

ASSOCIATION



Niger Zinder, March 2019

## Niger's Minister of the Interior visits the *Après-demain* Centre



Minister of the Interior of Niger, Mr Mohamed Bazoum, at the Centre

During this last stay in Zinder, I had the great privilege and honour to welcome the Minister of the Interior of Niger, Mr Mohamed Bazoum, to the Association Centre!

As nothing happens by chance, everything happened as it should have. I had repeated to myself, day after day, in Switzerland and in Niger: "Do and expect nothing", "Live and let live". As it turns out, everything is possible if we do not hinder what can happen.

The Minister of the Interior of Niger was very touched during his time with the 280 students and young girls who study and work at the Centre. His awareness of the situation grew as he interviewed the students in their classrooms; paid special attention to the quality of teachers hired by the Association; and was surprised at the high number of albino children taking classes, concerned about their state of health and care in the Centre's infirmary. The system of collecting rainwater from buildings, solar panels, water drilling, the goat pen, and vegetable garden brought many questions, and proved that anything is possible in this corner of the Sahel (80% in desert areas), with a strong will, solidarity, and determination!

The following week, on the initiative of the visit of the Minister of the Interior, the Governor of the Zinder region, His Highness the Sultan of Damagaram, the President of the Regional Council, the Head of the Armed Forces, the Regional Directorate of Primary Education, the School Inspectors and their delegations honoured us with an official visit, broadcasted on Niger's national television. A short report followed this visit on the national channel of Niger, which you can watch here: <https://youtu.be/mC8AVBT0kkg>

All of them have assured us of their full support and guidance, and strongly encourage this type of structure to be replicated for the benefit of the most disadvantaged children in Niger. In turn, I assured them of my full support and field experience to help them finance and build such Centres themselves, in order to replicate them throughout Niger!



## Daily Life in Zinder

The "harmattan" wind regularly blocks our breathing!

It is still a challenge to reach and leave Zinder, 1,000 km from the capital Niamey. The sand dust has not yet left Niger and causes a several-hour to several-day delay in small airports or around overheated tarmacs.

To reach Zinder, the journey by local plane sometimes takes us through Agadez, "the pearl of the desert, which has become a migration hub" in northern Niger. That morning, after having waited for hours before being able to take off from the capital, the plane was diverted to a new take-off in Agadez... One of the engines had to be dismantled on the tarmac by the ingenious and very efficient flight engineer.

My good Swiss chocolate made its full impact on the on-board staff after a brilliant repair, and I was offered a seat with the pilots for the last trip to Zinder! The view is, of course, only desert, dusty and arid but full of splendour, infinity, and immensity as far as the eye can see...



The new landing strip in Zinder – March 2019

The reception of children and young girls at the Centre is always a moment of happiness and deep joy that ends when they take their leave.

Their looks, smiles, and hugs, their hands that touch, is as music and melody that open Heaven.

We continue to receive generous donations, kind and useful gestures for the children at the Centre as well as for the adults! About ten boxes, well taped and stacked by our very efficient technical manager Jörg, made the Swiss-Niger trip at the beginning of the year. It was filled with medical glasses, Avène sun protection 50, products for albino children, and books to fill a new library, cycling jerseys, football jerseys, sports socks, clothes, wool, knitwear, tennis balls, and 5.3 kg of delicious Villars chocolate that the children and teachers loved to eat quickly after the photo session, under an intense 42° weather!

Hundreds of medical glasses, very gratefully received by Favre Optique in Fribourg, are a joy for all those who have been able to benefit from them in recent weeks in Zinder! After the local staff of the Centre, the guards from the other structures arrived, followed by the staff of other NGOs or local Associations, and people in the poor districts of Zinder who had heard that medical glasses were available for those who needed them. Finally, the Court of the Sultan of Damagaram came forward, all in traditional colours and trumpets!



Epidemic of chickenpox and meningitis....

For two weeks, dozens of children under the age of 10 from the Centre discovered small red pimples, similar than mosquito bites, on their faces and bodies, which form vesicles (small blisters) containing clear liquid that open, dry, and turn into scabs. The early

childhood disease was knocking at our gate! The Centre's highly professional and hardworking nurse asked the sick students to join their families so that they could be confined to quarantine while their bodies rested and healed.

At the same time, the Regional Director of Public Education informed us of a meningitis epidemic in the Zinder region. A regional vaccination campaign was under way for all school classes. Our Centre Director quickly contacted the authorities to make sure that our children aged 0 to 7 years would benefit from it.

Seasonal meningitis epidemics are common in sub-Saharan African countries during the dry season, from November to June.

A baby...

Sometimes there are surprises that we don't even know about! By custom, out of modesty or fear, girls and women do not talk about or show their pregnancy. The fabrics that clothe and cover women's bodies are often large and layered, leaving nothing to show of a possible weight gain or a fetus that would grow warm in her mother's womb.

During my stay in October 2018, I didn't see anything. I try to create bonds and trust with the employees and young girls while keeping and respecting local customs and traditions. Sometimes there are difficulties and we don't talk about it; we commit everything to prayer. There was once a concern within the couple of a trusted collaborator, but in time it seemed that the problem had been resolved, and after discussing it one last time, I left, reassuring her that we were listening to her, that we wanted to help her, and that her work at the Centre was very important for the children. We wanted to keep her, no matter what happened to her marriage. One month later, the Director of the Centre wrote to me that she was rushed to the maternity ward to have a caesarean section and give birth to a premature baby boy. No one at the Centre knew that she was pregnant for seven months. For fear of losing her job, which was very important to her, and no longer having her husband with her, she had hidden her pregnancy....

After the 40 days of rest to which all women who have given birth in Niger are entitled, during which the mother and baby are cared for, fed, massaged, and rested with their families, according to customary tradition, our dear collaborator returned to the Centre with her pretty little boy who had recovered well from his light weight! We looked around the Centre for a nanny who could take care of the baby during the day and bring him to the Centre in the evening, to spend the night with his mother.



Children in the Dining Hall – March 2019

They grow up...

Little children become big, little worries become more important...

It is now a question of managing the hormones of all those young people who are reaching the sensitive age of puberty and freedom!

Last January, a high school boy from the Centre decided to make some pocket money by offering girls from the Centre to meet friends across the Centre wall when everyone was asleep. Three girls were delighted to take part in this first night outing, which only lasted the time it took to pass through the rear gate of the Centre. One Friday, at the end of the day, the boy stole the key to the rear gate of the Centre, which had been hidden high up by the worker. When everyone was asleep in the two dormitories, around 9:30 pm, the four companions, only one of whom had become somewhat wealthier, took the path to the rear exit, lit by a splendid full moon night!

The excursion did not last long in the end, as it was quickly thwarted by the night guards, hired for the Centre's external surveillance. One of the guards was stationed at the back of the Centre and all he had to do was pick up our four fugitives when they closed the gate. Carefree and totally unaware, they quickly returned to the dormitory! The day following, we held awareness sessions for all students, and young girls in particular.

Two pediatric psychologists from the State of Niger regularly come to the Association's Centre to give awareness and information courses to students and local staff.

Awareness is also important for the families and entourage of our students and young girls. Too regularly, and especially during official holidays, several students do not return to the Centre at the beginning of the school year. Either the grandmother has decided to go

to her maternal village with her grandchildren, which is generally several tens or even hundreds of kilometres from Zinder, or an uncle or aunt from Nigeria or an isolated village comes to look for the child in Zinder and make him work during holidays, and "forget" then that he must return to school.

I have sent our Centre Director to Nigeria to try to recover little girls aged eight to 10, whose fathers, who supposedly went into exile years ago, have come back to take them permanently. What life, what future is there for these little girls?



Smiles at the Centre

In 2018, four students from the *Après-demain* Centre were among the 40 best students in the Zinder region. Aïchatou, Amina, Ibrahim, and Issoufou have been invited to the Regional Directorate of National Education to receive their prize!

Aïchatou and Ibrahim are young albinos and they are now studying in the new school complex, in the 5th year of secondary school.

I congratulated the Centre's Director, the Principal, the College Principal, and the teachers for this good start to the school year. However, I drew their attention to the fact that with the infrastructure, equipment, personnel, and comfort they all enjoy at the Association Centre, dozens of students should now have a high academic level, especially when compared to the teaching conditions of the public school, where they are often more than 80 students studying in a single school class, with conditions and teaching materials much lower than ours.

According to the Forbes ranking, based on IMF data, the richest continent in the world (Africa) has the poorest people in the world. Of the 25 poorest countries in the world, only three are not African.

## Events:

**Wednesday, April 10, 2019**      **9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Association**  
**20.00 Hôtel de Ville in Romont.**  
Everyone is welcome!

Testimony of **Jean-Philippe Rapp**, journalist and sponsor of the Association, who came shoot the 3rd documentary film in Zinder with his team in February 2018.  
20-minute broadcast of the film "Isabelle's Fulfilled Dream - A Future for Children in Niger".

**Wednesday May 1, 2019**                      **SALON DU LIVRE in Geneva 10.00 – 11.30**  
**Payot Booth**  
Workshop for school classes

**Friday, May 3, 2019**                      **SALON DU LIVRE in Geneva 10.00 – 14.00**  
**Payot Booth** - Signing and sales of the illustrated  
Colouring book *Words to Grow by*.

**Friday, July 26, 2019**                      **La P'tite Librairie, Château-d'Oex**  
Signing and sales of the illustrated  
Colouring book *Words to Grow by*.  
14.00 – 16.00  
During the Children's Festival Week

**Tuesday, December 3, 2019**                      **Charity event in support of the Association's**  
**10 year anniversary**  
**20.00 CO2 La Tour-de-Trême**

**With the comedians YANN LAMBIEL & MARC DONNET-MONAY**  
**Jean-Philippe Rapp and Ian Jaquier's third documentary.**  
***Isabelle's Dream Come True – A future for Niger's children.***

## **2009 – 2019**

This year, 2019, the au Coeur du Niger Association is celebrating its 10th anniversary of activities in Niger for the poorest children in Zinder!

THANK YOU for your precious and generous participation, contribution, friendship, encouragement, fidelity, kindness, which touch me deeply and allow me to bring, with my wonderful and dynamic committee in Switzerland, a concrete and direct help on the field!

With my warmest and most grateful thoughts, and with smiles full of joy sent to you by the children at the *Après-demain* school!



Beautiful and sweet arrival in spring and the joy of seeing you again!



NAGODE !

Isabelle Macheret  
Founder of l'Association  
Au Cœur du Niger

Zinder Niger, March 2019

[www.aucoeurduniger.ch](http://www.aucoeurduniger.ch)