

# The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

June 2000

- [Message from the President](#)
- [FON Plans Trip to Niger - 2002](#)
- [FON Slates Reunion 2001 for Washington, D.C.](#)
- [Inside Peace Corps Niger](#)
- [PC Niger Sets Up Girls' Scholarship Program](#)
- [BU/FON Chewable Vitamins Campaign- Project Update/June 2000](#)
- [Third Shipment Heads for Niger in July](#)
- [From the Creative Responses Department](#)
- [Dr. Degbey Thanks FON & Individual Contributors](#)
- [UNICEF Signs Protocol with Association of Traditional Chiefs in Niger](#)
- [Niger Launches Campaign to Eradicate Polio by End of this Year](#)
- [Meningitis Epidemic Hits Niger - FON Helps UNICEF Respond to Vaccine Shortage](#)
- [Nomad Foundation Sponsors US Tour for Group Tidawt](#)
- [FON Archive Project Off to Great Start](#)
- [Free Donations & Other FON Website Changes and Additions](#)
- [Credits and Other Information](#)

## Message from the President

Hopefully this message finds each of you enjoying at least some of the pleasures of early summer. Among those pleasures, we also hope, will be the reading of this edition of *The Camel Express*.

As you have probably already noticed, this issue of the newsletter is the largest ever - a full ten pages for the hardcopy version. In addition to the now regular column by PC Niger Country Director Jane Bonin, this issue features an update on the BU/FON Vitamin Campaign and how you can become involved in it along with stories on FON's involvement with UNICEF's meningitis vaccine campaign and Niger's effort to eradicate polio, PC Niger's new Girl's Scholarship Program, and the upcoming U.S. tour of the Taureg Group Tidawt. You'll also want to catch up on other activities of **Friends of Niger - FON Reunion 2001** and the **FON Archive Project**. Then glance at the announcement regarding the **FON** trip back to Niger in the year 2002.

The calendar year 2000 is nearly half over. And as the calendar year coincides with both the fiscal year and the membership year for **Friends of Niger**, it is timely that I touch upon matters related to both our finances and our membership base.

**Need for membership renewals.** Our Annual Budget is dependent upon financial contributions, primarily those made in the form of membership fees. This means that, in order to do even a bit of planning, the Board of **FON** must look - as it makes its annual financial projections - towards a strong membership renewal rate. It is not our practice to send out membership renewal notices on an individual basis. So I want to use this opportunity to ask each of you to take a peek at your checkbook and see whether or not you've renewed your membership for this year. At the same time, I very much want to thank all of you who have been so generous with your membership contributions and with your donations to both the vitamin and the vaccine campaigns.

**Need to augment and update our mailing list.** Since FON's reemergence a little over two years ago, we've been "working" essentially the same list of about 1200 names. Some people have disappeared and other people have been found, but by and large, it's the same list. We have something over 200 members and, while we are certain a few more of you will join, this probably means that the membership numbers derived from this list will not grow significantly. Given the inevitable attrition, we are faced with a dynamic that we want to change. We need your help to do this - to ensure that the FON membership base remains both vital and strong.

**We need your help in two ways.** The first is simple - please keep us informed each time that you change addresses, postal and electronic. While we ask for additional information, your address is the absolute minimum. We just cannot stay in contact if we don't know where you are located.

The second way that you can help is both more creative and more of a challenge. We need one or more person from each annual group of Niger PCVs to help us find more of the people from your group. (A couple of years back, two people from the 1964-66 group set out to do this. They were able to locate 95% of their group, of which number 45% are now members of **Friends of Niger**. With numbers like that - over 38 years of Peace Corps involvement in Niger - we would have not only a formidable financial base but, much more importantly, we would be in a position to make a more significant contribution to the people of Niger). To help FON with this initiative, please contact me via any of the means of communication listed elsewhere on the page.

**Hardcopy version of *The Camel Express*.** Presently FON distributes almost 400 hardcopies of this newsletter to non-members. We've done that now for more than two years. The cost is high. The Board has decided to limit this practice to two free issues per year, beginning with next year. This will not effect the electronic distribution of the newsletter nor the web edition. Nor will it effect new names added to the contact list for the first year that new people are on that list. Remember as well that we will happily switch anyone from the postal mailing list to the electronic mailing list.

Have a great summer.

Enjoy the newsletter. Stay in contact. And, please, join **Friends of Niger**.

**Jim Schneider**

**President**

## **Early Warning!! FON Plans Trip to Niger - 2002 -**

While it's way too early for details, the Board of Directors of FON has decided to begin the process of planning a group trip to Niger. The trip is targeted for the year 2002 - the 40th anniversary of Peace Corps in Niger.

The first step in the process is to invite reaction from the FON membership and others interested in being part of the trip as well as to get a sense of how many people are interested.

Send comments to FON or Jim Schneider at any of the addresses listed below under **Credits and Other Information**.

## **FON Slates Reunion 2001 for Washington, D.C.**

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger has announced that **FON Reunion 2001** has now been officially scheduled to be held in Washington, D.C. during the summer of next year.

Early plans call for a series of social events and information sessions designed to update FON members and contacts - as well as their families and friends - on happenings in Niger while providing lots of opportunity for RPCVs and others who have lived and worked in Niger to catch up with each other and trade stories from their time in Niger.

More detail will be available in the fall edition of *The Camel*. Meanwhile, FON President Jim Schneider has put out the call for "volunteers" willing to help organize what is expected to be a 3-4 day weekend oriented event.

Input in the form of ideas and comments - as well as an indication of willingness to help pull together **FON Reunion 2001**

- should be sent to Jim at [lorenz3@magi.com](mailto:lorenz3@magi.com) or via the other FON addresses listed under **Credits and Other Information**.

# Inside Peace Corps Niger

Dear Friends of Niger,

Greetings to all who follow the progress of Peace Corps/Niger. Someone told me that a person who has been a PCV in Niger always wonders at this time of year whether the rains have started. Niamey got a nice, soaking rain during the night, the first significant one. People out in the countryside are beginning to plant. I just returned from a tournée of Agadez and Iférouane. It hadn't rained in either place, and we stopped a number of times to give water to people standing on the side of the road holding out their cups. I hope that for them too relief is in sight.

PC/Niger is approaching a time of staff turnover. APCD/AG Nelson Cronyn is assuming his duties as Country Director in Burkina this week. The selection process for his replacement is taking place right now. My replacement has already been named. He is James Bullington, former Ambassador to Burundi and a retired career Foreign Service Officer. He also served in Chad and Benin, so he is an old Africa hand. He is scheduled to come out on August 27, and I will leave on September 4.

We have had several big events lately that might interest you. One was the third annual National Woman's Work Fair, held up at Hamdallaye, the PC training center. The fair brought together fifty-one women in order to provide skills training, information sessions and a forum for the exchange of experiences and ideas. Volunteers from across Niger worked with their host communities to select motivated women who are both leaders in their communities and active in small income-generating activities. Our able Gender and Development coordinator, Assalama Dawalak Sidi, helped Volunteers design a program that focused on income-generating activities but also included topics such as Women's Rights under Islam, HIV-AIDS prevention, and family planning. The event was a big success, as the two earlier ones had been. There will be follow-up in all regions for the participating women who participated to communicate what they learned to their fellow villagers. By the way, PC/Niger is a torchbearer in Gender and Development activities.

Another inspiring event was the Young Girls' Conference. These young students were selected on the basis of an essay contest, the title of which was "Educate a Woman; Educate a Nation." The winners were gathered at Hamdallaye and welcomed by the U.S. Ambassador, the Secrétaire Générale of the Ministry of Education, and me. I think our presence as women on the dais was a good image for the beginning of the conference. After preliminary activities, each girl was introduced to her mentor or *tutrice*, a professional or successful business woman.

The highlight of the Conference was the kickoff of the Girl's Scholarship Program, about which you will be hearing a good deal more as there will be an opportunity to contribute to this vital work. The essential thing for now is that 90% of Niger's women and girls are unschooled. Girls in Niger who are lucky enough to go to elementary school often drop out in middle school because their families cannot afford the tuition, room, and board for them to go away to school - as is the custom here. A modest sum of money - around \$200 - could sustain a young woman for one year of middle school. The scholarship committee proposes, as a modest beginning, to support one girl from each of the 13 regions of Niger for four years of schooling, for a total cost of \$10,400. The committee made up of teachers, members of the Ministry of Education, and PCVs, will select girls with a demonstrated need, an excellent scholastic record, and a real chance of academic success. Given the importance of female literacy as a factor in development, I believe that contributions to this initiative will be highly-leveraged money that will make a major difference in the future of Niger.

We are also experiencing an explosion of activity in the area of HIV/AIDS Awareness. Volunteers in Gothèye, Ballayera, and Konni have all had or are having educational events, drawing large and attentive crowds. Maybe AIDS prevention is an idea whose time has come. As you may know, the Health sector in Niger now invites males to participate in the formerly all female project. We currently have six men posted *en brousse*. Due to their easier access to the male population, they have been successful in reaching men to discuss sensitive topics such as AIDS/STD prevention, child spacing, and other health issues.

That's it from Niger at the moment. I will suggest to Jim Bullington that he continues to communicate regularly with FON. Thank you for all your support of this program and of our Volunteers.

Peace.

Jane Bonin

Country Director/ Niger

## PC Niger Sets Up Girls' Scholarship Program

As part of its ongoing effort to promote the continuing education of young girls in Niger, Peace Corps Niger's Gender and Development Committee has established the **Girl's Scholarship Program**(GSP).

The need is clear. Niger's illiteracy rate among women is more than 90%. Currently, the highest drop-out rate of young girls in the school system is between the elementary school and middle school level. According to PC Niger and recent studies, this is largely due to the fact that most students are required to move from their homes to the location of the middle school. Their families cannot afford the cost of room and board in the home of a host family.

The goal of the GSP is to support one girl for the first four years of middle school from each of the thirteen regions currently represented by Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Niger (Guidimouni, Matamaye, Madarounfa, Mayahi, Konni, Gaya, Boboye, Kirtachi, Kollo, Ouallam, Balleyara, Gotheye, Iferouane).

In each region, Volunteers will work with local primary school directors and teachers to encourage girls to apply to the program. A local selection committee made up of PCVs, teachers and representatives of the Ministry of Education will chose the successful candidate based on need and scholarship.

Cost per student per year of schooling is estimated at \$200. The total cost for four years schooling for 13 students is \$10,400. Since the GSP hopes to provide this opportunity on a yearly basis, \$10,400 is the amount that will be needed each year - at a minimum because GSP hopes that the program will expand.

Donations in the form of checks should be made out to **Peace Corps Partnership-Niger Girls' Scholarship Fund** and sent to **Peace Corps Partnership Program, Room 8301E, 1111 20th Street NW, Washington, DC, 20526**. Additional information is available at the Niger desk - 1-800-424-8550.

## **BU/FON Chewable Vitamins Campaign**

**- Project Update/June 2000 -**

### **Third Shipment Heads for Niger in July**

In early May, Sue Rosenfeld - Boston U's staff person in Niamey and the person whose initiative led to the creation of this project - returned to Niger carrying the second shipment of children's chewable multivitamins purchased with donations to this project.

The shipment was a bit larger than the 13,520 tablet shipment carried by Chris Zoolkoski last December. As with the December shipment, the tablets were divided between the Pediatrics Ward of the National Hospital in Niamey and the SIM Hospital in Galmi, near Madaoua.

The next shipment is scheduled for July of this year - when Sue again makes the round trip between Niamey and the States. Financial contributions, in checks or money orders, should be made out to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **Vitamins c/o Friends of Niger**

**P.O. Box 33164**

**Washington, D.C. 20033-0164**

As always, all contributions will be earmarked for the bulk purchase of chewables.

## **From the Creative Responses Department**

As reported above, many individuals have been generous with their financial donation to the BU?FON chewable multi-vitamin campaign.

Since the joint program began last fall, a number of individuals have taken initiatives of their own - to either raise funds or collect bottles of vitamins. These initiatives have added significantly to the overall amount of resources that the campaign has generated.

**Natasha Copeland**, a graduate student working at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, "sent an email out to the Africa email list ... so that anyone ... with an interest in Africa, from any department, could donate. I left a box at the French department office (where I am working on my PhD in contemporary Sahelian literature), explained what was needed, and sent out one reminder notice..." When Sue Rosenfeld arrived in Charlottesville, Natasha was waiting with a large bag filled with bottles of vitamins.

**Julie Doughty** teaches World History at Highline High School in Burien, WA. Julie recommended the campaign to her tenth grade class who "were very enthusiastic in their response." Result another couple thousand vitamins. Julie is heading for Niger in August as the Resident Assistant for the BU/Niger program.

**Laurel Branstrator** put the same idea to her church youth group and they raised \$250 for the campaign. *Three ideas - thousands of vitamins for kids in Niger!!*.

## Dr. Degbey Thanks FON & Individual Contributors

French

Niamey le 24 05 00  
Hopital National de Niamey  
Service de Pédiatrie A  
Docteur Herbert DEGBEY

Monsieur Jim Schneider

Monsieur

Je voudrais vous remercier au nom de tous les enfants des services de Pédiatrie de l'hôpital de Niamey, pour le don en vitamines que votre association vient de faire. C'est un geste que nous apprécions beaucoup étant donné le très grand dénuement dans lequel se trouve notre hôpital.

Je voudrais tout particulièrement remercier Mademoiselle Julie Daughty dite Agaisha qui enseigne dans l'état de Washington, et Madame Natasha Copeland du département de Français à l'université de Virginie.

Salutations sincères.

Docteur Herbert DEGBEY

English

Niamey 24 05 00  
National Hospital of Niamey  
Pediatriy Service  
Doctor Herbert DEGBEY

Mr Jim Schneider

Sir, I would like to thank you on behalf of all the children in the Pediatriy Service of the Hospital of Niamey, for the gift of vitamins which your association has just made. It is a gesture which we appreciate much being given the very great destitution in which is our hospital.

I would like particularly to thank Miss Julie Daughty known as Agaisha who teaches in the state of Washington, and Mrs Natasha Copeland for the French department at the university of Virginia.

Sincere greetings.

Doctor Herbert Degbey

## UNICEF Signs Protocol with Association of Traditional Chiefs in Niger

Earlier this year, an historical Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Association of Traditional Chiefs in Niger (ATCN).

The overall goal of the accord is to commit both parties to collaboration related to "the survival, protection, and development of the child and woman."

The chiefs specifically undertake to "use all of the communication resources given to them to inform, sensitize and stimulate behavioral change, in order to promote: basic education, especially for girls; actions in the interest of children's and mothers' health, notably observed in the reduced level of mortality and particularly in child immunization; and, the

target campaigns on certain diseases such as malaria, mumps, and STD/AIDS."

- translation provided by UNICEF Niger.

# Niger Launches Campaign to Eradicate Polio by End of this Year

In mid-June, Niger began the second phase of an ambitious, four-part campaign the primary objective of which is to eradicate polio from Niger by the end of the year 2000.

The first phase- carried out between May 19-23 - was highly successful in its attempt to vaccinate all children five years of age and under. Phase two (June 16-20) aims to distribute vitamin A tablets to all children 6 months to five years of age and to 75% of lactating women, as well as to distribute iron tablets to 75% of pregnant women.

The third and fourth phases, set for the months of October and November 2000, will involve additional steps aimed, according to UNICEF Niger, to "interrupt, indefinitely, the transmission of the polio virus."

In commenting on the success of phase one, UNICEF Niger staff person Julie Burke said "it was the involvement of the government, religious leaders, traditional chiefs, and development organizations, which made this first phase a success."

The tone for this collaborative effort was set by the National Assembly which unanimously declared the first National Immunization Day (NID) to be a national holiday.

President Mamadou Tandja initiated the NID by beginning the house-to-house vaccination campaign; religious leaders preached the need for polio vaccinations; the traditional chiefs helped alleviate problems that have plagued volunteer vaccination teams in the past - such as families not allowing male and female teams into the compound, because of the mix of both sexes. Other features of the campaign have included the use of town criers to pass along messages and the use of public, private and international radio and television spots.

The National Inter-Agencies Coordination Committee for the campaign includes UNICEF, WHO, Helen Keller International and Rotary International.

UNICEF has expressed an interest in an active campaign role for **Friends of Niger**. Details of an active **FON** involvement in phases three and four are under discussion and will be announced by early fall.

# Meningitis Epidemic Hits Niger FON Helps UNICEF Respond to Vaccine Shortage

Reports in March of a cerebro-spinal meningitis outbreak in Niger were later confirmed by data released in April by Niger's Ministry of Public Health and forwarded to Friends of Niger by UNICEF Niger. Those reports suggested that the outbreak had reached national epidemic proportions, with the capital city of Niamey and nine neighboring health districts being the hardest hit. Subsequently the epidemic spread east, eventually striking close to 900 people with a mortality rate of over 8%.

UNICEF Niger teamed up with the Ministry of Public Health, WHO, French Cooperation, Belgian Cooperation, GTZ and the Muslim Association of West Africa to define needs and to respond. The original estimates - which called for one million doses of meningitis vaccine as well as syringes and chloramphenicol - were found to be short and additional funds were needed for the purchase of these supplies and to cover the cost of the social mobilization necessary in order to successfully carry out the immunization program.

**FON** worked with Mary Roodkowsky, Director of UNICEF Niger, and Julie Burke, former PCV and current UNICEF staff

person in Niger, in an effort to set up a facility at the New York office of UNICEF which would receive contributions intended to go specifically to the purchase of vaccine and related supplies intended for the immunization campaign in Niger.

At the same time, FON launched an appeal for financial contributions via e-mail and web posting (<http://www.friendsofniger.org>). Donations received have been set aside and will be passed along as soon as UNICEF finishes putting in place the facility referred to above.

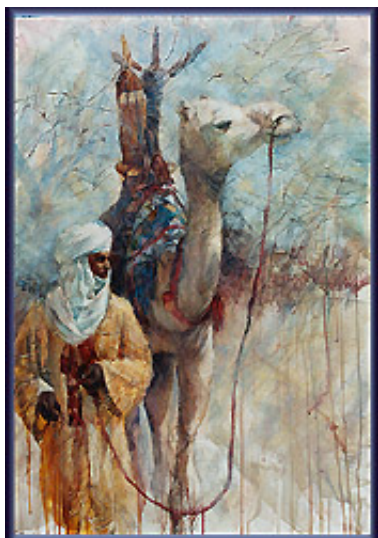
Since then, FON and UNICEF have begun discussion concerning an active role for FON in the polio immunization campaign currently underway in Niger (see article above).

## Nomad Foundation Sponsors US Tour for Group Tidawt



Leslie Clark is a painter who spends several months every year in Niger, mostly with the Wodaabe and Tuareg nomads--painting them. She and the Nomad Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by Clark and dedicated to the preservation of African cultural and artictic traditions, are sponsoring a U.S. tour by four Tuareg musicians .

The musicians, known as Group Tidawt, will perform in Ojai and Santa Barbara, California as well as in Cave Creek, Arizona and Washington, DC between July 14 and August 12. In addition to their live performances, the trip will give the musicians access to recording facilities and afford them the opportunity to collaborate with North American musicians. The visit will also allow the group to build support for a fund designed to help the Tuareg community with efforts to rehabilitate in the week of the rebellion of the past ten years.



The basic schedule of appearances is as follows:

July 14 - Ojai, California  
July 22 - Cave Creek, Arizona  
July 27 - Santa Barbara, California  
July 29 - Ojai, California  
July 30 - Ojai, California  
August 1- Ventura, California  
August 5 - Ojai, California  
August 12 - Washington, D.C.

For more information on location and costs related to the various tour appearances contact Leslie Clark at [leslie@nomadgal.com](mailto:leslie@nomadgal.com) or visit her website at <http://www.africasart.com>.

A visit to the website will also provide detail regarding the projects of the Nomad Foundation as well as a view of Leslie's extraordinary artistic achievements - two of which are reproduced above (*Indigo* at the top and *Desert Crossing*).

## FON Archive Project Off to Great Start

According to FON Recording Secretary John Soloninka, the organization's archival project is off to a great start. Major donations - in the form of photographs, slides, audio tapes, correspondence and newspaper clippings have been received from Geraldine St. Onge (1966-68), Ken Gibbs (1973-74) and former US Ambassador to Niger Robert J. Ryan (1964-68).

The collection will be stored on CD's as well as in albums and made available for reunions and other events (including the much anticipated FON Reunion 2001 in Washington, D.C. next summer - see story above). Some of the material will eventually be accessible from the FON website - <http://www.friendsofniger.org>.

# Free Donations & Other FON Website Changes and Additions

1. Click on the button at the top of the left-hand column on the **FON** home page, or click on the On Line Donations link which can be found further down the left-hand column under Other Great Links. Either action will take you to a page with information on how you can contribute - free - every day - to a number of humanitarian causes related to world hunger, refugees, the ecology, the homeless, etc.
2. Click on the little goldfish near the top of the right-hand column, and the content of the page will be translated - more or less accurately - into French. Our webmaster, Jai Evans, is working on an even better service. This one is passable and at least allows French-speaking people to get a better idea of what we are trying to say.
3. Patrick Thomas' site, with its focus on recyclable African tools, has been added to RPCV Pages, which can also be found along the left-hand column.
4. Further yet down the left-hand column - under fOn-Line - check out the latest messages on the **FON** Bulletin Board. Post a message yourself.

**All this & Much, Much More at - <http://www.friendsofniger.org>!!**

5. Check out the revised NPCA website at <http://www.rpcv.org>.
6. New Niger sites include the Rotaract Club of Niamey at - <http://www.gsi-niger.com/rotaract/> and the National Museum of Niger (go to - <http://www.cfn.ne/> and click on "musée").

## Credits and Other Information

This edition of **The Camel Express** was prepared, produced and distributed with the contributions of Jai Evans, Jim Schneider, Sue Bracken, Irma Poots Sarata, Judd Lyon, Jane Bonin, Sue Rosenfeld, Chris Zoolkoski, Julie Burke, Natasha Copeland, Julie Doughty, Leslie Clark, Gaston Kaba, Carrie Regan, Penni St. Hilaire, Gabriella Maertens, John Soloninka, Larry Koff and Maria Mar. Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at any of the addresses above.

**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 e-mail 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).



# Board of Directors Friends of Niger

\*

Jim Schneider, President  
& Editor

\*

Gabriella Maertens, Vice-President

\*

John Soloninka, Recording Secretary

\*

Larry Koff, Treasurer

\*