

The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

November 1999

Message from the President

Well here we are!! Almost the end of 1999. Almost the end of the millennium - whichever year you prefer. And, whichever, it would be difficult not to be struck by the challenges which lie ahead - for Niger and for FON as well.

Will this country - Niger - which belongs to others, but which we care about so much - find its way towards a more representative, participatory and inclusive political system? The signs are good, as clearly illustrated by the recent first round of the presidential elections. But Niger's recent history bodes caution - and vigilance.

And will **Friends of Niger** - itself only recently revived - not only continue to grow, but, more importantly, find itself able to muster new and increasingly more effective means of response to Niger, the people of Niger and its own membership? Here, the signs are also good - witness the range of activities touched upon in this edition of *The Camel Express*. But, like all largely voluntary undertakings, **FON** too requires vigilance - best achieved, I submit, in the form of your involvement.

Taking out a membership or making a financial contribution is a form of involvement. Either of these actions are supportive of **FON** and directly assist with the newsletter, the website and our other activities. We are very grateful for this support and urge each of you to renew your existing membership or officially join **FON** for the first time (see the **FON Membership Form** below).

But, as is reflected in the more activist content of this edition of **The Camel Express**, the new millennium augurs a new and more activist agenda for **Friends of Niger**. Many of the articles in this edition - those on chewable vitamins, Books for Africa, Jubilee 2000, Peace Corps Day 2000, Help Wanted, even the little notice regarding The Hunger Site - suggest ways large, small and in between that you can find a more active role either within **Friends of Niger** or in other activities that are supportive of the interests of the people of Niger.

The **FON Participaction Menu** is an attempt on our part to make it easier for *you* to let *us* know what forms of participation you would be willing to at least explore. **Please respond.**

Enjoy the newsletter. Stay in contact. Have a great Thanksgiving. Join **Friends of Niger**.

Thanks.

Jim Schneider, President

Boston University & Friends of Niger Project

- Chewable Vitamins for Niger's Children -

PROJECT UPDATE

In the spring issue of **The Camel Express**, we reported on Sue Rosenfeld's request that visitors to Niger bring along a bottle of children's chewable multi-vitamins.

Sue is the Resident Director of Boston University's Study Abroad program, which is based in Niamey, where Sue has lived and worked for 15 years. When someone arrives in Niamey - with one or more bottles of vitamins - they give Sue a call at 73-54-26. Periodically, Sue passes the bottles along to Dr. Gamatie Youssouf at the Pediatric Ward of the National Hospital in Niamey. Dr. Gamatie oversees the distribution of the vitamins.

Since then the children at the National Hospital have been the recipients of a steady, if modest supply of vitamins brought to Niger by a variety of visitors and returning residents. Recently one donor, Beth Mundell, sent along 1600 chewables.

Now an even more exciting development has occurred. **A full suitcase has been put at the disposal of the chewable vitamin project!** Chris and Helene Zoolkoski, along with their daughter, will be carrying the suitcase with them when they arrive in Niamey on December 18. PCV's in Tahoua and Niamey (1988-91), Chris and Helene (Warkentin) are headed to Galmi where Chris, a recent med school grad, will work at the SIN referral hospital while Helene studies Hausa.

How You Can Help to Fill the Suitcase

There are two ways that you can help fill the suitcase - by sending bottles of *children's chewable multi-vitamins* **or** by making a project-specific financial contribution.

Bottles of *children's chewable multi-vitamins* should be sent to **Gabriella Maertens, 13302 NE Sacramento Drive, Portland, Oregon 97230-3000**. Gabriella is Vice-President of FON (& the originator of the 'suitcase' idea). Chris and Helene also live in Portland.

Financial contributions, in the form of checks or money orders, should be made out to **Friends of Niger** and sent by mid-November to::

**Vitamins c/o Friends of Niger
P.O. Box 33164
Washington, D.C. 20033-0164**

We'll forward a lump sum check to Chris for purchase of vitamins in Portland. And we'll let you know how this all worked out in the next issue of **The Camel Express**.

FON Explores Partnership with St. Paul Based Non-Profit Organization



Books For Africa is a St. Paul based non-profit organization established in 1988 for the purpose of shipping donated books to Africa. To-date, BFA has been involved in the shipment of more than 4 million free books to over 20 African countries.

About 30 percent of the books are shipped from the BFA warehouse in St. Paul, the other 70 percent from partner organizations across the country.

About one-third of those partnerships have been with Rotary Clubs in the developed world and in Africa.

Friends of Niger is discussing with BFA the possibility of a partnership, a relationship which would see FON facilitate the movement of books to Niger (which has not been a recipient country).

Discussions have also been started with an NGO in Niger - important because NGO's are capable of ensuring duty-free entry of the books and, because some such organization needs to handle the internal distribution of the books to schools, libraries, etc.

We Need Your Involvement!!

We need people to come forward who would be willing to take the local initiative with potential partner organizations and/or book-donor institutions. For more information and/or to become involved in the campaign, please contact Jim Schneider at the FON mailing address (see below), via E-mail at lorenz3@magi.com or by phone (819-827-4870).

JUBILEE 2000

The Campaign to Cancel

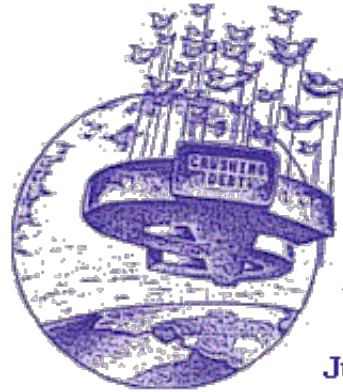
Third World Debt



Jubilee 2000 campaigns and coalitions around the world have joined in a concentrated effort to cancel the international debt of the world's poorest countries - Niger included.

33 of the 41 countries identified by the World Bank as Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) are in Africa - Niger near the bottom of the list.

Simply put, the continent's debt is so large in relation to its income that the debt can never be repaid. In 1997, for example, Niger GNP was \$2 billion US, its debt owed to foreign creditors \$1.579 billion - over 75% of its GNP. Servicing of debt of this magnitude diverts resources from health, education and other vital services. And development aid does not fill the gap. In 1996, sub-Saharan African countries shelled out 30% more for debt servicing than they received in grant aid.



**MUST WE STARVE
OUR CHILDREN
TO PAY OUR DEBTS?**

**Julius Nyerere,
Former President of Tanzania**

And whereas individuals have access to bankruptcy proceedings and overextended businesses can go into receivership, poor countries have had no escape - no recourse - no means to start over with a clean slate.

To find out more about world debt, Niger's debt situation, current U.S. policy and how to get involved in the Jubilee and related campaigns - including the Jubilee petition - consult below:

Jubilee 2000/USA - largest coalition of US group .

Source for debt-related educational material; links to other groups and sources; information on regional and local activities and contacts.
222 East Capitol Street, NE; Washington, DC, 20000-1036;
1-202-783-3566 (phone); 1-202-546-4468 (fax);
coord@j2000usa.org (E-mail); <http://www.j2000usa.org> (website)

African Policy Information Center (APIC)

Source of background papers and other educational material.
110 Maryland Avenue NE #509; Washington, DC, 20002;
1-202-546-7961 (phone); 1-202-546-1545 (fax);
apic@igc.apc.org (E-mail); <http://www.africapolicy.org> (website)

Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative

<http://www.web.net/~jubilee>

Oxfam International

<http://www.oneworld.org/oxfam/policy/papers/1papers.html>

PEACE CORPS DAY 2000

March 7, 2000 will mark the 3rd annual Peace Corps Day. Last year's event saw approximately 9000 RPCV's going into school's across the country, teaching students about their country of service and sharing their experience of living in another country.

The theme of this year's event is "Bringing the World Home to Our Nation's Schools."

The Peace Corps Day 2000 brochure - which includes info on how to receive a 'presentation kit' from Peace Corps - is scheduled for mailing in November to RPCV's and other educators.

RPCV's who are interested in speaking to a class or teachers who would like to host a speaker or others who are seeking information about Peace Corps Day 2000 may address their questions to Lisa Ward, Peace Corps Day Coordinator, at eward@peacecorps.gov.

Inform **Friends of Niger** of your involvement and we'll try to get back to you with an information package which is Niger specific.

Special Help Needed

Friends of Niger needs assistance with and through the process of obtaining federal tax-exempt status. At present, **FON** is a non-profit corporation registered in the District of Columbia but without tax-exempt status. The process is detailed and somewhat complicated and we're a bit daunted. Anyone with experience with the process or who is otherwise qualified and would be willing to offer *pro bono* assistance is urged to contact Jim Schneider at the **FON** mailing address (see below), via E-mail at lorenz3@magi.com or by phone (819-827-4870).

FON would also like to assemble an information/education package on Niger - the people, the country, the culture. If possible, we would like to assemble a basic set of materials for use during Peace Corps Day 2000 and then build a more sophisticated package over the course of the coming year. We'll probably produce the basic materials in-house and take it from there. Once assembled, materials would be made available on request. To help with this project, please contact Jim Schneider at the **FON** mailing address (see below), via E-mail at lorenz3@magi.com or by phone (819-827-4870).

FON SETS UP PHOTO ARCHIVE

FON Recording Secretary John Soloninka has taken responsibility for establishing a **Friends of Niger** Photo Archive - a depository for all those photos from Niger that need to be rescued from closets and drawers and basement storage areas - while they are still salvagible. The collection will be stored on CD's and Zip discs as well as in albums and made available for reunions and other events.

Contact John at 2388 Glenmawr Drive, Columbus, Ohio, 43202; 614-261-0578 (phone); soloninka.1@osu.edu (e-mail) or via FON.

RPCV Books & Stories

Over the past 38 years, there have been quite a few books and stories written by Niger RPCV's, particularly books written from the perspective of the experiences of their volunteer years.. During the same period, other authors have also written books about Niger and its people. Here are four of the more recent.

Hale, Thomas A. **Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music**. Indiana Univ Press, 1999. ISBN: 0253334586 Hale (Niger '64-66) went back to Niger in 1980 on a Fulbright senior lectureship to teach African and American literature at the University of Niamey. While back in Niger, he conducted the research which led to four books, including **The Epic of Askia Mohammed** and **Oral Epics from Africa**.

Hill, Kathleen. **Still Waters in Niger**.

Triquarterly Books, 1999; ISBN: 0810150891.

A novel, released in May, built around the work of her daughter Kathleen (85-87) who was a NUT volunteer in Niger.

Chilson, Peter. **Riding the Demon: On the Road in West Africa**. Univ of Georgia Press, 1999. ISBN: 0-8203-2036-6.

Rain, David R. **Eaters of the Dry Season: Circular Labor Migration in the West African Sahel**. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999. ISBN: 0-8133-3616-3.

Coyne, John et. al. **Living on the Edge : Fiction by Peace Corps Writers**. Curbstone Press, 1999. ISBN: 1-8806-8457-8.

Check out the [RPCV Books link](#) on this page for more information

VISIT the HUNGER SITE



Every 3.6 seconds someone dies of hunger; 3/4 of these deaths are children under 5. Visit The Hunger Site and make a difference - <http://www.thehungersite.com>.

Friends of Niger WA State

Support Orphanage in Niger

Niger RPCV's and other friends of Niger from the state of Washington gather twice yearly to spend an evening together, catch up with each other, share their Niger experiences and discuss ways that they can respond to today's Niger.

Their next get-together takes place from 5 PM, Saturday, November 6 at the Mandarin Chef, 5022 University Way NE, Seattle, 206-528-7596. For further information regarding the dinner contact Sue Dernbach by phone at 206-937-6320 or via E-mail at Susandern@aol.com.

In 1998 the group launched a program in support of Niger's newest orphanage started in 1997 by Fraternité Notre Dame. Tax deductible donations can be sent to Fraternité Notre Dame at P.O. Box 1713, New York, NY, 10035 or directly to Niamey at B.P. 12661, Niamey, Niger. Last year the American Women's Club of Niamey funded the purchase of bedroom furniture for the orphanage. For additional information contact Sue Bracken (509-924-3903) at Sbrckn@aol.com.

- Dreamweaver Travel -

Start the Millennium in the Air Massif



Dreamweaver Travel is a small tourism company, specializing in cross-cultural and adventure tours to West Africa. The new company, owned by Dudley Parkinson - RPCV Cameroun & PC staff in Togo, Benin & Cameroun - offers trips to Niger, Togo and Cameroun.

According to Dreamweaver, current packages include a two-week camel trek among the Tuareg, scheduled to start on December 27 and reach the Air or Tenere by December 31.

For a complete itinerary as well as information regarding Dreamweaver's commitment to "culturally and environmentally sustainable travel" visit their website at <http://www.dreamweavertravel.net> or make e-mail contact at dudley@dreamweaver.net The company, based in River Falls, Wisconsin can be reached by phone at 715-425-1037.

Reunion '99 Attended By

40+ Friends of Niger



Forty plus Niger RPCV's, their families, and other friends of Niger participated in part or all of **FON's Reunion '99** which took place August 13-15 in St. Paul, Minnesota at the same time as NPCA's annual conference.

Participants included RPCV's spanning the entire history of PC Niger - from 1962 right through 1999.

FON its special thanks to local members who helped organize the event, including Jim and Daisi Martin and Sue Riesgraf. [Photos From Reunion 1999](#)

News Briefs from Niger

×In mid-September the Conseil de Réconciliation Nationale confirmed that the government has ratified the international convention calling for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The ratification occurred in spite of serious opposition from Islamic groups.

×On July 18, some 31.2 percent of Niger's electorate turned out to overwhelmingly approve (89.6 percent) Niger's new constitution. The constitution of the Fifth Republic was proclaimed by the government in August.

Sources: Kakaki, Reuters, BBC

New Leadership for Peace Corps & NPCA

Since the last issue of **The Camel Express**, both Peace Corps and the National Peace Corps Association (NPCA) have undergone changes of leadership at the top. Mark Gearan has stepped down as Director of the Peace Corps and accepted an appointment as President of Hobart and William Smith Colleges. He has been replaced on an interim basis by Chuck Baquet. Meanwhile, the NPCA search for a replacement for its president, Chip Dambach, resulted in the successful recruitment of Dane Smith - former US Ambassador to Senegal.

Credits & Other Information

This edition of **The Camel Express** was prepared, produced and distributed with the assistance of Jai Evans, Sue Bracken, Irma Poots Sarata, Judd Lyon, Sue Rosenfeld, as well as members of the Board of **FON**. Please send address changes and corrections, as well as any queries to **The Camel Express** at any of the addresses below.

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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; and you will find **FON** on the web at the following Internet address
www.friendsofniger.org.

Renew your **Friends of Niger** membership for the year 2000 or join us for the first time. You'll find the **Annual Membership Form** above. While you're there, fill in the **FON Participaction Form** which can be found immediately below the **Membership Form**.