

# The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 30 Issue 2



November 2015

## ***TOWARDS AUTONOMY FOR BORORO WOMEN THROUGH BREEDING GOATS***



The women of Tekinéwane and Ajangafa have never been to school in this northern Tahoua community in Niger because their lifestyle of nomadism imposes a constant displacement and seasonal transhumance: the boys drive grazing animals and girls help their mothers to do domestic work (fetching water, gathering wood, preparing meals, etc.). Following successive droughts, most of the population has lost livestock, and what remains is not enough for families to meet their daily food needs. A request of the local NGO, Kaourital, for financing of a dairy goat operation for the women of the Women's Group of the Association Kaourital in the town of Ajangafa in the commune of Tchintabaraden was accepted by the David Nikkel Foundation and Friends of Niger (FON).

The women in the project receive a dairy goat and her kid, which will allow their families to benefit from a few liters of milk per day. After 18 months the kid of the goat is sold to repay the amount awarded, and the recipient woman still has her goat and can anticipate more goat births to sustain her and her family. Repaying the original amount allows the NGO Kaourital to present other women of the group with goats to continue the operation.

*from Ortoudo Bermo, President of the NGO Kaouritel, translated by Gabriella Maertens*



## Former Niger Peace Corps Director shares thoughts on the value of Peace Corps

In his 2007 book, *Adventures in Service with Peace Corps in Niger*, former Peace Corps Niger Director, James R. Bullington, shared some thoughts about the value Peace Corps. *War on Terrorism: A View from the Niger Front*, November, 2001:

"The people of Niger are more than 90% Muslim, for the most part fervently so. ... Moreover, [they] are wretchedly poor, mired in a sort of poverty that is quite literally unimaginable for most Americans. ... And finally, Niger is located in a very tough global neighborhood. Four of the seven states on its borders – Algeria, Libya, Chad, and Nigeria – are poster countries for various sorts of terrorism. ...

"Doesn't all this make Niger a hotbed for international terrorism and a very dangerous place for Americans ...? No, it does not.

"Since September 11, some 500 Americans – Peace Corps Volunteers, embassy staff ... have continued to live and work throughout the country without serious incident or threat. Many Nigeriens ... have expressed their condolences and have spoken out against terrorism and Islamic extremism. I believe that Peace Corps Volunteers ... are as safe from terrorism as they would be in the United States.... Why is this so?

"First, the government and the vast majority of the people ... see [the terrorists] as perverting Islam. ... Another reason for Niger's relative tranquility ..., I'm convinced, is that 39 years of continuous Peace Corps presence here has built a reserve of good will ... that makes Nigeriens less susceptible ... to the anti-American message of the extremists. ... I'm constantly meeting senior-level Nigeriens who say, "Oh, Peace Corps! Do you know X? (who turns out to be a Volunteer from many years ago who lived in their village ...)."

[Just recently His Excellency, President Issoufou Mahamadou, inquired about his Peace Corps 4eme English teacher from 1967, and Friends of Niger was able to put them in touch with each other.]

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## FON Supports Bien-être des Femmes Rurales Soap Project

by Gabriella Maertens, Vice-President of FON, Projects Coordinator

This project took place in the refugee camp in Ayorou. At the time of the project's implementation, in April 2015, there were over 8,000 persons living in the camp. Of the 2,000+ households, 72% were headed by women. Most of these Malian refugees were Tamasheq, Sonrai, Peul, Bambara and Hausa. The BFR project aimed at training several women in the production and selling of liquid soap. With the help of Friends of Niger this training, which lasted about six months, brought smiles to the faces of these women who came into the camps with sad hearts and a tense demeanor. The women who lived in the camp did not receive assistance from international organizations and were struggling to support their families.

Thirty women benefited from the liquid soap project. The training has finished but the fabrication and selling of the liquid soap continues at the Ayorou Market. The women are fast becoming self-sufficient because they can take care of their needs without depending on others. This activity fits perfectly with the empowerment of rural women. Madame Alhassane Nafissatou, coordinator of the project, wishes to thank FON for its continued support of these types of projects that benefit rural women through the activities of BFR (Well-Being of the Rural Woman). The first BFR project supported by FON was a peanut oil extraction project, which continues to help empower women. Another current BFR project is a women's sewing project, which has been approved by FON for funding and began in September.

In the photos below: US Ambassador to Niger, Eunice S. Reddick (left) visits the BFR soap project.

Alhassane Nafissatou, BFR coordinator is in the photo on the right.





## RAIN AGADEZ LEARNING CENTER

### STUDENTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND GRATITUDE

Rain for the Sahel & Sahara, along with the 25 students at the Agadez Learning Center, thank FON for funding student scholarships this year. The Center provides superior nomadic and rural primary school graduates who have no viable options to continue their educations with scholarships to attend middle school in Agadez. As new students Mahmoud and Ghoumar said: *When we first came to the city we saw so many cars. It was so busy, with so many roads. It's confusing. Everyone speaks Hausa and we don't even know how to greet.* Mariama added: *"The city is very tight. All the houses were so close together with so many people. There is no fresh air in the city."*

While rural students may attend middle schools in rural centers, they report that each village school is allocated one room in which all its students live, no food is provided, no books and no supplies. More critically, students have no support staff to help them with their studies or to adjustment to new situations and more difficult studies.

The RAIN Center provides the following:

- After-school classes – Math, French, English and Physics/Chemistry;
- Peer to peer tutoring - Students gather informally in the evenings to review and help each other with difficult subject matter, often with a selected leader that serves as a peer-teacher;
- Hygiene training- A variety of topics are covered: personal hygiene, living space and personal belongings, bathroom area etiquette, hand-washing, and diseases related to bad hygiene;
- Civic Responsibility: Roles include: dorm room leader, after-school class representative, dorm cleanliness organizer, and others as assigned;
- Evening film screenings: Cultural and environmental documentaries weekly; and
- Recreational and skills activities.



Meet Aissa. Hello, my name is Aissa Maidaji Ibrahim in 10th grade. I come from the village of Tagdount in the bush. When I was in elementary school I lived at home. I would wake up very early to be in class by 8 o'clock. My mother takes plastic jugs to get water at the well to bring back home so that we she can cook. My father takes the animals out into the bush leaving at 6am. Sometimes he does not come home until 11pm. When I am not in school I help my mother with the housework. The RAIN center really helps students to study because all of the things we need for school are actually here. We can study well. There are also all things that we need to live well to help a student with her studies. I love this center that RAIN made for students. We thank ONG Rain for the Sahel and Sahara, the Friends of Niger and all the people in the U.S. who support us. When I finish studying I want to be a nurse because I want to know something about how to bring good things to the life in our village. I would like to help my village. I am happy to be able to study to learn about things that I never knew about. There are so many things to learn.



Meet Ghaissata. Hi, my name is Ghaissata Alhassane from Hamzane, 35 km from Agadez. My mother herds goats but there is no food for the animals so she must leave every morning to walk the animals very far to find something for them to eat. There also is not enough water in Hamzane. Sometimes we have to go look for water in nearby villages like in Goofat. It is very difficult for my mother. My father is a gardener but there isn't enough water. Sometimes he has to go to a nearby village so that he can plant corn and tomatoes so that he can find money to buy food. Really it is difficult for him....I like the center because teachers come to help us after school. We have notebooks, pens, soap, beds, mosquito nets, and uniforms. We learn a lot by living and studying together at the center and I am very proud because I have learned many things with the help of this center. I want to continue my studies until I can become a doctor so that I can help my village, and especially my family, since they have helped me so much.

## American Women's Club (AWB) of Niger Activities Report for 2014-2015

Information Provided by Sue Rosenfeld, Chair of the Charity Committee of the AWC of Niamey

Friends of Niger collaborates with the American Women's Club (AWC) of Niger to identify potential projects to be funded and local Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to partner with. The current AWC members want to reconnect with past members and friends to update them on the organization's current activities. AWC was founded in the late 1980s with a dual purpose: AWC is a social group, allowing women (not just Americans) to get together at least once a month. The working language of the group is English but all women are welcome regardless of what language they speak. The second purpose of AWC is to help Niger. AWC accomplishes their second goal by holding fund-raising events and then funding local projects. Normally the AWC sponsors two fund-raisers each year: A Christmas Bazaar and a Silent Auction and dinner. This year, thanks to the efforts of AWC's Pakistani and Indian members, a third fund-raiser was held, an Indian dinner. Through these events AWC collected a total of about 3 million CFA for the AWC Charity Committee. The committee received 16 proposals for funding, which was fewer than usual. The total request for funding was 8,693,450 CFA. FON funded one of the proposals for an animal husbandry project near Tchintabaraden (reported in this issue). Seven projects were funded, two of which were in Niamey:

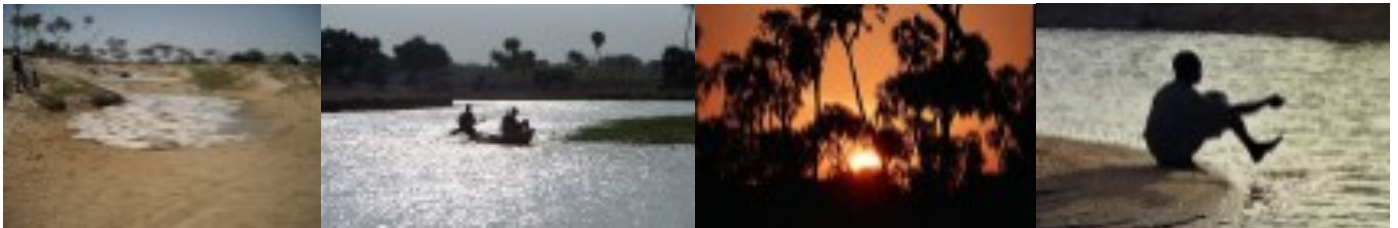
- ◇ 428,000 CFA to the NGO Bonbatou for a soil enrichment project in Tagar (Tillabery); beneficiaries: 6 rural organizations and more than 100 farmers.
- ◇ 390,000 CFA to the Gouré English teaching inspectorate for a workshop for rural CEG English teachers (Tesker, Bouné, Kele, Soubdou); beneficiaries: 21 English teachers and more than 4,000 students.
- ◇ 750,000 CFA to Académie Evangelique Cornerstone of Maradi for toilet construction (4 toilets) at the primary school. Beneficiaries: 90 students & 6 teachers and teacher aides.
- ◇ 520,000 CFA to the NGO OURZP (organisation d'urgent pour la zone poastorale) for a well rehabilitation project in Arahmat (south of Tchintabaraden) Beneficiaries: 850 inhabitants and their livestock.
- ◇ 670,000 CFA to JVE (Jeunes Volontaires pour l'Environnement) for creation of two school gardens in the CEG I and CEG Tallagé (they have put gardens in other schools in Niamey); Beneficiaries: approx. 1000 students and teachers.
- ◇ 76,300 CFA to SIM for their project 'Sowing the Seeds of Change' for birth attendant start-up supplies in 2 villages in Maradi region (Saye na Allah & Kudumus. Beneficiaries: approximately 1,500 people.
- ◇ 476,850 CFA to the Centre des Jeunes de Kalley-Sud (Niamey) for training for 15 girls (no longer in school) in soap making (all kinds of soap; liquid; perfumed, laundry soap, Omo, etc.) Beneficiaries: 15 young women initially.

Total amount obligated this year: 3,311,950 CFA. This is the most the AWC of Niger has ever funded since records have been kept (1992!) Since 1992, AWC has funded more than 50,000,000 CFA worth of projects in Niger. Below is a group photo from the Centre des Jeunes de Kalley-Sud Soap Making Project



## DIFFA by Steve Anderson

Diffa, Niger. When referring to the Komadougou Yobé, most locals simply call it “the River.” There is only one. It returns once a year and then ebbs progressively. This cycle is one of the constants in the lives of Diffa’s population. The River’s rebirth is—by turns—weak or strong, early or late, long enduring or fleeting, but it will happen.



The River has returned more than 100 times since this countryside knew horror and violence akin to that now returned to its doorstep. In the closing decades of the 19th Century it was here that the Sudanese slave-trader and brigand, Rabih Fadl Allah (commonly called “Rabah”), and his bands looted, enslaved, and slaughtered men, women, and children. Their swath of destruction mowed through this same corner of the Lake Chad Basin that has once again fallen under the shadow of an implacable predator.

The oldest people I knew were born just after the termination of Rabah’s bloody reign. These children and grandchildren of survivors refused to utter his name. Those who would speak to me at all of what had come to pass did so in hushed, fearful tones. At a spot close to where I lived, it was recounted that the River had been so choked with bodies that they made a “bridge.” There is a village in a dale named “Man’s Head” for the number of skulls left strewn about the valley floor. And well into the 20th Century, clay jars full of silver Marie Thérèse Thalers continued to be unearthed in isolated spots...the cached fortunes of the unfortunates who’d not been able to return for them. The voices rising skyward, in lament, were legion during those years of scourge.

Rabah was felled in 1900. Three French columns converged on him, one from Brazzaville, another crossing the Sahara from Algiers, the third snaking east from Dakar. If his execution marked the beginning of la paix coloniale, Rabah’s brutal legacy outlived him, scarring the collective memory, reaching into the minds of successive generations, transforming perception of past evils to presentiment concerning the future.

The River came and went for more than a century without ever truly washing clean the wounds inflicted by Rabah. And so when we began to hear about another marauder the ancestral dread arose anew. It started vaguely, like the distant nocturnal flare of lightening and soft bumping of thunder that long precede the crashing cacophony of wind, dust, and torrential rain that will come. But no one doubted the inevitability of the maelstrom’s arrival. People spoke in hushed tones of something malignant evolving in northeastern Nigeria, just across the River, just beyond the horizon. The adults would not speak its name—Boko Haram. Indirect allusions were made, eyes fixed on the ground. No one wished to see his or her own apprehension confirmed in another’s regard. *(continued on page 7)*



This was ten years into the 21st Century. The wider world was preoccupied with the fighting in northern Mali, yet another coup d'état in Niamey, and the implosion of Libya. To my friends and neighbors these events seemed impossibly remote. They were transfixed by the slow but regular expansion and approach of Boko Haram's sphere of carnage, and the equally devastating, indiscriminately murderous ripostes of Nigeria's troops.



In reality, the battle had already arrived, stealthily. It was being waged in the hearts and minds of young men. Estranged and increasingly alienated, much of this new generation was veering radically away from its parents' ethos and customs. The rupture was largely involuntary, fueled by dangerously incompatible trends besetting both rural and urban contexts, namely a burgeoning youth population<sup>1</sup> versus incommensurately slow growth, stagnation, or regression of the natural resource base<sup>2</sup>, educational opportunities, and licit employment options. Simultaneously, the IT revolution has fueled a veritable of globalization of dreams. The now ubiquitous cellphone and widespread Internet access provide an unprecedented window on the world. They tantalize with visions of a life that poor people will never attain, emphasizing the sense of relative deprivation already felt with acuity by ambitious by side-lined young men.

The narrow strictures of fundamentalist ideology are at odds with what most young men wish to do with their lives, but what happens when you are without viable career prospects, when your life is in disarray because the traditional values inculcated by your parents have revealed their bankruptcy? What happens when extremist dogma propagated online or in the streets is neatly packaged as an easy-to-follow recipe with which to organize and give sense to your errant existence? What happens when this new ideology is cloaked in sanctity, as a right-thinking movement meant to sweep away a corrupt world order, the entrenched elite whose cushioned indifference to your plight you feel bitterly every single day? Why not strike a blow against it, in a violent and purifying flameout? Compared to that, what are your vain, flimsy hopes for temporal wellbeing? Especially now that things are going to pot here...with Boko Haram attacking on Nigérien soil (which everyone said would never happen), the imposition of martial law, the denunciations, the arrests, the stop-and-frisk searches, the jailings, and the ever-present, pervasive fear and suspicion that transform anyone into a potential enemy.

It's over tea, on the street corner, that the young men are mulling over what they've heard. It sounds vaguely glorious. And, at least, it qualifies as "doing something," a signal merit when compared with facing another empty day, one more day you know your family can't help you get ahead and you're ashamed to depend on them but you do because you don't know what else to do. One of your group will get up from the bench on which you've passed these indolent, unfulfilled days together. It might be you or it might be another. Others will follow, because it's important to stick together with your friend. And because now you have a plan, a direction in life, not just listless drifting. Apprehensive and hopeful at once, you'll all head south into Nigeria, passing first through the palm forest, just across the River.

<sup>1</sup> An estimated 50% of Niger's 17 million population is less than 15 years of age. Similar demographic estimates are given for other Sahelian states.

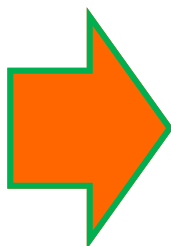
<sup>2</sup> Natural resources in the Sahel are under unprecedented pressure from combined effects of climate change (manifested by increased frequency and severity of rainfall deficits) and over-exploitation (more users employing more rapacious, unsustainable techniques). Diffa's situation in particular has been further exacerbated by the inflow of more than 100,000 refugees; the region's total pre-crisis population was estimated at just under 400,000.

## SOCCER BALLS FOR NIGER

By: Larry Koff, FON Board Member

Friends Of Niger has facilitated the introduction of the “One World Futbol” soccer program started by former professional soccer player and former Niger PCV Mike Mitchell into the Maradi region with the delivery of soccer balls to the village of Mayahi and the city of Maradi. With the support of FON Board members, and Mike himself a former professional soccer player for the Niger National team, contact has been made with school teachers in both locales who will manage a soccer program.

*FON is hoping that with additional fund raising and organizational capacity, we can promote a campaign to facilitate the delivery of soccer balls to additional programs in the Zinder and Dosso regions and retain the services of a full-time program manager for Niger.*



## IN MEMORIAM

Richard Lee “Rich” Lehtinen, 71, (RPCV Niger 1967-69) died March 30, 2015 in Florida. Before joining the Peace Corps, he worked for farmworkers rights in Delano, California. In Niger he worked with UNCC. Rich had two careers in regional planning, first in Sonoma County, California, then in International Falls, Minnesota. He retired to Florida. He leaves a wife (Liane) and three children (Zack, Raina, Eric) and grandchildren. He is greatly missed by everyone who ever knew him.

Luigi “Louie” Velo, 68, (RPCV Niger 1967-69) passed away peacefully on March 6, 2015. Born in Paderino del Grappa, Italy, Luigi moved to Sacramento with his family when he was 12. After graduating from Sacramento High School in 1965, Luigi joined the Peace Corps serving 2 years in Niger. After returning to America, Luigi worked several years as a steward for TWA, traveling the world and fulfilling his love of travel. In 1989, Luigi moved back to Sacramento to take over the family business - Italian Importing Company in Mid-Town Sacramento, Italian Importing Co. Luigi is survived by Lorie, his loving wife and companion of 25 years, son Christopher (Bethann), grandson Allan, stepson Justin, brother Mario (Alba), sister Donna, nephews, nieces and cousins.

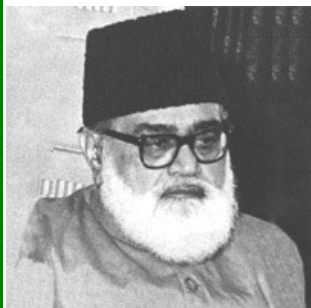
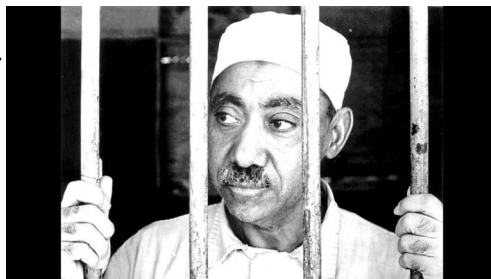


## *Reflections on Religious Extremism* by Daniel Chirot

Because Niger is one of a growing number of countries faced by the spread of radical Salafist Islam, as are the United States, Western Europe, and a great many Muslim societies, it might be worth keeping three aspects of this spreading trend in mind. The “Salaf” were the supposedly pure first three generations of Muslims whose devotion to uncorrupted Islam allowed them to conquer so much of the world. They have a highly mythologized image that hardly corresponds to the historical reality of almost constant civil war within their ranks, but there is no denying that they were astoundingly successful.

First of all, this radical and very violent kind of extremism has some support in almost all Muslim societies and among Muslims living in the West. Yes, it is definitely a minority, but it is a significant one. For every active young man (or now increasingly women) willing to fight, kill, and die for this cause, there are many more who more or less sympathize and agree that it is worth attacking and even killing unbelievers and the corrupt within Muslim communities. And for them it is also necessary to repudiate the Christian West, and all of its supposedly liberal but actually degenerate, anti-Islamic ideas (as they see it). It resonates also with very widespread anti-Jewish sentiment. The notion that this is just a bunch of wayward criminals who have “hijacked” Islam is a comforting fantasy.

There is a very old tradition of similar brutal, sectarian puritanism within Islam. Shortly after the Prophet’s death there were the Kharijis, and even though they were ultimately defeated, periodically, especially in times of stress, many other sects and leaders emerged proposing to cleanse the vile, perverted accretions to their religion. The very influential Arab theologian Ibn Taymiyyah in the 13<sup>th</sup> century who railed against impious “false” Muslims served as an inspiration for Ibn Wahhab, the founder of the Saudi brand of Islam in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and more recently for Sayyid Qutb, perhaps the single most influential Salafist intellectual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Qutb was executed by Egypt’s dictator Nasser in 1966. (You can see him being led to his execution on YouTube.)



In Pakistan Abu Ala Maududi was a similarly influential preacher of violence against impurity and heresy. Ideas matter, and behind the mayhem there is a whole intellectual tradition that filters down to a popular level through the preaching and writing of learned extremists. The young men who kill may not be well read intellectuals, but their leaders have been inspired by these ideas. Such puritanism always was and remains a minority position, but then all revolutionary movements begin as fervent minorities, sometimes quite small ones, that grow in times of crisis if they have effective leaders.

Secondly, there is nothing uniquely Islamic about this. Christianity has had more than its share of religiously inspired murderers out to “cleanse” their religion, including the Crusaders who staged the first large scale European massacre of Jews in Germany in the late 11<sup>th</sup> century. In 1572 French Catholics massacred Protestants, and in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century the Puritan Protestant armies of Oliver Cromwell massacred Irish Catholics. One need only look at the Bible to find numerous examples of calls to genocide and ritual cleansing to satisfy God’s will, and indeed, Cromwell’s men saw in the Book of Joshua, where all of the Canaanites are condemned to death, an example to follow in Ireland. More recently American evangelical Christians preachers were in Uganda furthering an anti-gay agenda that led its government to pass laws condemning gays to death, not quite genocidal, perhaps, but quite extreme nonetheless. (continued)

## *Reflections on Religious Extremism* (continued from page 9)

There are Hindu and Buddhist versions of similar murderous fanaticism active in parts of Asia today.

Third, most of the Muslim world has been under extreme stress for a long time. Colonialism by Christian Europeans was followed by the largely inept, brutal, and corrupt rule of dictators who claimed to be promoting reform, but who were unable to remediate the effects of rapid population increase, grow their economies fast enough, curb corruption, or meet the challenge of emancipating women. In the 1960s the ideological contest in Islamic societies seemed to be between various brands of mostly secular Third World socialism (Ba'athism, Nasserism, Communism) and more conservative modernizers such as the Shah of Iran or the Pakistani military. All failed, leaving open the way to a very widespread religious revival whose most extreme form is Salafism.

I recently saw the wonderful, beautiful movie *Timbuktu*. If you have not seen it, do. It is about the recent events in Mali, but alas, perhaps about the Sahel's future too.

## CHILDREN'S CHEWABLE VITAMINS Update

by Gabriella Maertens, FON V-P and Projects Coordinator



In July 2013, FON purchased 132 bottles of chewable vitamins, 100 tablets each to be delivered in a container with other supplies for the SIM Hospital in Galmi, Niger. FON received news that the shipment finally arrived in Niger and cleared customs.

The vitamins were to be equally distributed among the Galmi Hospital, the Niamey Orphanage, the Makalondi clinic, and the Pediatric Ward of the National Hospital. The expiration date on the vitamins is April 2016, so there is still time for kids to benefit from them.

In the meantime, FON Board member, John Hutchison, was able to take 20 bottles with him when he traveled to Niger earlier this year. Since these vitamins were distributed to the Pediatric

Ward of the National Hospital with the help of Sue Rosenfeld, special friend of Friends of Niger (see photo above), the remaining bottles will now be distributed among the remaining three recipients. FON hopes to continue the Children's Chewable Vitamins Project. There are remaining donated funds still available for children's vitamins. So if FON members continue to contribute to this fund, FON will find a way to deliver the vitamins to Niger. Thank-you again for your support.

*Dear Friends of Niger, The rains began late this year and many here in the Tahoua region were worried that no planting rains came during the entire month of Ramadan. But since the latter part of July, the rains have been generous and frequent. The millet and sorghum are looking tall and healthy and we are anticipating a good harvest. As is typical, with the blessing of rain come increases in the incidences of malaria, typhoid, and dysentery. Since the harvest has yet to happen, our census is also high in our CREN / Malnutrition Rehabilitation Center. Thank you for your gift of Children's Chewable Vitamins which are being used to address the nutritional needs of these and other pediatric patients.*

*Thank you for your partnership with us! Gratefully serving with you,  
Christopher D. Zoolkoski, MD Galmi Hospital / RPCV Tahoua 88-90'*

# 2015 Friends of Niger Membership Form

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Location in Niger \_\_\_\_\_ Program or Involvement \_\_\_\_\_

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☐ Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ \$55 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ In addition to my membership, I have enclosed a General Contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ or

☐ Instead of joining FON at this time, I enclose a General Contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

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Friends of Niger

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Address Correction Requested

**There is no way to peace.  
Peace is the way.**

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can be accessed at

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