

The Camel Express

Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

September 2001

Peace, Hope, Reconciliation, Renewal

Dear Friends of Niger -

Those of you who have visited this site over the past two days will have seen this space occupied by a simple but powerful photo depicting the [New York City skyline](#) before the terrible events of Tuesday, September 11. Prominent in the foreground is the American flag. The photo was our quiet way of remembering things as they were and of mourning all that has been lost - in New York City, in Washington, in Pennsylvania, and around the world.

Friends of Niger is an organization dedicated to the notion that individually and collectively we can be a force for the advancement of the dreams, aspirations and potential of the people of Niger - people with whom we have lived and worked for the best part of a forty years; people with whom we've grown up; people who have given us easily as much as they've received; and, people to whom we've nevertheless dared to suggest that we have something to offer.



"Placing of Friends of Niger wreath at grave of John F. Kennedy, Arlington National Cemetery, August 5, closing ceremony of Celebration of Niger 2001 - Jim Schneider on the left, Sue Rosenfeld on the right."

Barely six weeks ago, on the morning of August 5, it was my great honor to preside over the closing ceremony of Celebration of Niger 2001- which celebrated 41 years of Nigerien independence and at the same time recognized the 15th anniversary of Friends of Niger and the 40th birthday of the Peace Corps. As Sue Rosenfeld and I placed a wreath on the grave of John F. Kennedy and found ourselves standing midway between the eternal flame and the grave itself, and as with a few words I brought our weekend to a close, I found myself mindful of the historic significance of those forty years of service and of the wonderful potential of our continuing commitment.

Those forty years have also been witness to great suffering and to great human tragedy as neighbor has fought neighbor on countless battlefields in every corner of the globe. World peace has continued to be illusive; justice fleeting; human dignity often less the unshakable standard of human behavior than the fragile residue of the human spirit.

In the days and months ahead, our longstanding dedication to peace, to justice and to human dignity will be profoundly tested. The challenge will come from within each of us, as it always does. It is my hope that we will help each other meet this challenge and that we will take this opportunity to rededicate ourselves to the quest for universal peace - here at home, in Niger, and around the world.

Jim Schneider

FON Commits to Microcredit Project & Teams with MICA to Provide Oxen & Carts



Friends of Niger has formed a partnership with MICA, Inc. (Microcredit Africa) to provide oxcarts to women in villages in central Niger as part of a project whose aim is to “empower women to reclaim their basic rights for education, health care and respect as human beings.”

MICA is a non-profit organization, founded by Haoua Diatta, which seeks to alleviate poverty in Africa by empowering women. Mrs. Diatta is the author of [Shadow of Africa](#) and is the spouse of Nigerian Ambassador Joseph Diatta.

The flagship activity of MICA is the Oxcart Project which begins with the formation of an association of village women, who then choose their officers (including 2 Financial Managers) from amongst themselves and undergo training as a group. This process is followed by the provision of an ox and a cart to the group. The women rent the carts to villagers who need transportation for a variety of purposes - as an ambulance, for farmers taking produce to market, for craftspeople transporting goods, etc. Rental revenues allow the women to eventually purchase the cart while continuing to generate revenue. These recovered funds, in turn, allow MICA to purchase additional carts for other women in other villages. The cost of an ox and a cart is \$280.

The Oxcart Project is operating in the Maradi region with active projects in Dan Keri and Aguié and with another four villages at various stages of project development.

Friends of Niger has agreed to fund oxen/cart sets for two villages as well as to package donations from its members and contacts in units of \$280 for the purchase of additional oxen and carts. Information about where and how to contribute can be found midway down the right hand column on this page.

More information regarding MICA, its various projects in Niger, and Haoua Diatta’s book (Shadow of Africa) can be found at the MICA web site - <http://justin.kirk.net/mica/>.

Member Donations Push Oxcart Sets to Six

Financial contributions over the past several months have allowed Friends of Niger to boost its support for the Oxcart Project from two to six sets of oxen and carts .

Contributions to the FON/MICA Oxcart Project should be made payable to **Friends of Niger** and sent to :

Oxcart; c/o FON; P.O. Box 33164; Washington, DC; 20033-0164