

ASSOCIATION



Niger Zinder, May 2016



The **Sultan** of the region of Zinder and the **Mayor of the City of Zinder** express their satisfaction and gratefulness for the services provided to the Zinder region and the children of the *Au Coeur du Niger* Association.



My last stay in Zinder was emotional and intense. If I had known that it would be 50 degrees Celsius when I arrived I would have made an effort to enjoy the beautiful snow falling in Gruyère at the beginning of May! The Sahel lives up to its reputation as Africa's oven. It took me awhile to acclimate to the 40-degree nights sleeping in a cement room, most of the time without electricity, which meant no fan! I often considered sleeping outside but, between the starving dogs barking in the distance and the gecko lizards and enormous spiders (*what* or *who* do they eat?!) crawling all over me while children cry, laugh, or scream the whole night long (everyone sleeps outside), I quickly gave up and surrendered myself to the hellish room.

Is it really possible to get used to that kind of heat? When everything sweats, when your body is working overtime just to cool you off, when your pores are overflowing with sweat that just won't stop. The only advantage is rarely having to use the rest room since everything you drink sweats right out! It is very important to drink a lot of water in order to avoid dizziness and malaise. Even the dear Aïchatou, who is always running around trying to help me, lost her energy and ability to stay standing after the school party! When my team is exhausted, it's a pretty good sign that I need to get myself back to Switzerland and let them get back to their own pace for awhile. Especially with the coming of Ramadan in June, and with all this heat!

At school, the children and I spend time counting the number of heat rashes that appear from clothes rubbing on skin. It doesn't really help but it does help pass the time for a moment. It is important to learn to find the positive side of every situation. If I hadn't learned to do that, I never could have lasted until now!

But what has encouraged me lately to continue my work were the two wonderful expressions of gratitude on behalf of the local Zinder authorities. I was so moved during the Association's official food distribution to hear the Sultan and Mayor of Zinder express their satisfaction with my work. I come in contact with them on each visit to Zinder, when I ask for their collaboration, assistance, and counsel on how to conduct my activities and projects in favour of the city's orphan children. This allows me to work under the best possible conditions and in full transparency with local staff. I rely heavily on their counsel in terms of culture and local custom, which adds a level of credibility to my work with the children, albinos, and child-mothers, especially with their entourage, who are most often resistant to any kind of change. Zinder's Sultan is the moral (religious) authority, and has lent me his full support!

The Minister of Primary Education paid a visit to Zinder recently. I had the opportunity to welcome him on a broiling hot street at the entrance to town. I invited him to visit the Centre the next day and prayed all night that the next day at 10 am someone would tell me that the Minister had arrived at the Centre for a brief visit. (When it's too hot to sleep, that's when miracles happen...) After visiting one of the buildings that houses three schoolrooms, a dormitory, the dining room, and the IT room, and realizing that I had so many things to say about my activities and aspirations for Niger, he invited me to visit his office at the governorate later in the day. As precise as a Swiss watch, I was ten minutes early! I thanked him profusely for his time and requested that he grant a few extra State teachers (the State had already sent two), as well as some school supplies for the children. It is very difficult to hire quality educational staff in the poorest country in the world in terms of development and education. Less than 30 percent of the children are educated. But you can count on me to change that; I'm in up to my ears! Fortunately,

I can rely on the support and presence of the directors of the Centre and the school, and on the management in Zinder.

“There are no accidents, only encounters.”

I couldn't agree more! And I experienced this in the plane from Niamey to Paris this May. Thanks to a very generous and extraordinary “accident”, I was upgraded (awesome that they overbooked the flight) and found myself surrounded by Nigerian politicians and businessmen! It didn't take me long to start talking about my communication plan. As I was exiting the plane, I passed around my business cards and received a few in return, one of which belonged to a member of the presidential coordination office who returned to Zinder the following weekend to visit the Centre and grant me the authorization to work in Niger for five more years, a document I had been waiting for six months as it sat on the desk of the Department of the Interior! The ways of God are fathomless!

During this stay, the *Après-demain* Centre welcomed a visit from an Arab NGO and its Emirate donors. They were impressed by the premises, structure, and organization, as well as the strong sense of hope that pervades the Association. I have been hoping for years that another entity would emulate the concept. I have been hoping that tens, hundreds, even thousands of *Après-demain* Centres would be developed in Africa and throughout the world! I have been hoping for an end to injustice, a solution for the children wandering without hope or future. I have been hoping for a better, more humane, world.

I believe that education and training contribute to the improvement of human resources, which is vital to development. They allow us to eliminate sociocultural shackles, prepare youth for modifications in conduct, and encourage them toward development.

THANK YOU for participating and for building with us!

End of the year celebration at the Association Centre



Prize distribution for the four best students from six classes at the Centre, the College and the sewing class – May 2016

The children prepared the celebration to mark the end of the school year for weeks! Joy was written all over their faces, and they were so proud to be able to purchase colourful material thanks to the pocket money they earned at the Centre, sweeping and helping in the kitchen. Everyone was wearing an orange uniform, including me with little embroidered hearts!

The table was full of colourful prizes, thanks to the generous donations from Switzerland. It was well worth the effort to carry two suitcases weighing 26 and 28 kilos!

The four top students from six classes were given an encouragement prize for their sterling results at the end of this school year, and because of the abundance of prizes I was able to hand out special awards. Soon all the scholastic results, drawings, French letters, and photos will be arriving in the mailboxes of the sponsors. The top five sewing students and child-mothers could choose from hair care products, necklaces, bracelets, or backpacks.

Ismaël, Mahamadou, Farida, Ibrahim, Kadija, Karima, Zouberou, Almoustapha, Ayouba, Oumarou, Aïcha, Abdoukarim, Ouma, Fatima Zara, Mariama, Aïchatou, Ousseïna, Ramatou, Zeïnabou, Gaïcha, Halima, Najaatou, Biba, Chapaatou, Chamsya, Aïchatou, Mariama, Bassira, Saade, Jamila, Saïda, and Fanta were all recipients of the lovely prizes.

Best **smile** went to the irresistible and mischievous Aïchatou Moussa!

Most **helpful and dedicated to cleaning tasks** went to the indefatigable Hadiza Yahaya!

Most **present in class** went to Aïchatou Ibrahim, our young Albino student!

Best **sense of solidarity and camaraderie** went to our tall and devoted Ouma Saïdou!

The **Kindergarten** prize went to the tiny, cuddly, Farida Maman Noura!

Most **perseverant in self-improvement** went to Hadiza Moutari!

Most **devoted to physical hygiene** went to Fassouma Ousman!

Most **dedicated and disciplined female** went to Nafissa Harouna!

Most **dedicated and disciplined male** went to Ismaël!

The children sang and danced while they awaited the arrival of the Governor of Zinder, the Sultan, the Mayor of the City of Zinder, the President of the Regional Counsel, law enforcement representatives, the Secretary Generals, Regional Directors, and the media! No one can be forgotten, especially when it comes to speaking. Thanks to the ceremonial who arrived early that morning, everything in an orderly and customary fashion.

Following a speech by each attendee, the Sultan and Mayor of Zinder addressed two expressions of satisfaction and gratitude to me by for nearly seven years of presence and work in Zinder with the Association Au Coeur du Niger! (10 years since my first stay in 2006, with an international NGO). Their words are a source of encouragement and strength for everything that remains to be done!

Day to day in Zinder

For the past 10 years that I've been working in Niger it has become clear to me that one cannot expect to live at a European pace of life in such scorching temperatures! Everything is done slowly, carefully, with simplicity in order to retain as much energy as possible.

Ever the geckos give up sprinting up the side of the house. The heat is just that thick and suffocating. My cats, however, welcome the opportunity to catch them! Migrating birds are thin and emaciated in May, water is rare, and they pick at grains of sand, their beautiful red or blue grey feathers giving them a majestic air despite their tiny size. It's tempting to pick them up and protect them so they grow faster. Later in the morning, around 9 am, when it's already 30 degrees outside, they will start singing again, this time in quite a different cadence.

What better time or place than this to return to the essential, to take time for oneself, to experience a measure of simplicity and authenticity?

Then... the dreaded termites. They'd been approaching my house. The day after my arrival I was taking a look around when I noticed three trees completely commandeered by the little beasts! Up and down the trunks by the thousands, the millions (or is it only an impression), they climb centimetre after centimetre, destroying every bite of bark that the valiant trees will never see again. Painfully considering what would happen over the next few weeks, I make a mental note: instead of attacking my cabinets, my clothes and books yet again, they have assaulted elements that can do nothing to defend themselves! If I dislodge them they will get their revenge in my house! To fight against termites that most often attack at night (see my account in a recent newsletter), without electricity (light), is to fight a losing battle. Does anyone have a natural miracle product some 1,000 km from the capital? Anyone?

I actually did find the solution – as every year – in a spray can used for cleaning and hygiene at the Mayor's office, which they claim is completely non-toxic for man and nature. I was instructed to keep a distance and wait a few hours, however...



Children smile during the school celebration! May 2016

Upcoming events

Saturday, May 28, 2016

Benefit concert in Glanerland (Glaris)

Organised by the Club Soroptimist International
Glanerland
8 pm Gemeindehaus Ennenda

Saturday, October 8, 2016

Charity Dinner

7 pm Salle de l'Ancien Stand 10, 1807 Blonay
**'For children at home and elsewhere' – International
cuisine buffet** in favor of the *Au Coeur du Niger*
Association and the 'Sport-Up' Foundation in Vaud. The

event comes under the patronage of **Mr. Jean-Philippe Rapp**, journalist and sponsor of the *Au Coeur du Niger* Association and **Mr. Sergei Aschwenden**, Olympic medallist.

For **reservations**, contact Ms. Rita Vuichard, organizer, by September 20: Chemin du Marais 3, 1822 Chernex. Tel: 079/417.0453 rita.vuichard@bluewin.ch

I wish you all a beautiful summer wherever you are, and look forward to seeing you again!

Isabelle Macheret
Zinder Niger, May 2016



Five solar cookers delight the taste buds of 173 children and 27 local employees at the Association school! May 2016