

The Camel Express Online

Newsletter of the [Friends of Niger](#)

Volume 13, Issue 3

November 1998



Message from the President

Greetings on behalf of the Board of Directors of **Friends of Niger** and welcome to this edition of **The Camel Express**. We believe that you will find this edition particularly informative.

As many of you know, **Friends of Niger (FON)** is just emerging from about a two year hiatus. Its revival is due mostly to the hard work and diligence of Terry O'Leary, who stepped down as Group Leader prior to last spring's elections.

Over the past few months - since the election - your new Board has been busier than it would have liked with the inevitable administrative chores that accompany the efforts to breathe life back into a more or less moribund organization.

Most of the pieces are now in place. We have a bank account. We have a revised set of Bylaws. We are reaffiliated with the National Peace Corps Association (**NPCA**). And we have a sense of direction covering at least the short to medium term.

Much of that sense of direction comes from those of you who responded to our survey earlier this year and who, subsequently participated in the election. In response, the Board has been working - amongst other things - on the following:

The Camel Express, hardcopy and on-line editions, will be in your hands and on your screen at least three times a year (roughly January, May and September); the **FON** website will be up and running within a matter of days; a **Friends of Niger** reunion - **Reunion '99** - is in the planning stages and targeted for Minneapolis/St. Paul in August 1999; over the course of the coming year, we want to set up a regionally based and regionally driven FON outreach program; and, we want to tap into your commitment to Niger with productive and new ideas on how to respond to Niger's ongoing need for assistance of various kinds.

All this costs money. This need for financial resources is reflected in **FON's** new membership policy, details of which you will find in the body of the newsletter. Your response will by-and-large determine the quality of organization that **FON** evolves into over the next little while.

Enjoy the newsletter. Let us know what you are thinking. And please, please underline your commitment by becoming a member of **Friends of Niger**.

Thank you.

Jim Schneider, President

Friends of Niger Launches Website

With the help of RPCV Jai Evans, **Friends of Niger** will soon have its new website up and running. As of December 1, look for it at - <http://www.friendsofniger.org>.

In addition to the latest from and about Friends of Niger, the page will have links to all kinds of other Niger-related sites - including Focus on Niger, NigerNet, the Peace Corps, NPCA, etc. Eventually the **Camel Express** will be archived on the site as well.

Check it out and let us know what you think.

Niger Flood Relief - & What You Can Do

A recent FAO report stated that for Niger, "Crop prospects are favorable, reflecting generally abundant and widespread rains during the entire season...overall, a good, possibly record harvest is anticipated."

Unfortunately, these 'abundant and widespread rains' - torrential in many instances during August and again in September - have also led to flooding in many parts of Niger, and particularly in the region of Niamey.

Some 30,000 people have been reported homeless. As is true for most of the population of Niger, the people on the periphery of Niamey do not have piped water and depend on well water. Due to the flooding, most of the wells near Niamey are unusable. Many of the well rims and platforms have deteriorated and need rehabilitation as well as disinfection. The accompanying threat of waterborne diseases such as cholera has magnified the need for targeted public health education efforts.

The **Camel** found out - with the assistance of Marjorie Copson from the PCDC Niger desk - that Lutheran World Relief was directly involved with flood relief activities related to all the flood related problems described above.

You can assist LWR with its flood relief efforts by sending a contribution to : Lutheran World Relief, Attn: Kenlynn Schroeder, Church Street Station, P.O. Box 6186, New York, NY 10277. Make your check or money order out to Lutheran World Relief and - in order to ensure that your contribution is used for the flood relief effort - somehow designate the contribution as **Niger Floods-FON**.

Giraffe Carving Stuns Archaeologists

A 6.5 meter giraffe carved between 6000 and 9000 years ago in the sandstone of the Sahara is causing a sensation among archaeologists.

Long known to the Tuareg, the giraffe carving and others were discovered during an expedition by Frenchman Jean Clottes, president of the International Committee of Rock Art.

David Coulson, chairman of the Trust for African Rock Art said: "We were completely stunned by what we

saw. We had climbed on to an outcrop about 300 yards long and 50 feet high, all of it covered in engravings. We looked down and there it was.

"To us it was the rock-art equivalent of stumbling on Michelangelo's David in the desert, and it is certainly equal to the finest art in the great paleolithic caves of Europe."

The giraffe was carved with primitive stone chisels and hammers. The carving survived because it was engraved on a natural buttress protected from the prevailing northeasterly desert winds. The lack of rain helped as well.

Casts will be prepared in January for the Nigerien government, the National Geographic Society and possibly the Louvre.

Source: The Times of London

REUNION '99

According to the **Camel**, **Friends of Niger** will be sponsoring a Niger reunion to coincide with next summer's NPCA National Conference. Both events will take place in Minneapolis/St. Paul, August 12-15, 1999.

FON VP Gabriella Maertens will be coordinating planning efforts for **Reunion '99**. At this point, all options are open for the **FON** event - it could be as short in duration as an evening social, or as long as the entire weekend - complete with a variety of social and educational events.

Please pass along your ideas and let us know that you are planning to attend. Gabriella can be reached via the **FON** address (see pages 4 & 8). **The Camel Express** will carry a more detailed report in its next issue.

Who's Who or What's What

(more or less)

The **Camel** is constantly receiving messages from people who are understandably confused between Friends of Niger, Focus on Niger, NigerNet, NPCA and goodness knows how many other sets of initials. The information below should help clarify who's who and what's what - - more or less.

Friends of Niger (FON) is a registered nonprofit corporation under the laws of the District of Columbia. The purpose of FON is to initiate and/or support activities related to Niger and its people and for the benefit of its membership. **FON** was established well over a decade ago and was active for many years under the leadership of its founder, Meredith McGehee. **The Camel Express** is the name of its newsletter. It has a

contact list of over 1200 people, largely Niger RPCVs but also many others who have worked and/or lived in Niger, including Nigeriens. Further information on the composition of its current Board of Directors, on its current mailing address, and on some of its current activities can be found elsewhere in this edition of **The Camel Express**.

At the point a couple of years ago when **FON** went into temporary hiatus, the *Camel Express Telematique* and **Niger Net** were amongst the services provided by Friends of Niger. During FON's down time, these two services would have disappeared had it not been for the special efforts of two people - Joel Mayer and Bill Stein. Joel kept *CET* going, added additional features under the umbrella of **Focus on Niger** and continues to maintain a truly first class web site. Bill kept **NigerNet** going, giving many of us the information that we needed in order to establish or maintain contact with each other.

The **Focus on Niger** page, still maintained by Joel Mayer, attempts to be the best possible source of information about Niger and links to Niger-related sites on the web, including many inside Niger. It also contains many links to sources of information on Africa in general, as well as of sites of interest to RPCVs, and is a member of the Africa International Ring. Its URL is: <http://users.idworld.net/jmayer/fon.html>.

The main features of **Focus** are:

- A weekly independent online newspaper containing news and opinions about Niger from a variety of sources. The newsletter maintains a pro-democracy editorial policy.
- Niger Human Rights Watch - which attempts to document abuses of human rights by the government of Niger. It relies on information from Amnesty International, the National Democratic Institute, the Committee to Protect Journalists, the U.S. State Department, and the archives of Focus' online newsletter.
- **NigerNet** (see above right).
- Families and Friends of Peace Corps Volunteers - a message board dedicated to issues concerning the Peace Corps experience in Niger. It is intended to be a support system for those "left behind" in the United States and is coordinated by PCV Parent Linda Showalter.
- Association des Etudiants et Residents Nigeriens aux USA - founded mainly to raise funds privately for famine relief in Niger but also to open channels of communication for Nigeriens in the USA.

Niger Net is an e-mail network of people who have lived in Niger. Joining puts you in electronic contact with Nigeriens, RPCVs and other people interested in Niger. It currently has over 500 members. John Soloninka, FON's current Recording Secretary, is the coordinator. He can be reached at soloninka1@osu.edu or via links available at the **FON** and **Focus** websites.

National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) is a worldwide network of RPCVs, former staff and supporters of the Peace Corps movement. NPCA works in the U.S. and abroad for world peace, understanding and well-being. Its membership tops 17,000 and it has 130 affiliated organizations - **Friends of Niger** being one. Membership includes entitlement to its magazine - **World View** - and its newsletter - **3/1/61**. More information on NPCA and its various programs and services can be found via its website - www.rpcv.org.

Get on the Camel Express

Join Friends of Niger

Earlier this year, before the spring election, the Interim Board of **Friends of Niger**, was concerned to ensure that **FON**'s future was built on a democratic foundation. The Interim Board believed that this aim would be best served by creating an elected Board of Directors.

Attainment of this objective was complicated by the fact that **FON** did not have an identifiable membership. It had a fairly extensive contact list, but no specific membership list. So the Board created an 'Interim Membership' for the express purpose of holding **FON**'s first elections.

The criteria for 'Interim Membership' was, in effect, that a person had in some manner communicated the desire to participate in **Friends of Niger**. Included in that 'Interim Membership' were people who fell into at least one of four groups: those who had responded to the January 1998 survey; those who contacted **FON** and simply said that they wanted to be a member; those who stood for election to the Board or nominated someone to the Board; and, those who were members of **NPCA** and had designated **FON** for receipt of part of their **NPCA** membership dues.

The 'Interim Membership' came to some 200 people. The election was held and a new Board was elected. The new Board has put **FON**'s administrative house in order, launched a new website, started the planning for **Reunion'99** and managed to keep **The Camel Express** on the tracks (9th issue in 1998 - going to more than 1000 people). All these things cost money. So we are going to need some financial help. You can help **FON** financially by becoming a member and/or making a financial contribution.

We will be very appreciative of every contribution that we receive (and are grateful for the ones already received). But we would much rather that you were a member as well.

Some Membership Options

- Become a member of **Friends of Niger** for 1999 by filling out and sending in the **Membership/Contribution Form** and taking out either an Individual Membership (\$20) or a Family Membership - two members at one address (\$35).
- Become a member of **Friends of Niger** and **NPCA** as well by filling out the form and sending \$45 for an Individual Membership in both organizations or \$67.50 for Family Membership in both. We'll keep your **FON** dues and pass along the rest to **NPCA**.
- In addition to or instead of becoming a member, make whatever financial contribution you can to **Friends of Niger**. We'd like you to fill out the form regardless - it's the only way that we can be certain that we'll be able to stay in contact.
- And remember that you can still join **NPCA** direct. Please remember to designate **Friends of Niger** as the affiliate to which you'd like a contribution to be made - **FON** will receive \$15 and you'll become a member of both.

Some Undertakings

Once a year, beginning with the 1999 membership year, the Board of **FON** will issue a financial statement via **The Camel Express**. In other words, you'll be kept informed on how the Board makes use of your financial contribution.

Membership includes election entitlement. New RPCVs will receive a 1-year free membership. Members & contributors will receive **The Camel Express** - hardcopy or online. In fact, we'll try to get the **Camel** to everyone on our list - for as long as the budget allows.

FON ELECTS NEW BOARD

In May 1998, **FON** held its first elections based on a broad-based membership. Five 'interim' members accepted nomination for the three elective positions: Larry Koff, John Lemon, Gabriella Maertens, Jim Schneider and John Soloninka.

Past President Terry O'Leary and Interim Board member Maria Mar acted as scrutineers, monitored the election process and counted the ballots. The three candidates receiving the most votes - and thereby elected - were Gabriella Maertens, Jim Schneider and John Soloninka.

At its first meeting, the newly elected Board members appointed Larry Koff and Maria Mar to the Board and filled the Board offices as follows: Jim Schneider, President; Gabriella Maertens, Vice-President; John Soloninka, Recording Secretary; Larry Koff, Treasurer; and, Maria Mar, Member-at-Large. The Board can be contacted by post (**Friends of Niger; P.O. Box 33164; Washington, DC 20033-0164**) or by e-mail (**lorenz3@magi.com**).

PEACE CORPS DAY '99

Peace Corps Director Mark Gearan recently announced that the second annual Peace Corps Day will be held on Tuesday, March 2, 1999 in honor of the Peace Corps 30th anniversary.

Peace Corps Day is an annual event which takes RPCVs into schools across the country to teach students about their experiences living in another culture. Last year on Peace Corps Day, over 6650 RPCVs inspired and delighted an estimated 320,000 students nationwide by participating in classroom presentations about life overseas.

RPCVs who are interested in speaking to a class, or teachers who would like to host a speaker, or others who are seeking additional information about Peace Corps Day '99 can request an information brochure through which a speaker's kit and other materials will be made available.

Send Your name, mailing address and daytime phone number to Peace Corps' World Wise Schools via e-mail at **<pcday@peacecorps.gov>** or call **(800) 424-8580 (press 2, then extension 1961)**.

**Peace Corps
Has Moved**

This past August, Peace Corps moved its DC operation to 1111 20th Street, NW, Washington, DC, 20526. E-mail address and 800 number remains the same.

Thank You Joel Mayer

During FON's down time - most of 1996 and 1997 - RPCV Joel Mayer did more than any single person to keep all of us informed on what was happening in Niger and in relationship to Niger. Mostly on his own, he has managed a first class webpage dedicated to Niger and its people (see page 3), provided his slant on all the latest news, and linked those of us with web access to - at last count - more than 100 sites dedicated to Niger and Africa and international development issues.

The Board of Directors of **Friends of Niger** wanted to take the opportunity of this issue of **The Camel Express** to not only thank Joel for his obvious hard work but also to recognize his passion for and dedication to human rights and to democracy in Niger.

As Joel and Texans everywhere will understand - we might could have said more but we hope *mun gode* will suffice.

Nouvelles Nigeriennes

Electoral Roles to be Updated in November

According to a decree signed by General Mainassara, Niger's electoral roles were to be updated in the first half of November. This special revision is part of the July 31 accord between Niger's political parties and the Niger government regarding the conduct of local and regional elections scheduled for February 7, 1999.

The effort involved the registration of new voters, the transfer of names from one location to another, and the removal of voters deceased since the last election.

An earlier revision was conducted in June by the Delegation Generale de l'Informatique (DELGI), a government agency - but these results were not accepted as valid by political parties opposed to the current government.

Souces: Reuters, AFP, CET

FRDD Expresses Satisfaction with CENI

On November 2, spokespeople for the Front pour la Restauration et la Defense de la Democratie (FRDD) said that it was satisfied with the way that the Commission Electorale Nationale Independante (CENI) was handling preparations for the February 7 elections.

At the same time, FRDD leaders stated that they still do not agree to the inclusion of traditional chiefs in the new regional and local assemblies., and that they were still not satisfied with the degree of access its parties have to state-owned media.

Regarding the inclusion of traditional chiefs, the government position is that the traditional chiefs are at the base of all development and that they can not be "left on the sidelines" while rural communities take charge of their own future.

Source: AFP, CET

GremahBoucar Receives CPJ Press Freedom Award

Gremah Boucar, founder of Radio Afani, Niger's only private radio station and publisher of Anfani newspaper and magazine, has been chosen as one of the five journalists to receive the 1998 CPJ International Press Freedom Award for courage and independence in reporting the news.

The eighth annual awards will be presented at formal ceremonies being held in New York City on November 24. The event will mark the 17th year of CPJ (Committee to Protect Journalists), an independent non-profit organization that works to promote press freedom worldwide.

Boucar will travel to New York and be on hand to receive the award. The other 1998 recipients include Gustavo Gurriti, a Peruvian investigative reporter working in Panama; Goenawan Mohamad, a magazine editor in Indonesia; Pavel Sheremet, a television bureau chief and newspaper editor in Belarus; and, Ruth Simon, a wire service correspondent imprisoned in Eritrea.

Officials in Niger Place Limits on Private Media

Officials in Niger have temporarily banned all relays of international broadcasters on private Niger stations.

The two Niger private FM broadcasters singled out for restriction were Anfani and R et M. Both broadcast news from Voice of America, Radio Deutsche Welle and the BBC.

Daouda Diallo, president of Niger's media authority, Le Conseil superieur de la communication (CSC), said the ban would remain effective until international broadcasters sign contracts with the government - agreements which would help establish who would be held legally responsible in the event of legal actions.

Source: IRIN-WA

Human Rights Commission

On November 5, the Nigerien cabinet adopted a draft law for the purpose of creating a national human rights and liberties commission. An official statement said that the commission would watch over individual rights and fundamental freedoms. It will be made up of a judge, a professor of law, and "representatives of civil society."

Sources: Reuters, CET

Balanced Budget Forecast for 1999

Addressing the Assemblée Nationale last month, Nigerien Finance Minister - Ide Niandou - said that the 1999 budget is based on a growth of 4.5% in the gross domestic product. He pointed out that growth in 1998 is running at 4.4%.

The balanced budget calls for revenue and spending of 234 billion CFA (\$425 million), an increase of 15% from 1998. Of the income, 143 billion CFA would come from Niger's own resources - an increase of 23% over 1998.

Sources: Reuters, CET

Increase in Cotton Production

Reports from Niger are that cotton has now become 'white gold.' While cotton production caused some to fear that the large Gorou-Bassounga Classified Forest (Gaya) was under threat, the report claims that 'spirits are appeased and calm has returned.' The forest which covers 8.832 hectares has not been declassified or cut into - although the number of cotton farmers has increased and production has tripled. A Chinese factory for the deseeding, spinning and weaving of cotton will soon open in Gaya.

Sources: CET, Le Niger-Actualite

Iodine Deficiency Causes Concern

Nigerien Minister of Health, Lt. Col. Illo Almoustapha, recently stated that iodine deficiency diseases have become a major health problem in Niger.

Speaking during events in Niamey marking World Goitre Control Day, the minister quoted findings from a national survey carried out in 1994 in Niger schools showing a 5.5 percent prevalence rate of visible cases and a 35.8 percent rate when all cases are considered.

The investigation indicated that the most affected districts were Dosso, Tahoua and Maradi. The major

symptom of goiter is swelling of the neck. But specialists claim that this is only the tip of the iceberg and that diseases related to iodine deficiency are a real obstacle to development. These related troubles include: repeated abortions, low weight babies, congenital malnutrition, higher maternal and child mortality, mental deficiency and lower productivity dues to reduced capacity for work and learning.

Niger's campaign against disorders caused by iodine deficiency consists primarily in the promotion of the universal iodization of salt. The aim is to provide iodine, a mineral indispensable for people living in the affected areas. In October 1995, the government issued a decree regulating the production, importation and marketing of iodized salt in Niger. The regulation came into effect in March 1997.

Sources: PANA, CET

Fashion Festival held in Agadez Region

The first of its kind in Africa, the Festival International de Mode Africaine was held November 11-15 at Tiguidit, near Agadez.

Mr. Rhissa Ag Boula, Nigerien Minister for Tourism and Artisans said that the government viewed FIMA as an important contribution to the consolidation of peace, the promotion of African culture, the stimulation for renewed growth of tourism, and the development of the economy of the North.

The event was organized by Nigerien fashion designer ALPHADI.

Sources: Le Niger-Actualite, CET

FRIENDS OF NIGER 1999 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City/ State _____ **Phone (h)** _____

Zip _____ **Phone (h)** _____

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

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON

\$45 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA

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

\$67.50 to cover Family Membership in both FON & NPCA

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

Please send me a Copy of FON's Bylaws (Members Only)

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

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

Make Check or Money Order Payable to **Friends of Niger** and mail to:

P. O. Box 33164, Washington, D. C. 20033-0164

(Please Enclose Membership Form)