

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 27 Issue 1



April-May 2012

Nigerien Ambassador Maman Sidikou Presents Credentials to President Barack Obama



In January 2012, the new Ambassador from Niger presented his credentials to President Barack Obama. The Ambassador invited FON Board Members to a celebratory reception at his residence on January 31, 2012 (see p. 4).

FON Solicits Projects with New Funding Application

FON has developed a new, simplified form that non-profit organizations and grass roots groups can use to apply for funding from Friends of Niger. To access the form and instructions, please visit our website at <http://www.friendsofniger.org/projects>



Letter from the FON President—April 23, 2012

Dear Friends,

It was a great honor for me and board members Penni St.Hilaire and Jude Andreasen to represent all of you during the official DC welcoming reception of the new Nigerien Ambassador Maman Sidikou at the ambassador's residence in January. Penni also hosted a welcoming at her home for Ambassador Sidikou, FON members, friends and guests (see some of the pictures on page 8). Since arriving in Washington, Ambassador Sidikou has reached out to many individuals, private organizations, and government agencies with a message of sincere and genuine thankfulness for the many past contributions made to and on behalf of Niger and a call to continue to build on these past friendships and collaborative efforts to support a new 21st century holistic partnership. I was very impressed with Ambassador Sidikou and want to report that he is hopeful for the future of Niger and has invited us as Friends of Niger to join with him in finding creative and collaborative programs that will mutually strengthen our personal commitments and connections with our Nigerien family and friends. Along those lines, Ambassador Sidikou is keenly aware of the Peace Corps situation in Niger and has committed to work together with us and the Peace Corps Washington office identifying opportunities and milestones in the long journey ahead of us to reinstate the Peace Corps Niger program.

I would also like to bring to your attention the call for candidates to stand for election as members of the FON board of directors (see page 5). This is an open call to all FON members; please consider nominating yourself for a position on the FON board. A ballot and election can't be held without volunteers, so I want to thank member Lorraine Krusa for agreeing to collect nomination applications and to assist with this election.

In addition to your participation in the upcoming FON board election, we continue to seek your opinions, ideas, and contributions on how we as an organization can be more active and meaningful. Please let us hear from you! Peace!

John

Board of Directors Friends of Niger

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 CAMEL EXPRESS EDITOR

The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of **Friends of Niger (FON)**. FON can be contacted via the post at P.O. Box 5823 Washington, D. C. 20016-9998 Or by e-mail at president@friendsofniger.org 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 Project Play Africa

Soccer as a Tool for Development



FON continues to provide funding for Project Play Africa (PPA), the first project to use the new FON funding application. The following is an excerpt from an article by Jana Tomasello of PPA.

Project Play Africa was conceptualized on the belief that a simple soccer ball could bring joy to children in impoverished Africa. Our founders, passionate about soccer from their youth, started PPA with the goal to make an annual trip to deliver soccer balls to rural communities in West Africa. Our mantra became “putting smiles on the faces of children, one ball, one village, one country at time.”

Sports teach teamwork, discipline, tolerance and respect - skills needed if the energy and aspiration of African children are to be invaluable assets to eradicating poverty and creating sustainable economic development. It is documented that sports are effective for social mobilization, for supporting health and education and also can be an economic force providing jobs and community development.



This is our story. Incorporated in 2006, Project Play Africa embarked on our first journey to Africa in 2008 having shipped 2000 soccer balls which the American Embassy received in advance of our arrival. The PPA staff arrived in Niamey with loosely coordinated plans to work with the Peace Corps. In 10 days, we traveled over 1,500 miles from Niamey to Zinder and back distributing balls, pumps and encouraging community leaders, school administrators and other NGOs to organize youth programs and facilitate daily play for children. Additionally, the balls were being used to encourage attendance at school and participation in health and hygiene programs.

In 2010, PPA made plans to return to Africa and selected Benin on the recommendation of Brownie Lee, then Peace Corps Director. This time with well-coordinated plans and an itinerary organized by PCVs, PPA traveled to Benin and embarked on a 3,000 mile trek visiting five regions distributing equipment. Many of the programs are still active today. With two missions under our belt, PPA began to reevaluate our objectives. PPA is 100% volunteer with a small staff – our time is limited.

For our organization to remain viable our mission had to be sustainable and repeatable. We needed to focus and add more value. In late 2010 we enlisted the help of Robin Mednick, President of Pencils for Kid who was doing incredible work in the community of Libore, Niger. Robin provided sage advice – focus on one community, develop a model that engages the community, provide the resources for the community to develop and grow programs on their own and expect the community to help expand to neighboring communities. Her advice solidified our decision to return to Niger and focus our efforts on the community of Libore.

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FON SUPPORTS SOCCER AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT *continued from page 3*



Two months before our scheduled departure, PPA was faced with the tough decision whether to heed the travel advisory not to travel to Niger. We went anyway! Now twelve months after our 2011 visit, the Libore Futbol League is thriving and just voted in their second board. Last year, 17 of the 23 communes fielded adult teams and 25 schools have teams participating in youth tournaments. In a recent update, Hamani wrote, "Futbal (soccer) is undoubtedly the only sport through which we can unite people of religion, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds."

The establishment of the Libore Futbol League has formed an infrastructure that is benefiting the entire community. While PPA's mission remains focused on youth development through soccer, we realize that

supporting the adult club teams is promoting involvement of the entire community. The matches and tournaments are creating community pride, entertainment and participation. Spectators are learning the sport. Children aspire to practice, play for recreation and competition. The league is promoting leadership and education – establishing rules, training, and an organization. It is systemic and organic growth.

Returning to Libore in May 2012, we hope to make inroads for an even greater impact. We have solid support in Niger with Pencils for Kids, Hamani Djibo as our Libore coordinator and PPA friend and journalist, Ibbo Abdoulaye, who has provided on-going support since 2008. Our top priorities are to increase structure in the youth programs, encourage more local government support – land for fields and finances. We will also investigate the possibility of manufacturing equipment - balls, goals posts, nets, uniforms currently brought into Niger – thereby locally creating jobs and economic opportunities. Lastly, we plan to recruit support and train Libore mentors to assist in expanding PPA programs and make introduction to neighboring communities. As our mission has evolved our commitment and vision have expanded. Collaborating with organizations like FON and Pencils for Kids has the potential to expand our reach and make a greater impact through networking, consultation and shared resources. Project Play Africa ... because a ball can change the world! For more information about Project Play Africa email us at info@projectplayafrica.org or visit our website

<http://www.projectplayafrica.org>



Update on the 2012 FON Trip To Niger

We here at Friends of Niger are still hoping to organize a trip back to Niger in 2012 for anyone who is interested in joining us. We put out a call in May of 2010 to see who might come along. If you responded then, rest assured that we still have your contact information. In reality the trip is most likely to occur in 2013, or late 2012 at the earliest.

Organizing the trip has been complicated by the cancellation of the Peace Corps program in Niger. We try not to lean on the Peace Corps office, but it does help to have their advice and guidance in-country.

If you are interested in helping with the trip planning, we greatly need your help to make this happen. We are looking for someone who could potentially help us to coordinate getting 10 to 20 people to and around Niger and back. If you have some time to take on some of the many logistical tasks, please let us know at trip@friendsofniger.org.



Friends of Niger Board Elections

Election 2012

The Board of Directors of Friends of Niger is pleased to announce elections for the Board of Directors in May. The last year election for FON Board members was held in 2010.

For the 2012 elections, the current FON Board members are seeking additional FON members who would like to participate in the FON Board activities, which are conducted by email and at quarterly phone conference meetings. The FON Board members oversee the activities of FON which include the content and publishing of the Camel Express Newsletter, maintenance of the FON Website and webpages, the selection of projects to support in Niger and the collection and disbursement of funds collected by FON for these activities. Persons who can be liaisons with Niger, Niger NGOs or Nigeriens in the USA are especially invited seek nomination to the FON Board. To participate in the election process for the FON board, we encourage you to submit your name and brief resume following the guidelines on the attached document. Deadline for receiving nomination forms is June 1, 2012. Electronic or paper form is acceptable. After responses from this "call for nominations" are collected, we will send a ballot of nominees to FON members in good standing by the end of June 2012. Current Friends of Niger Board Members are listed on Page 2.

FON member Lorraine Krusa has agreed to serve as our "third party" to collect nominations. Please forward your nomination to Lorraine by post or email:

Lorraine Krusa, 27 Rose Ct., Glen Carbon, IL 62034

email: elections@friendsofniger.com

NOMINATION FORM

Friends of Niger Board of Directors — Elections 2012

I. I am a member of Friends of Niger, and I would like to stand for election to the Board of Directors of FON. If elected, I am willing to participate in up to four quarterly phone conference meetings (dates vary) with other FON Board members:

Name: _____

My contact information:

Address: _____

Address: _____

Email address: _____ Phone: _____

II. Tell us about yourself. (This information will be shared with the FON voting membership).

Dates that you lived, worked, or served in Niger: _____

If you worked in Niger, for which organization did you work? _____

Other information about your experiences in Niger or life experiences that you would like to share.

III. What experiences, ideas, service, or vision would you be willing to bring to the table as a member of the Board of Directors of FON? (Please limit your response to one-half a page).

The NH Seacoast Community Celebrates with Bombino in an Evening of Music and Hope for Niger



Bombino (center) & his band with Ambassadors Sidikou of Niger (3rd from left), and Moussa-Adamo of Gabon (2nd from right).

Music with a message of peace. On April 5th, 300 people, along with the Ambassadors of Niger and Gabon, danced, clapped and cheered for Tuareg sensation Bombino at The Music Hall in Portsmouth, NH to support RAIN's programs in Niger.

At the reception before the performance, Portsmouth Mayor Eric Spears was on hand to deliver to Bombino and the Ambassadors a special welcome and to proclaim April 5, 2012 as **West Africa Day in Portsmouth**, expressing pride in the city's role in bringing new life to RAIN's partner nomadic communities.



Mayor Spears presenting proclamations with RAIN founder Bess Palmisciano.

Representing Friends of Niger were John Hutchison and Larry Koff. RAIN and FON have worked together to petition for Peace Corps reinstatement in Niger as well as support for NGOs in the region in Washington D.C.

During the concert, Bombino sang songs about unity and reconciliation, of the beauty of the desert and of nomadic life. He spoke to the audience about the importance of education in his homeland, sharing his plans for an upcoming Peace Tour to promote Niger as a model of peace for the West African region.

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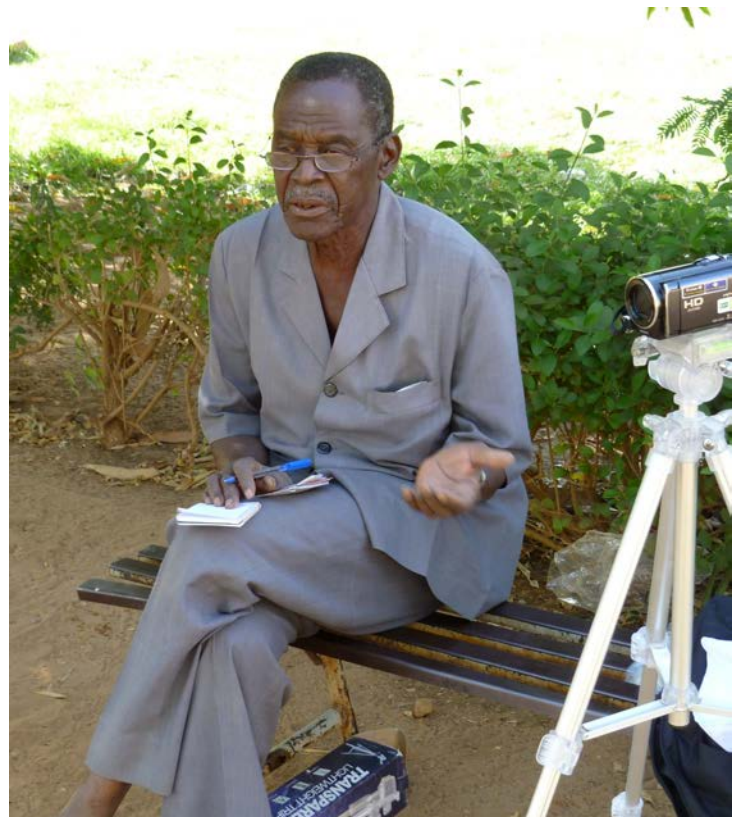
Nigerien Icons, Pioneers in Women's Rights, Education and Development Visit the U.S.



ABOVE: :Hadja Aminata Djima
RIGHT: Yazi Dogo.

Yazi Dogo (from Dogondoutchi) and his wife Hadja Aminata Djima have been invited by John Hutchison, Professor Emeritus of African Languages & Linguistics at Boston University's African Studies Center, to visit the US during this spring and summer. Hutchison has been collaborating with the Friends of Niger since earlier this year on fundraising to make this visit possible. Thanks to contributions from the Friends of Niger and also through funds raised by Mother Tongue Editions, their visit is now possible, and imminent! FON officers contacted FON members and facilitated the FON portion of the fundraising effort! All of the stakeholders are extremely grateful to the FON for this aid.

Yazi and Hadja are about as old as the oldest former volunteers from Niger. Yazi is 70 years old this year. John Hutchison first met Yazi in the 1970s in Zinder. Hutchison was working in the Nigerian university system as a research fellow specializing in the Kanuri language and often left Maiduguri to work with colleagues on language issues in Niger. Yazi Dogo at the time was a primary school teacher, teaching in the Hausa language in the first Hausa medium primary school in Niger. He was a pioneer in this field. He went on to establish a Hausa theater troop known as Kungiyar Yazi Dogo which is well known throughout Niger and in West Africa. (continued on page 9).



Ambasssador Sidikou Hosts Reception



Left to Right: FON President John Soloninka, Cleve Overton, FON Secretary Penni St. Hilaire, and her spouse, Tommy Tomlinson enjoy the Ambassador's reception.



Ambassador Sidikou, left holding paper, welcomes diplomats, friends, and Friends of Niger board members and their spouses.

FON Secretary Penni St. Hilaire Welcomes Ambassador Sidikou to Washington



LEFT: Ambassador Sidikou chats with Penni St. Hilaire at her home.

RIGHT: The ambassador shares coffee with Meredith McGehee, an original founder of Friends of Niger in 1989.



ABOVE: The Ambassador mingles with members of Friends of Niger.

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Visit by Nigerien Pioneers in Women's Rights and Education



The following was submitted by John Hutchison.

Since 1987 Yazi Dogo has also taught Boston University students first in French and Hausa, and later in the performing arts during their semester abroad in Niger. Aminata Djima has worked in public health throughout her life as a nurse and a public health educator. Recently she founded a women's group known as Aiki Yanke Talauci which is a micro-credit NGO in Niamey established to help the women of the Route de Filingué quartier to become financially independent through the establishment of small

Aminata Djima with a student.

business enterprises. Both of them appear on the African Language Materials Archive website (alma.matrix.msu.edu). Yazi is a cultural icon, comparable to a Bill Murray in our country. When you move around Niger with Yazi Dogo, you have a passport that opens every door.

Having them visit the U.S. is an opportunity and a way to enable us to honor our relationship with Niger by honoring this quite remarkable couple. Yazi Dogo epitomizes all that the Friends of Niger love and admire about the language and culture of Niger.

Yazi and Aminata will be here during late April and throughout the month of May this spring and summer. They will be in New England and in the New York/New Jersey and Washington, D.C. area. They will be interviewed by the Hausa Section of the Voice of America in Washington, D.C. We would be pleased to arrange meetings for any of you who will be in the area to meet them during their stay.

For more information contact John Hutchison, Coordinator of the African Language Materials Archive at 978-476-3078, or see the following website:

<http://alma.matrix.msu.edu/yazi-dogo>

Bombino Music and Hope *continued from page 8*

The Ambassador of Niger, the Honorable Maman Sidikou, spoke of the resiliency and hope of his country. He expressed that despite recent unrest, Niger is a country of diverse people, unified in their identity as Nigeriens and in their shared goal of engagement with each other and their neighbors. He also expressed how inspired and moved he was by the huge show of support for his country demonstrated that evening by their New England friends.



Ambassador Maman Sidikou (Niger) with Bombino.

New Friends, New Partners

The air of excitement and enthusiasm was palpable as the Portsmouth audience gave Bombino and his group multiple standing ovations. Said Bess Palmisciano, founder of RAIN*, "We couldn't have asked for a warmer reception and are excited to share our vision of a Niger where people with access to education, food and water have the freedom to choose to live in their tradition in safety and good health with a wider circle of supporters.



Left to Right:

Amb. Moussa-Adamo (Gabon), Amb. Maman Sidikou (Niger), Boubacar Rilla, Counselor to the Embassy of Niger, RAIN Board member Zenagui Brahim, and Larry Koff, FON Treasurer, enjoy the concert.

- *RAIN is a 10-year old NGO, one of the few working in remote areas of Niger with the Wodaabe and Tuareg people of West Africa. Their website notes that the event above raised \$80,000 for Niger* [\\(<http://rain4sahara.org>](http://rain4sahara.org)).

2012 FRIENDS OF NIGER MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s) _____ Date _____

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 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA

☐ Enclosed is \$35 for a FON Family Membership (2 Members at One Address)

☐ I am a New RPCV, entitled to a 1-Year Free Membership

☐ In Addition to my Membership, I have enclosed a General Contribution of _____

☐ Instead of Joining FON at this time, I have enclosed a General Contribution of _____

☐ I want to support the FON Chewable Vitamin Campaign with a Contribution of _____

☐ Please send _____ Friends of Niger T-Shirts

at \$15 each (Shipping Included) _____

T-Shirt Sizes: S _____ M _____ L _____ XL _____ T-Shirt Color: _____ brown _____ beige

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 does not share your contact information with any third party other than with the National Peace Corps Association with whom we have a reciprocity agreement.