

ASSOCIATION



Niger, October 2017

21 new orphan children welcomed to the *Après-demain* Centre!



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It's always a profoundly happy moment when I arrive at the *Après-demain* Centre in Zinder and see the main gate invaded by dozens of young children hanging on to their grandmothers or widowed moms!

Word of mouth works better than a bullhorn! As soon as they see "Nassara's" car, word gets around that the "White One" has returned to Zinder. All the grandmothers and mothers who have heard about Coeur du Niger come with birth certificates - for those who have them - and death certificates of husbands, often yellowed and wrinkled by both Niger's harsh climate and endless relocation.

At first intimidated and withdrawn, the new children quickly realize that the founder "Tanti Isabelle" and local staff want only the best for them; they realize that they will not be abused or neglected, as it is too often the case in their homes.

To reassure them during their first nights at the Centre, the little girls (4 to 6 years old) sleep with the nurse at the Centre or with Nanny Aïchatou. The children each choose a teddy bear from the dozens of soft toys donated by generous Swiss donors. These precious soft toys also help them to regain a sense of affection and emotion, coming as they do from precarious situations.

The new children quickly fill the classrooms, and depending on their scholastic level and age are able to follow the national curriculum of Niger!

Among the new orphan girls welcomed at the Centre, the little Halima (6).

Halima was 3 years old when she lost her left eye while playing with other children in the neighbourhood. Without money or knowledge, her widowed mother did not take her to the clinic. Binta, our kind nurse from the Centre, will take little Halima to Zinder Hospital for some initial exams to see what can be done for her. Her left eye has become blue and immobile, but she is adorable and cheerful like a bubbly little toddler! As with all the new children that come to the Centre, we gave her cotton underwear (they often do not have any), clean cotton clothes, a blanket to keep warm on a Swiss military mattress, a toothbrush and toothpaste, a teddy bear to cuddle, and hope for a better life with her new friends! But first things first: a good deworming and delousing from Nurse Binta!



Halima, 6, with the Centre nurse

Kadija, 5 years old

Kadija did not want to go to Zinder Public School anymore. The children laughed at her, so she cried and fled. When their car broke down a year ago, Kadija had to ride with her mother on a motorbike taxi that was to take them to visit family in the bush. Her foot caught on the motorbike's spokes as it sped down the road, they fell, and she lost four toes on her right foot.

She arrived at the Centre with her mom, weak and timid. She was shaking when I took her into my arms; it was new and strange for her. Children are never hugged by their parents; in fact, there are very few signs of tenderness and love. Kadija quickly adapted to the programme and activities with her classmates, after having spent time observing how things work at the Centre!

35 girls and 1 boy (albino)

Thirty-five girls and one boy (the young albino, Saadou) from the Association are enrolled in the public college of Zinder for 2017-2018!

Each year, a dozen girls (and one boy for now) from the Association pass from the CM2 level to access College! This is very encouraging for teachers and students. Balkissa, our young apprentice secretary at the Centre, began a year of schooling in order to complete the year she quit unexpectedly when she moved to Niamey for an arranged wedding, 3 years ago.

One major problem continues to affect the lives of teachers and public health workers in Niger: they do not receive regular salaries. The Niger State is still several months behind in the payment of salaries. In protest, state teachers do not go to their workstations and students must return home or protest in the streets. This lack of motivation and rigour can bring about serious consequences for young people who are approached by small groups skilled at coaxing and attracting them, convincing them to join their ranks by promising paradise and eternal life.

The official back-to-school date in Niger is October 2. For the time being, all middle school students are waiting for the government to take responsibility for a crucial change that will affect their future. For now, the moment is not ripe.

This is why I decided, jointly with the Director of the Centre, to build four new classrooms for middle and high school students, within the walls of the *Après-demain* Centre. We are aware that the situation will persist, but that we cannot tolerate it out of respect for the young people under our responsibility, and the future of this country. I am convinced that the right foundation for any underdeveloped country is education, schooling, and training.

An estimate will be made for the construction of four new classrooms in order to welcome - as soon as possible - our own middle and high school students. We will hire public teachers for the compulsory lessons, and they will be more than happy to earn a stipend!



Absent from the photo: Aissata, Binta, Najaatou, Sidika, all malaria patients lying in the Centre infirmary awaiting a blood transfusion.

School governance

The director and teaching staff have set up a school government. From among the students representing the six classes they named three "ministers": Oumarou, Minister of Education, whose role it is to report students who have not learned their lessons; Youssouf, Minister of Sanitation, watches over cleanliness and garbage collection in the schoolyard and classes; Ousmane, Minister of Energy and Water, observes and takes note of students who play with water or waste it, and forget to turn off the lights. Every two weeks, new ministers are elected to the cabinet so that everyone can practice bearing responsibility. At the end of the year, the student that has been the most committed, serious, honest, and authentic will be decorated!

Professional training authorization

The Ministry of Vocational Training of Niger has just granted the *Au Coeur du Niger* Association a license to lead and teach at the professional level. We can now train our own apprentices at the Centre, including our first secretary, Balkissa! The child-mothers and girls in the sewing room will be very happy to benefit from this authorization, take and pass exams, and obtain their diplomas. Some organizational changes have been made in the sewing class structure. A surprise test was conducted in order to evaluate each student's level and the quality of instruction given. Two vocational training counselors from Zinder came to conduct oral and practical tests. The results were alarming: all students received marks between 0 - 3, on a scale of 0 - 10! We were forced to let the teacher go, and hire instructors from the vocational school in Zinder. In a year or two, our girls should succeed in passing their sewing exam!

Zinder, my hell!

This last mission proved to me that there is no respite from the daily struggles of Zinder. I am always being tested, for better or worse! Upon my arrival in this small area of the Sahel, I noticed the very poor and deplorable state of the roads. This last rainy season (from July to September-October), left gaping holes. These are no longer "potholes" as they say here, but "elephant holes" as we say elsewhere! We are still waiting for the roads to be repaired as these giant crevasses are causing motorcycle and bicycle accidents.

Hundreds of semi trucks have been piling up downtown the last few weeks. The State of Niger has declared the customs points of Maradi and Gaya (a few hundred kilometers from Zinder) closed, indicating that all trucks must pass the customs point in Zinder. The city was already overrun by the many trucks - carrying oil and other goods - that cross the city daily with their dangerous and polluting cargo. They are now piling up day and night in the narrow streets of Zinder, opening the door to a new wave of prostitution and diseases.

1,000 km by car

A sporadic and ineffective connection and network forced me to return to Switzerland early so I could work in better conditions, and respond to the hundreds of emails that needed my attention. I have not been able to answer everyone in a timely fashion! At Orange Niger, however, we are proud to announce that 4G will soon be operational, while 2G does not work at all, or hardly ever.

My humanitarian flight having been booked for a week, I was eager to reach the capital of Niamey by air (it's just a few hours' flight). At 4:00 pm the day before take-off, I called the booking office to find out when I should arrive at the airport. "Oh, Isabelle," they answered, "but the flight is cancelled, the pilots are sick ..." Bother! Thanks for taking the time to inform me in advance so that I would have time to think up a plan B! Never rely on others, always take your own initiative and responsibility!

Plan B quickly crumbled. Niger's national carrier, which seats 39, was already full for the next day. Plan C was to call a local association that had assisted me twice in recent years in a similar situation! At 5:15 pm, the manager arrived at the Centre to discuss what to do. At 5.30 pm, we decided to leave the same evening to reach Niamey by car, 1,000 km from Zinder! The Centre Director, worried about me leaving with the driver in the middle of the night for 14 hours of what can only be described as chaotic, offered to accompany me to ensure a smooth transfer. He was still trying to find an alternative to the driver's tiny private car. There was no time to have his association's official 4x4 serviced for such a long trip! "Madam Founder, you'll never make it in this vehicle, we must find a bigger, more comfortable automobile!" Unable to locate an alternative, we took to the road at 10:20 pm, me lying, camouflaged, in the back seat and my two valiant drivers and protectors in the front! We passed the first checkpoints quickly and without any complications other than paying for passage. I wondered if the military personnel and check point officers could see me in the back of the vehicle, and if so, whether they would wonder or ask questions about my presence. Should I uncover myself a little so that they could see me or would they take me away? They did not appear overly curious, and we moved on past each check point without question, as if I were not there.

The car jerked and jolted over the potholes, and the heat intensified in the first morning rays to the point where one would need a cold room to keep temps to an acceptable limit inside the vehicle! Through the open window, a burning heat blew in; it was as an oven that magnified the smells of sand dust, perspiration, and bad diesel. The capital grew closer and closer. At noon, they dropped me in front of the travel agency to confirm my evening flight. The Centre Director, all smiles and exhausted from a sleepless night, proudly confided: "Madam Founder, you alone are worth at least three men!"

THE ASSOCIATION'S ILLUSTRATED COLOURING BOOK, *WORDS TO GROW BY*

A playful and educational illustrated book, to the rhythm of the letters of the alphabet! Enjoy!


Concept and writing: Isabelle Macheret, Founder of the Association

Illustrations: Arnow - Arnaud Dousse

Layout: La petite dame - Severine Perriard-Jaquier, Romont

Printing: Glassonprint, Bulle


Financing: This book was printed thanks to the support of a dear Association sponsor.



ASSOCIATION
AU CŒUR
du Niger
Association pour l'éducation et la formation des enfants orphelins et des filles-mères à Zinder.

Des Mots pour Grandir

Livre à colorier




Un livre illustré de 60 pages, pour petits et grands, à colorier et pour découvrir le quotidien simple d'une population dans une région du Niger, où il peut faire jusqu'à 52° en pleine saison chaude.

Un livre pour soutenir les activités de l'Association Au Cœur du Niger, qui scolarise, éduque et forme les enfants orphelins, les enfants albinos et les filles-mères à Zinder.

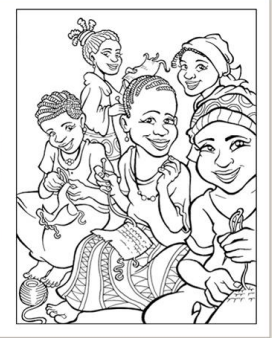
Merci pour votre soutien!
Isabelle Macheret, fondatrice
www.aucoeurduniger.ch

En vente dans certaines librairies
ainsi que lors des manifestations de l'Association.
Commande par mail: isa.macheret@bluewin.ch
Tél. + 41 (0)79 407 70 24
CHF 20.- le livre

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28 dessins à colorier, réalisés par le dessinateur fribourgeois Arnow!



Tous les bénéfices de ce livre sont versés pour les activités de l'Association Au Cœur du Niger à Zinder.

BOOK SALE AND SIGNING IN SELECT LIBRARIES IN ROMANDY:

- Albert Legrand, Friborg
- La P'tite Bookstore, Château-d'Oex
- The Rumor, Romont **Saturday, November 11, from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm**
- The Vieux Comté, Bulle **Wednesday, October 25 from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm**
- Page 2016, Payerne
- Payot Friborg, Lausanne, Montreux, Vevey, Geneva, Neuchâtel (11 Payot bookstores in French-speaking Switzerland). Dates and locations of the signings will be indicated on the website at: www.aucoeurduniger.ch

All proceeds will be donated to the activities of the Association in Zinder. Many thanks to the generous bookstores for their support and welcome!

Upcoming events:

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| Wednesday, October 25
4:00 pm – 6:00 pm | Signing at the Librairie du Vieux Comté in Bulle
With the presence of Isabelle and Arnow |
| Friday, October 27
3:15 pm | Interview with Isabelle at Radio FR, from the Comptoir Gruérien in Bulle |
| October 27 to November 5 | COMPTOIR GRUERIEN
At booth 62 of the La Gruyère-Molésion Lions Club.
Signing and sale. Lions Club will conduct raffles to support the Coeur du Niger Association and Les Cartons du Coeur.
Come for a chance to win a new car, among other prizes! |
| Saturday, November 11
10:00 am -12:00 pm | Signing at the Librairie La Rumeur in Romont
With the presence of Isabelle and Arnow |
| November 18-19 | Christmas market in Villaz-St-Pierre
Saturday 11:30 pm – 8:00 pm. Sunday 10:00 am – 5 pm |
| November 21 | Presentation at Kiwanis Club in St. Moritz |
| December 2-3 | Christmas market in Semsales
Saturday 11:00 am – 7:00 pm. Sunday 10:00 am – 5 pm |
| December 7 - 8 - 9 | Handcraft Market in Romont
Thursday 17:00 am – 9:00 pm
Friday 2:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Saturday 11:00 am – 9:00 pm |

As the Chinese proverb goes:

*If you are planning for a year, plant a seed,
If you are planning for a decade, plant a tree,
If you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.*

Our lifetime project is to fight poverty and illiteracy!

More than 200 orphan and albino children, child-mothers, seamstresses, and 26 local employees at the Association's *Après-demain* Centre in Zinder join me in wishing you all a very beautiful autumn and a sweet and peaceful end to 2017!

Magana da ku da sannu! (in the Hausa local language!)



Our warmest and most grateful thoughts, filled with sun and smiles, go out to you from Niger!

With all my kindness, Isabelle Macheret

Zinder Niger, October 2017

www.aucoeurduniger.ch