

# The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

December 2001

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## Message from the President

**Dear Friends of Niger -**

Hanukkah, Eid-al-Fitr, Christmas, Kwanza'a - regardless of which of these or of how many of these special days you observe - it is my hope, and that of the Board of Directors of Friends of Niger, that this holiday season finds each of you happy and healthy and that the year 2002 brings peace to the world and all the very best to the people of Niger.

As promised, this FON web edition of The Camel Express is a big one and includes considerable coverage of the events of Celebration of Niger 2001; the remarks on that occasion of Nigerian Ambassador to the United States Joseph Diatta; as well as a more recent article by PC Niger Country Director Jim Bullington.; and much more (see complete list below).

If by chance you have not already had the occasion to update yourself on FON's involvement in and support for two microcredit initiatives in Niger - the Mata Masu Dubara program of CARE Niger and the Oxcart Project of MICA - please click on the links provided above and/or below. [Click here](#) for information on how you can support either or both of these exciting activities.

It's not too late to order a copy of the [2002 International Calendar](#). We'll be filling orders right through the holiday season (as long as supplies last). The cover of this year's calendar, produced as always by the RPCVs of Wisconsin-Madison, is graced with a photo by FON member and Niger RPCV Diane Choplin. Inside the calendar, the month of September features a photo provided by former US Ambassador to Niger Charles O. Cecil.

The beautiful high-quality Friends of Niger T-Shirt remains available in quantity. As with the calendars, we will be filling and shipping [T-Shirt orders](#) right through the season.

As we approach the end of 2001, I want to take this occasion to encourage each of you to [become a member](#) of Friends of Niger or to [renew your membership](#) for 2002 if you have been a member this past year. Membership dues and contributions help fund FON activities, including this award-winning website, FON's award-winning newsletter (The Camel Express), the on-going FON Archives project, and projects such as those reported on below.

Enjoy this FON web site up-date. Stay in contact. And please, please join **Friends of Niger**.

**Jim Schneider**  
President

## **Ambassador Diatta Addresses Opening Event of Celebration 2001**



Joseph Diatta, Ambassador of Niger to the United States and pictured on the left, addressed those in attendance at the Bukom Cafe opening during the August 3 kickoff to Celebration of Niger 2001.

After bringing greetings from the people of Niger, Ambassador Diatta reminded participants of Niger's great potential as well as the reality that Niger remains one of the poorest countries in the world "with a GNP of less than 230 US dollars per year, with low social indicators, and with 63% of the population living in poverty."

Ambassador Diatta brought attention in his remarks to the fact that the USAID office in Niamey has still not been reopened and that US economic assistance continues to be channeled to Niger through Africare, Care and Catholic Relief Services. He took the opportunity to thank those and other NGOs for their assistance and to call for a renewed "USAID presence in Niger, in addition to an increase of the US economic assistance level."

[Click here](#) for the complete text of Ambassador Diatta's remarks.

## **FON Presents Achievement Awards**



The year 2001 marked the 15th birthday of Friends of Niger and the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the Peace Corps. The opening day of Celebration of Niger 2001 - August 3 and Niger's Independence Day - coincided with 41 years of Nigerian independence.

To commemorate these occasions, Friends of Niger honored several people on the evening of Friday August 3 at the inaugural event of Celebration of Niger, a multi-course West African dinner at the Bukom Cafe.

Recognized with a Friends of Niger Special Achievement Award for their "important and lasting contribution to Niger and its people and

to the purposes of Friends of Niger" were Meredith McGehee, founder and long-time leader of Friends of Niger; Joel Mayer, editor-publisher of Kakaki-News of Niger; Sue Rosenfeld, initiator of the FON/BU children's chewable multivitamin campaign; Robert J. Ryan, Sr., former U.S. Ambassador to Niger and longtime member and supporter of Friends of Niger; Joseph Diatta, Nigerian Ambassador to the United States; and, Haoua Diatta, founder of MICA, Inc. and the moving force behind the Oxcart Project.

Pictured above is C. Payne Lucas, recipient of the Friends of Niger Lifetime Achievement Award "in recognition of his lifetime of service and of his contributions to Niger and its people, to Africa and her people, and to the purposes of Friends of Niger." "Luke," as he is known, is a past PC Niger Country Director and founder and President of Africare.

## **FON Takes Another Microcredit Initiative & Supports CARE Niger's Mata Masu Dubara Groups in Matamaye and Agadez**

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger has announced financial support for the microcredit activities of CARE Niger. The goal of the program, entitled Mata Masu Dubara (MMD), is to improve the socioeconomic conditions of rural and urban women in Niger. Mata Masu Dubara is a Hausa term meaning "Women of the Move."

Over the past several years, CARE Niger has been active in the formation of MMD groups, of approximately 30 women each, in six of Niger's seven regions - Tillabery, Dosso, Tahoua, Maradi, Zinder and Diffa. It costs about \$300 to form a group, an eight-month training program included. The support from FON will be used to establish one of the first groups in the north, somewhere in the Agadez region, as well as to form a group in the area of Matamaye.

The picture below is of Fourera Soumana from the small village of Djoga in western Niger near Torodi. Fourera's story - and the story of the wonderful potential of Mata Masu Dubara is the subject of an article, [Reducing Poverty a Few Cents at a Time](#), written by Mark Wentling, former assistant country director, CARE Niger, and now with CARE Mozambique. Additional information about the methodology, operation and

impact of MMD can be found by [clicking here](#)



## **FON Support for Oxcart Project Expands to Six Locations in Areas of Filingue and Gazaoua**

FON announced its support for the introduction of the Oxcart Project of MICA into two villages in Niger. With the support of financial contributions from FON members and contact people, FON has been able to support six Oxcart projects now in varying stages of development. Three of the sets of oxen and carts are being placed in the villages of Fandara, Siguirado and Inattes in the Baleyara/Boukoukou area between Filingue and Niamey. The other three will be located in the area in and around Gazaoua in central Niger between Maradi and Tessaoua. The organization of the groups in the Baleyara/Boukoukou area is being facilitated by PCV Brian Greenan and MICA coordinator Illiassou Na Indo while work with the Gazaoua area groups is being facilitated out of MICA's Maradi office.

### **How People Can Help**

For both projects - Mata Masu Dubara (CARE Niger) and the Oxcart Project (MICA) - FON will package donations from members and contacts and pass them along in the appropriate financial units.

Contributions to Mata Masu Dubara should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to : MMD; c/o FON; P.O. Box 33164; Washington, DC; 20033-0164

Contributions to the Oxcart Project should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to : Oxcart; c/o

or include donation with [Friends of Niger 2002 Membership & Order Form](#)

## Niger, Peace Corps, and The War on Terrorism

The people of Niger are more than 90% Muslim, for the most part fervently so. Islam is a vital part of their daily lives, in a way that Christianity used to be in the West but is no longer for most people. While the Government of Niger is constitutionally secular, and small animist and Christian minorities are well tolerated, Niger is a very Islamic country.

Moreover, the people of Niger are wretchedly poor, in a way that is unimaginable for most Americans. As measured by the United Nations Development Program, this is the second poorest country in the world, ahead only of war-ravaged Sierra Leone. Worse, the standard of living for most Nigeriens has been in decline for more than three decades. This is because of rapid population growth, continuing desertification, and a host of other factors.

And finally, Niger is located in a very tough global neighborhood. Four of the seven states on its borders -- Algeria, Libya, Chad and Nigeria -- are poster countries for various sorts of terrorism, anti-Americanism, political and religious extremism, and bloody ethnic warfare. And those borders are highly porous.

Doesn't all this make Niger a hotbed for international terrorism and a very dangerous place for Americans to be these days?

No, it does not.

Since September 11, some 400 Americans -- Peace Corps Volunteers, Embassy staff, non-governmental organization employees (CARE, CRS, Africare, etc.), and missionaries -- have continued to live and work throughout the country without serious incident or threat. There have been no anti-American demonstrations and no hostile media campaigns. Many Nigeriens, from President Tandja to ordinary villagers, have expressed their condolences and have spoken out against terrorism and Islamic extremism. Within its limited means, the Government has been exemplary in responding to our security concerns and in discouraging violence.

Why is this the case?

First, Government leaders and the vast majority of the people, while very religious, are not Islamic extremists. They are proud of Niger's record of tolerance and see Osama bin Laden as perverting Islam. Moreover, Niger does not have a tradition of terrorism or religious conflict, and even its political turbulence has not involved widespread violence. The Sahara Desert provides considerable isolation from the turmoil in Algeria, Libya and Chad. The Islamic extremism and communal violence in northern Nigeria are far closer to Niger's populated heartland; but thus far spillover has been minimal.

Another reason for Niger's relative tranquility in the current storm is that 39 years of continuous Peace Corps presence here has built a reservoir of good will toward America that makes Nigeriens less susceptible than they might otherwise be to the anti-American message of the extremists. It is far easier to induce people to hate an abstraction, an ugly American stereotype, than to hate the friendly young man who lives in your

village or the dedicated young woman who taught you English. In addition to those whose lives are touched by the 100 current Volunteers, I'm constantly meeting senior-level Nigeriens who tell me how they were influenced by a Volunteer from many years ago who lived in their village or taught in their school. This effect can't be quantified, but it's real.

Peace Corps was born and flourished in the 1960s, at the height of the Cold War. President Kennedy saw that in addition to confronting communism militarily, we also needed to address its challenge for the hearts and minds of people in poor countries who had no understanding of Americans and the ideals we embrace.

Kennedy's vision for Peace Corps was not as an instrument to achieve short-term foreign policy objectives but as a global showcase of American ideals in action that would at the same time productively engage the enthusiasm of Americans to serve their country through service to others. It would be an instrument not only to promote economic development but also to promote mutual understanding between Americans and people in poor countries. Just as Peace Corps showcased American values and won friends during the Cold War era, it can also contribute to our long-term success in the war on terrorism. While it should not be explicitly or organizationally linked to the war effort, the current international context offers an unparalleled opportunity for its modernization, expansion and rejuvenation. Today's Americans would be likely to respond to a call to join Peace Corps in service to their country and their fellow man much as their parents did in the 1960s.

*By J. R. Bullington, currently Country Director of the Peace Corps program in Niger. He was formerly US Ambassador to Burundi and a career Foreign Service Officer, with extensive service in Africa and Asia.*

## **FON Wins 2001 NPCA Website Award**

### ***The Camel Express Also Recognized***

The National Peace Corps Association recently announced the winners of its 2001 website and newsletter awards. Friends of Niger was designated the overall winner of the website award for Country of Service (COS) affiliates of the NPCA, with honorable mention going to Friends of Morocco. The Columbia River Peace Corps Association was recognized as the best of the sites for Geographical affiliates.

FON's newsletter, *The Camel Express*, placed 3rd for 2001 in the Layout and Design category for COS affiliates, tying for that honor with Burkina Connection. Last year, The Camel placed first in the Layout & Design category and was tied with the Friends of Burkina Faso for second place in the Editorial Content category.

The FON website has been authored by Jai Evans with content supplied by Jim Schneider, editor of *The Camel Express*. Jai will be taking a leave from his work on the website, being replaced in that capacity by Cathryn Poff.

## **Haoua Diatta and Paul Stoller Conduct Readings & Book Signings During FON Exhibit**

Haoua Diatta, pictured below (second from the left) during one of her visits to the FON Exhibit events on Saturday, August 4, teamed with Paul Stoller to deliver two exciting presentations and readings during Celebration of Niger 2001. Their contributions were amongst the highlights of the Saturday schedule which included the FON Archives, the Patrick Thomas Exhibit - part of which is visible below in the background, The Mohamed Ahmed Jewelry Exhibit and Kiosk, and several featured videos with discussions led by FON Recording Secretary John Soloninka.

Mohammed Ahmed is pictured top right in the photo below. The featured videos included *The Way of the Woodabe* and *When the Harvest Comes*. The Thomas exhibit included Patrick's unique collection of recycled tools from Niger, calabashes of all kinds, Nigerienne textiles - as well as the exquisite Nigerienne photos of Delattre and Blum.



## **FON Presents MICA with Contribution to Oxcart Project for Six Villages**



Pictured on the left, FON Treasurer Larry Koff presents Friends of Niger check to Haoua Diatta, President of MICA at Friends of Niger dinner in Washington. The donation will be used to cover the cost of sets of oxen and carts for women's groups in six Nigerien villages - three in the Boukoukou/Baléyara area northeast of Niamey and three in the Gazaoua/Aguié area east of Maradi. The donation was made possible through the contributions of the membership and contact list of Friends of Niger.

## **Crisis Corps - A Chance to Serve Again**

As part of Peace Corps' HIV/AIDS initiative, Crisis Corps is placing short term (usually six months) volunteers who have experience working in an HIV/AIDS field. Some of the projects CCVs have worked on throughout Africa are:

In Kenya: Working with the Ministry of Health, CCVs developed a training manual for post-HIV test counselors and family members.

In Namibia: A CCV worked to destigmatize HIV by promoting a new HIV Multipurpose Center to the community.

In Malawi: Volunteers worked at an orphanage providing support to teachers in developing HIV/AIDS educational materials and working with the medical staff to create a post-test counseling system.

In Togo: CCVs are working with local HIV/AIDS NGOs to coordinate their efforts and provide capacity building training.

If you're interested in being part of this exciting opportunity to serve again, please telephone Crisis Corps at 800-424-8580 ext. 2250, or visit the [Crisis Corps' website](#), or [email them](#). The web site has information on current assignments and an application form. (*Courtesy of Melinda Bridges*)

## **Return to Niger 2002 Goes Ahead as Planned: Trip Scheduled for the Coming Autumn**

Planning is proceeding for the previously announced FON-sponsored trip to Niger. The continued strong response from interested people and several exchanges between FON and Peace Corps Niger has led to the decision to schedule the trip for the period October-November 2002 and for a duration of 14-15 days in-country.

Indications are that approximately 25 people will make up the return party. Trip activities tentatively include participation in a PC Niger all country conference and a visit to the original community of service, with plans in the works for several potential side trips (Agadez included) along with the possibility of a work project.

Dudley Parkinson of Dreamweaver Travel is working with FON on travel arrangements, transatlantic and in-country. Exact travel itineraries and costs are expected to be announced in the very near future.

Anyone who has not already indicated an interest should contact Jim Schneider as absolutely soon as possible [via email](#) or by phone at 819-827-4870. Look for further informational updates related to the trip on the [FON website](#).

## **Niger Embassy Launches New Website**



The Embassy of Niger to the United States has launched its own website - which can be found at - <http://www.nigerembassyusa.org/>.

The site is still under construction but already features a great deal of information and news related to Niger, as well as documentation of the embassy's consular services and access to the various forms required for visa and other purposes. There are also pages on government personnel and institutions, business and finance, travel and tourism, and Niger Internet links.

## **RPCV Diane Cholpin & Former Ambassador Charles O. Cecil Place Photos in 2002 RPCV Calendar**

The beautiful 2002 International Calendar, once again produced by the RPCVs of Wisconsin-Madison is graced on the outside and inside by photos provided by members and good friends of Friends of Niger.

The cover photo is the work of Diane Choplin. The photo, which we call Bathtime at Boulké, was taken between 1994-97 when Diane served as a Forestry PCV in Boulké, near Birni N'Konni.

Inside the calendar, featured for the month of September, is the photo entitled Tuareg Cure Salée at In-Gall which is the product of the skill of Charles O. Cecil. Mr. Cecil was U.S. Ambassador to Niger for the years 1996-99.

Either photo alone is worth the price of the calendar (\$12) which can be ordered via instructions here or via Friends of Niger 2002 Membership & Order Form.

Last year's calendar featured a photo from the collection of Niger RPCV Tori Paide.

## **This 'n That**

Jim Bullington, PC Country Director Niger, has asked The Camel to remind RPCVs, their travel companions and other potential travelers to Niger that health hazards remain real, especially en brousse and especially for people most vulnerable to serious health issues.

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It has come to our attention that Niger is one of the countries that has no community which enjoys official

"sister city" status with any North American city.

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Peace Corps D.C. is well into the yearly exercise of recruiting new Peace Corps trainees for Niger. Next year's stage is expected to be about the same in number as the 2001 group - 56 - and is scheduled to begin its training at Hamdallaye in January 2002.

## Credits and Other Information

*The Camel Express* is the periodical newsletter of **Friends of Niger (FON)**.  
FON can be contacted via the post at P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164;  
by email at [lorenz3@magi.com](mailto:lorenz3@magi.com);  
and you will find FON on the web at the following Internet address  
[www.friendsofniger.org](http://www.friendsofniger.org)

This edition of *The Camel Express* was prepared, produced and distributed with the contributions of Sue Bracken, Irma Poots Sarata, Judd Lyon, Jim Bullington, Jai Evans, Don Bracken, Doug Steinberg, Kassie McIlvaine, Mark Wentling, Haoua Diatta, Cathryn Poff, Gabriella Maertens, John Soloninka, Larry Koff, Ambassador Joseph Diatta, Diane Choplin, Charles O. Cecil, Paul Dewey, Michelle Ghiselli and Melinda Bridges.

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