FON President

Dear Friends of Niger,

It was great to celebrate in California with Niger 5 and 6 (and Niger 5 ½) RPCVs and their family and friends in early August. Their stories and remembrances of Niger and their Nigerien family and friends were very heart warming. Several of the group shared with me some of their cherished photos and Peace Corps stories that I hope to be posting on the FON website soon. Additionally, we will be having an FON gathering at the end of September in Washington, DC during the Peace Corps 50th anniversary celebration, at which time I hope to see and talk with many more of our FON members.

I also want to report that during the past several months, the members of the Board of Directors for FON have been making contacts and gathering information on how best we as a group can advocate on behalf of Peace Corps Niger and the reopening of the PC Niger program. We hope to have a planning meeting in DC in September on how best to proceed. If you have any ideas or experiences with advocacy, please contact me or any FON board member. We would like to hear your thoughts and ideas.

While our PC Niger support has been put on hold, with your support we continue to work with and fund projects and programs managed by Nigerien organizations. We invite you to read about the work of one of our new Nigerien partner organizations, ODI, in this issue of the CEX. A special thanks to Pam White for her work with ODI and bringing ODI's work and organization to our attention. Our commitment to the Nigerien people remains, and we will continue to reach out to other Nigerien organizations and financially support the work of those organizations that contribute to the well-being of all Nigeriens.

Best regards - John Soloninka

Global Giving Challenge

FON supported the Hampaté Bâ school through the Global Giving campaign in 2010 (see September 2010 Camel Express) and will contribute another \$1,000 during the renewed effort August—September 2011. Through the generosity of many supporters, the Niamey co-educational middle school earned a permanent spot on the website in 2010. Members and supporters are encouraged to help match the amount again this year by visiting the website www.globalgiving.org and making a donation. Search for Niger and you will find several deserving projects. The Hampaté Bâ school is titled, "Help 80 Secondary Pupils in Niger Read and Write." Former board members Sue Rosenfeld and Pat Alio have visited the school and confirmed the good work they are doing with students.

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The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of Friends of Niger (FON). FON can be contacted via the post at P.O. Box 5823

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and you will find FON on the web and this

newsletter in FULL COLOR at:

www.friendsofniger.org.

Editor: Jude Andreasen

Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to The Camel Express at the address above.



FON Supports Soccer Program

FON has contributed \$1,000 to an all-volunteer organization, Project Play Africa. The following letter from Jana Tomasello, Marketing Manager, explains the value of the program. If FON gets sufficient funds and support from members, we can expand the program to other regions.

On behalf of Project Play Africa, I would like to thank the Friends of Niger for your generous offer to support our efforts in the community of Libore, Niger. Project Play Africa is a 100% volunteer organization that is dedicated to improving the lives of children through the sport of soccer in Sub-Saharan Africa. We focus on reaching out to rural communities where thousands of children have little opportunity for a better life. The simple gift of a ball represents opportunity – to play, learn and enjoy life on a daily basis. We use a soccer ball as a tool to inspire youth leaders, schools and organizations to develop sports, education and community programs to benefit children. In the 5 years since our inception Project Play has made 3 visits to West Africa – Benin 2010 and Niger in 2008 and 2011. In previous years we worked with the Peace Corps traveling to rural communities to deliver soccer balls. In 2011 without the support of the Peace Corps we were faced with a challenge and were fortunate to be introduced to the community leaders of Libore. Our most recent trip to Libore, Niger has proved to have the greatest impact to date.

Libore is a community of 80,000 located about 20 kilometers from Niamey. This year, with much preparation and advanced coordination, we went to Niger with the goal of setting up a youth soccer league for the community of Libore. Our staff was welcomed by the community with a well-organized plan for discussing establishment of the league, training coaches, and a series of community events to meet and distribute the Project Play soccer balls. We have confidence in the dedicated and competent partners in Libore, in their ability to manage the resources we have provided, and in their willingness to make a lasting impact in their own community. Our greatest hope is that the Libore Premier Soccer League will thrive and that this community will assist Project Play in expanding to other outlying communities in Niger in the future. Project Play created a template for creating a soccer league and club teams that included constitutions, bylaws and training manuals for coaches and referees that can be replicated and utilized to expand the program.

Our proposal for the \$1,000 grant from Friends of Niger is to purchase and ship six sets (different colors) of quality scrimmage vests that would be used for league games. These vests, typically used for scrimmages or practice games in the States, will be a great alternative to team jerseys in Niger. They are cost effective, light weight and durable. The vests will be managed, distributed and collected by the league on game days rather than distributed to the individual children. Six sets of 15 will be enough to field six teams (3 games) simultaneously and ensure a variety of sizes for all age groups.

The intangible benefit is the enhanced experience for the kids and the community. Encouraging teamwork, sportsmanship and leadership is an important aspect to our mission. When the teams come to the field in a colored jersey they will have a sense of belonging and team spirit. This will boost morale and serve to build confidence in the children. It will bring more organization to the game and increase the sense of competition when opposing players are wearing team colors.

In closing, I want mention that like Friends of Niger we are dedicated to continue to maintain and expand our efforts in Libore and beyond in Niger. The roots of our organization are tied to Niger where our co-founder was a Peace Corp Volunteer. We appreciate your interest in Project Play Africa and support in furthering our cause. We look forward to working together to make a difference for the people of Niger.

FON members may submit proposed articles to the Camel Express editor at: judeheyjude@hotmail.com

FON Funds Nigerien NGOs (cont'd)

Below: Harouna instructs the family re: physical therapy exercises for infant's club feet.



RPCV Pam White made rounds with Harouna several times in 2006 and in 2008, noting that he exudes caring, acceptance, and patience as he teaches families and encourages self-sufficiency.

There are five field agents total, doing the same work as Harouna in other communes -- plus a few administrators. When their international funding recently suffered a several-month lapse, they organized themselves as an NGO, namely ODI, to carry on their work among Niger's disabled. The Jane Huser Maxwell Memorial Fund provided funding for a laptop computer to assist them, and two Americans living in Niger, Sue Rosenfeld and Steve Anderson, were instrumental in delivering the funds and purchasing the computer on-site in Niamey.

Harouna recently reported on the use of those funds. After purchasing the computer, the remaining money was used for two surgeries - one to correct a young girl's club foot and another to address the after-effects of a disabling injection, as well as a disabled-access ramp for a school in Balayera. Friends of Niger recently elected to contribute an additional \$1,000 to ODI's work, and requested a simple proposal from Harouna. He submitted the following:

Approximately 450,000 CFA will be used to purchase fifteen animals for a small-animal breeding project with five disabled individuals - two ewes and one ram per person. The animals will be held in the name of the disabled person, and provide an income-generation source. All assets provided to the family of a disabled person (land, animals, gardens) are held in the name of that person, reinforcing his or her value to the family and to the community and enhancing that person's self-sufficiency.

Several special chairs will also be commissioned for children with cerebral palsy. Due to their lack of motor control, these children generally spend their lives lying on the ground. The chairs allow them to be strapped in and remain upright throughout the day, significantly enhancing their quality of life. Any remaining funds will be used to purchase medicines for epilepsy and mental illness, to be dispensed, without charge, at the quarterly mental health clinic.

This proposal will directly impact those most in need. The power of these contributions represent grassroots funding at its most effective - funding which directly and positively impacts the lives of Nigeriens. FON funding for the proposal is being hand carried to Niger by former board member Sue Rosenfeld, currently Resident Director, Boston University in Niger Program.

Right: Harouna with a teenage boy, crippled from a degenerative disease, seated in an adapted wheelchair provided by ODI's program



Join Friends of Niger Festivities in September

Peace Corps' 50th Anniversary Is Here

Although Peace Corps' presence in Niger is on hold at the moment, 2011 still marks 50 years of promoting peace and friendship by volunteers in dozens of countries and 49 years in Niger. There will be an important strategy meeting of Niger RPCVs and FON and all are invited. Details are not yet final, but we expect it to be Friday afternoon (9/23/11) in DC. If you would like to attend, e-mail Penni St. Hilaire at: tommyt@erols.com and she will send the exact time and location as soon as possible (and/or you can check the FON website.) Following the meeting, all are invited to a social gathering at Penni's home from 6-10 PM. When you e-mail her about the meeting, she will provide directions.

The 50th Anniversary Dinner for FON members will be held Saturday 9/24 at Bukom Bar & Restaurant, 2442 18th St., NW in Adams Morgan, Washington, DC. Buffet starts at 7 PM, and costs \$20 per person + tax and tip (\$5.50) + drinks. If possible, please e-mail Penni as RSVP.

Peace Corps Niger Groups 5, 5 1/2, and 6 Gather in Santa Rosa

On August 5 - 7 over 80 volunteers and spouses who served in Niger between 1966 and 1969 gathered at the home of Bob and Gayle Reid in Santa Rosa, California, to talk about their days in Niger and what they have been doing since. The Reid's have hosted this group of volunteers four times since their return, the last time being 2005. In the photo below, the gently-aging former volunteers are standing in a field of lavender in front of the Reid's home that would make the citizens of Provence envious. Key people in making the reunion happen, in addition to the Reids, were Norma Hyatt, who got things going, Wendy Wallin who searched for members of the group and made the banner to honor Niger, Phyllis Maguire and Mike Meighan who made hotel arrangements and Jerry Koloms and Sandy Poysa who helped with food and wine. A delicious Mexican dinner was served Friday night and Ghanaian cooks provided food Saturday. Judy Irola and Bob Potter showed their film, "Niger 66" which brought the group back to Niger and a chance to look at their former selves. Saturday and Sunday provided folks with the opportunity to become reacquainted as well as acquaint themselves with some of the wonderful wines of the Sonoma Valley. A good time was had by all and it was suggested we get together more often. The Reids are game. Penni St. Hilaire

Photo by Guy Immega



Friends of Niger Continues Local Educational Support

FON has provided a \$1000 donation to continue support of ONEN, a small Nigerien NGO involved in education, including "Second-Chance Schools." The funds were hand-carried to Niger by RPCV and former board member, Sue Rosenfeld. RPCV Pam White has worked closely with ONEN since 2006 and keeps FON up to date on their excellent work. This year, ONEN has proposed a budget that specifically addresses the education of young girls. Additional information about ONEN and its partner, AAWEL in the December 2010 Camel Express. ONEN (Nigerien Organization of Innovative Educators) and its partner AAWEL (Alliance for African Women's Education & Leadership) provide academic and vocational education to young Nigeriens who have been unable to complete school and have achieved great success at several sites in Niamey, and now, with other partners, such as the Swiss NGO Enfants du Monde, in the Tahoua region.

FON Funds New Wood-Conserving Stove Project

Outside of major cities in Niger, nearly 100% of cooking is done over 3-stone open fires, which are wasteful of precious wood resources and dangerous for children. Due to rapid deforestation, women travel ever longer distances from their villages to collect firewood, which is exhausting, time-consuming, and exposes them to potential abduction and abuse.

StoveTec rocket stoves use 50% less fuel. Rachel Rothgery has coordinated the delivery and distribution of an initial load of 1,700 stoves to Niger with the micro-finance initiative of local NGO Rencontre et Action (R&A). R&A has employed 30 women to help with marketing and selling the stoves. FON has donated \$1,000 to R & A for the wood-conserving stove project. John Baird, RPCV and FON board member, visited Niger and oversaw the purchase of 52 stoves to be sold in Maradi.

Since this is a new product, a widespread media campaign, using brochures and radio ads, is planned to promote the use of the stoves, and explain the advantages. Since the stoves are heavy, it is difficult for women to take them house to house for demonstrations, so they will travel through the villages and markets, distributing brochures and encouraging people to come to a central location to view the stoves in operation (see photos below).



FRIENDS OF NIGER 2011 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM

Name(s) _____
 Address _____
 City/ State _____ Phone (h) _____
 Zip _____ Phone (w) _____
 E- Mail Address _____
 Connection to Niger (RPCV, etc.) _____
 Dates in Niger _____ Location in Niger _____
 Program or Involvement in Niger _____

Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund FON Activities - including The Camel Express, the FON website, the FON Archives, and Projects such as Those Listed Below.

**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 ☐ \$55 for Individual Membership both FON & NPCA
☐ Enclosed is \$35 for a FON Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Make Check or Money Order Payable to Friends of Niger and mail with this form to:
 P. O. Box 5823, Washington, D. C. 20016-9998

PRIVACY POLICY

Your contact information is requested and maintained by FON so that we can contact you in the future. FON will not share your contact information with any third party unless you indicate on this form to that you would also like membership in the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA).

HOW TO REINSTATE PEACE CORPS IN NIGER

Who better to advocate for a return to Niger for Peace Corps than RPCVs, Friends of Niger, and all who have experienced and loved the country and its people. If you can attend the meeting on Friday, please do. If you would like to participate but cannot be in DC, let Penni know by e-mail and we may be able to set up a conference call line. If you want to send your ideas and suggestions, send them by e-mail to Penni before September 23.

The agenda includes a strategy to begin lobbying for a reinstatement of Peace Corps Niger. We will explore strategies used by other groups and may be able to have one or more RPCV speakers from countries engaged in similar advocacy for their Peace Corps programs.

For details on time and location, see page 5 and e-mail Penni at tommyt@erols.com. And please join us for the dinner on Saturday September 23 (details on page 5.)

PLEASE JOIN US! Niger Needs Us More than Ever!