

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

June 2005

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Letter from the Past President: Jim Schneider Announces Retirement

For anyone who visits this website on an occasional basis, and especially for members and supporters of **Friends of Niger**, it has been for some time apparent that **FON** has been much, much less active than had been true for many years.

This has to a very large extent been directly related to very severe restrictions on my time and energy - scarce personal resources which I have felt obliged and compelled to redirect toward the needs of a family in crisis, the family of my daughter and her four young children. As so often happens in these matters, I long postponed making certain decisions regarding various involvements - in the hope that matters would improve to the point where I could resume past levels of activity.

FON has suffered from this delay, much to my regret. Recently, I informed our Board of Directors of my decision to step down as President of **Friends of Niger**, a post that I have been honored to hold since the spring of 1998. With my strong endorsement, the Board chose John Soloninka to serve as President until the next scheduled Board elections in the spring of 2006.

I know that you will all give John the same support that I have been fortunate to receive over these past seven plus years, support for which I will always be truly grateful. I particularly want to publicly thank my fellow Board members - Gabriella, John, Larry and Penni - and other **FON** super vols - Irma, Sue and Judd - for their efforts over the years and for their generous personal support throughout my continuing personal crisis. I will be trying to assist the **FON** Board by doing a better job of keeping this website up to date and by continuing to serve as an At Large member of the Board.

I will also continue my activities with the Nigerien embassy in Ottawa, where I am assistant coordinator of a committee of Canadians and Nigeriens resident in Canada which is engaged in a range of activities designed to raise Niger's profile in Canada - for general purposes as well as in the context of Niger's role as host country for the 5th Francophone Games (Niamey - December 7-17, 2005).

It would be more than a little remiss on my part to not apologize to many of you for my horrific communications failings this past year and more - I think particularly of Kimba and Pam and Dudley, but they are not alone.

Pentultimately, my understanding is that **FON** plans to renew its activities in support of microcredit, children's vitamins, youth education and appropriate technology. Supplies of the **FON** t-shirt and of the DVD production *Brother from Niger* continue to be available and can be ordered as indicated below.

Finally, you will find a link to a letter from Jim Bullington, current PC Country Director Niger, which speaks to the food shortage and famine in parts of Niger and which provides some thoughtful guidance on how people can best respond.

All the best and thank you.

Jim Schneider
Niger PCV 1964-66
President, Friends of Niger, 1998-2005

Letter from Jim Bullington: Food Crisis in Niger

The developing food crisis in Niger has gotten increasing attention in European and American media in recent days, and many Niger RPCVs, current PCVs, and their families and friends have been asking for more information and looking for ways in which they might help. Therefore, I thought it would be useful to provide this summary of the situation and address the question of Peace Corps involvement.

Last year's harvest was very poor in the agro-pastoral zone, i.e. more or less along the 14th parallel: Tillaberi-Ouallam-Filingue-Tahoua-Dakoro-Tanout. Forage for the animals is also scarce. This zone includes about a fourth of the population, some 3 million people. In the rest of the country, the harvest was normal or better.

Thus, while the food crisis is not country-wide in scope, it is very serious for those in the affected zone. The usual coping mechanisms (temporary emigration, animal sales, "famine food," etc.) have been employed sooner and more extensively than in normal years, and various relief operations by the government (sale of reserve food stocks at subsidized prices) and donors (food for work, grain banks, etc.) have already begun. However, there are reports that some people (estimates of the number vary widely) are not just hungry but starving.

A major problem in addressing this crisis is that food grains are in short supply throughout West Africa, and prices are very high; so simply providing money, while needed, is not a sufficient response to meet the overall requirements for more food. The government and donors are seeking to import additional supplies.

The rains began in late May, and crops are planted in most areas. However, the harvest won't come in the agro-pastoral zone until about September. Moreover, as always, there is no assurance that the rains will continue in a sufficient amount or timely manner.

This situation poses challenges for PC/Niger and our PCVs, about a fourth of whom are located in the agro-pastoral zone where the problem is centered.

For many good reasons, it is not appropriate for PCVs to simply pass out free food to their villagers:

- * PC focuses on development, not relief; and therefore we are not trained and equipped for such operations, which require special expertise and professionalism. Well-meaning amateurs can do more harm than good, while getting themselves into trouble.
- * Since PC as an organization has no resources for food aid, there is no way that an individual PCV could be able to feed everyone in the village. Thus the question inevitably arises of who gets food and who doesn't, with the PCV caught in the middle. This could endanger the PCV's security as well as undermine his/her effectiveness as a development agent.
- * If one PCV hands out food in his/her village, this creates expectations for successor PCVs and PCVs in other villages, expectations that cannot be met (and should not be met if our primary objective remains long term, sustainable development).

On the other hand, PC is also a people-to-people organization, and we are acutely aware of the humanitarian imperative to do something when friends and neighbors are starving. This is not only a moral issue but also a practical problem: Development work is not possible when people can't eat, and the PCVs' own safety and health (physical and mental) may become problematic in such conditions.

Thus, while we can't and shouldn't get involved in direct food relief by PCVs, neither can we turn our backs and do nothing, particularly in those places where PCVs may be living among starving people.

Here are some things we are doing:

- * CRS has received a grant from USAID for an emergency food relief project. They would like to have a few PCVs to help administer it. PC staff is currently assessing the situation of PCVs in seriously affected villages to see if it would be appropriate for some of them to work temporarily in this project.
- * We are looking at the possibility of collaboration with other NGOs, including Africare and World Vision, that have access to food aid and the expertise and means to deliver it effectively.

* PCVs have organized 13 village food banks, and the government has agreed to our request to provide an initial stock of 10 tons of grain for each (although they have not been able to give us a date when this will be done).

As the food crisis develops, we will continue to monitor the situation and look for ways in which PC could effectively respond.

RPCVs and family members who would like to make a personal contribution to food relief in Niger might wish to consider donations to the UN's World Food Program, the lead agency in addressing the crisis. You can go to: www.wfp.org, click on the "donate" box at the left of the page, click on "WFP operations in" and scroll down to Niger.

J. R. Bullington
Country Director
Peace Corps/Niger

In his June 10, 1963 speech at American University, President Kennedy said:

"What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave. I am talking about genuine peace, the kind of peace that makes life on earth worth living, the kind that enables men and nations to grow and to hope and to build a better life for their children -- not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women -- not merely peace in our time but peace for all time."

Brother from Niger Goes DVD

Brother from Niger, the 42-minute video which focuses on FON's microcredit initiatives and which was produced by Whalesong Productions of Halifax, Nova Scotia, will soon be released in DVD format. **Friends of Niger** plans to make the DVD version [available for purchase](#) at the same price and on the same basis as the VHS version.

Micro Niger - How You Can Help -

Contributions to our ongoing support for microcredit in Niger should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to: **Micro Niger c/o FON, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the [Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form](#)

Vitamin Campaign - How You Can Help -

Donations to FON's ongoing vitamin campaign should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to **Vitamins, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164** or sent along with the [Friends of Niger 2003 Membership & Order Form](#)

Video Production that Features FON Available for Purchase in DVD & VHS



The 42 minute documentary on Niger, originally produced for Canadian TV and shot in Niger in January 2002, is now available for purchase from **Friends of Niger** in both DVD and VHS formats.

From the blurb of the video's jacket - "In a *Brother from Niger*', award winning journalist Andrew Younger brings a story of courage, hope, and struggle from one of the world's poorest countries. *Brother from Niger*' follows **Friends of Niger** president Jim Schneider as he returns to a country he once called home, a country that's still as poor as when he left it.

The video was shot on location in Niamey, Maradi, Matamaye, Botsotsoua, Kantche and Zinder and includes interviews with Haoua Diatta of the Oxcart Project as well as with Schneider, representatives of FON's Nigerien partner organizations and others.

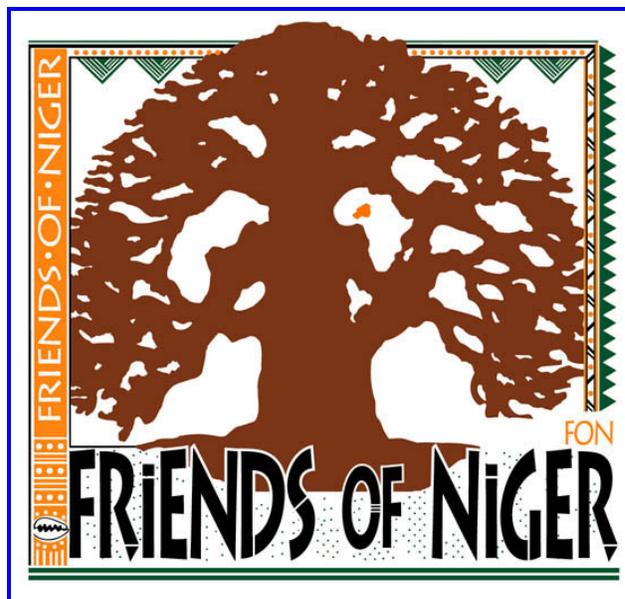
Copies of the videotape may be purchased for \$20 each (2 for \$35). Use the [FON 2004 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check or money order, made payable to **Friends of Niger** , to **Video, c/o FON, PO Box 33164, Washington, DC, 20033-0164.**

“Serve, serve, serve. That's the challenge. For in the end it will be the servants that save us all.” - Sargent Shriver .

Friends of Niger

You're Gonna Love This T-Shirt

**Available in 4 Sizes
- S, M, L, XL**



Makes a Great Gift!!

It'll Look Good on You as Well!!

Introducing - Friends of Niger T-Shirts...

You're gonna love this T-Shirt!!

Based on a design originally created by our neighbors at Friends of Burkina Faso, **FON** had produced its first and very own T-shirt. The short-sleeved shirts are 100% cotton, pre-shrunk beefy-T, natural muslin-colored fabric. The design (above) is four color: brown, black and the orange and green of the flag of Niger. You'll notice a nifty proximity map of Niger within the map of Africa which appears in the branches of the baobab tree. The shirts are available in Small, Medium, Large and Extra Large sizes and sell for \$18 each, shipping included. Use the [FON 2004 Membership & Order Form](#) or send a check made out to **Friends of Niger** (indicating the number of shirts by size), along with your name and address to: **Shirts. c/o Friends of Niger, P.O. Box 33164, Washington, D.C., 20033-0164.**

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@ca.inter.net; and you will find **FON** on the web at the following Internet address - www.friendsofniger.org.

This edition of **The Camel Express** was prepared, produced and distributed by Jim Schneider. Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at any of the addresses above.

FRIENDS OF NIGER **2005 MEMBERSHIP & ORDER FORM**