

ASSOCIATION



Niger Zinder, October 2018

The New Two-Story Education Building



May - October 2018: the time it took to complete the new Education Building at the *Au Coeur du Niger* Association in Zinder!

It's been months of monitoring figures, data, quantities, quantities, etc. Frédéric Chobaz, our Committee's new assistant for logistics and IT, has done a remarkable job working remotely, was very professional in this project!

Thanks to Frédéric, there was no flooding in the new building during the last rainy season. The building has two floors, built in the same way the *Après-demain* Centre was constructed during the 2012-2013 rainy season. The rain naturally waters the cement bricks. Thus, even in 40° - 50°C heat, these bricks do not crumble and can withstand the burning sun of Zinder.

The inauguration of this new two-story complex took place on Monday, October 22, with a beautiful and vibrant celebration, in the presence of 50 middle and high school students. The pupils are now enjoying four spacious classrooms on the ground floor as they

continue their studies at the Centre. Each school year is successful, and prepares 12 to 20 new students for the college level.

The first floor has three large rooms: one to accommodate sewing and soap-making class with 31 girls, who were outgrowing their former classroom as they grew in number; another room is reserved for computer classes; and the third will house a new library for college students. It will also serve as a room for college teachers and a music space! The container sent from Switzerland contained about twenty musical instruments; soon we very well might have a fanfare in Zinder!

The President of The Albino Foundation, Ms. Kadidjatou, was present at the inauguration, having travelled by bus from the capital Niamey. I am particularly grateful to her because I know how difficult and long these journeys are over potholed roads. We took advantage of this meeting at the Centre to talk about the plight of a large number of albino children and adults in Zinder. Albinos suffer from direct sunlight, are wanted for their organs and limbs. Also, their vision is poor due to an uncoloured iris. They develop melanomas or carcinomas, when they go out in the sun to beg or work. Ms. Kadidjatou's priority is to make people with albinism aware of these dangers and to provide them with high quality solar creams, sunglasses, and light clothes that help protect them from the Sahel sun. Thanks to the generosity and resourcefulness of Sonia in Switzerland, who provides sun and moisturizing creams to our nine albino children, we hope that we will be able to help newcomers join the sewing room or school classes. Ms. Kadidjatou left the Centre with twenty tubes of Aven sunscreen protection 50 for the fragile albino skin.

Visitors and authorities who came to admire the new building had nothing but praise for its construction. In fact, they were raving about how straight the walls were, how perfect every window and fence. I often heard how the windows and gates were so straight. My secret? A very efficient technician who followed the whole project from Switzerland and came to the site on two occasions to understand better the particularities of the landscape and the challenges faced by our local subcontractors. My intransigence and vigilance must have done the rest, coupled with the eyes and ears of the Centre Director when I am away in Switzerland!

To complete and fine-tune a project well means extensive follow-up. Everything looked perfect, but on closer inspection we noticed that they forgot to put the mosquito nets on the windows, that the paint was applied haphazardly or crosses the limit by more than 5 cm, that there are stains of paint and cement on the plaster and entire perimeter of the building, that classroom doors open by themselves, that there are missing locks at some doors, the welding marks are ugly, there are cracks on the stairs and in some walls, electrical panels are poorly installed, light switches do not work, electrical outlets under lamps and fans are not connected, blackboards are irregular and have no troughs for collecting water from the sponges, nails protrude here and there, floor joints are not filled with putty, etc

The handover was both astonishing and entertaining!



Inauguration of the new education building in the presence of Zinder's local and religious authorities – 22 October 2018

The Container

A third container, after a first in 2012 and a second in 2013 that gave us ample reason to sweat and cry, was organized, prepared, packaged, and sent from Vuisternens-en-Ogoz, by our faithful and dynamic technical leader Jörg Stämpfli and his efficient team!

Having experienced the hectic and uncontrollable situation with the first two containers, I was somewhat apprehensive with this one. My hope was that it contained hundreds of writing desks and chairs from CO schools in Bulle, Romont, Ursy, and Esmonts, dozens of sewing machines and computers for our new sewing and computer rooms, musical instruments, 1.5 tons of solar batteries from the Soleol company in Estavayer-le-Lac, a toolbox, hundreds of notebooks, cartons of stuffed animals, wool, clothes, and various other very generous donations completed the shipment!

These precious materials delight young people at the Centre and help to improve their knowledge, while the local staff is given new opportunities and motivation to work under the best conditions, with quality equipment! The Swiss-made label is recognized and appreciated in Africa!

But in order for this to happen, the customs office in Zinder needs to release our shipment and avoid a repeat performance of last time. After facing storms on the high seas, which engendered a three-week delay, the boat was attacked by pirates off the coast of Nigeria,

which meant another delay at the port of Cotonou in Benin. And as if this were not enough for Africa, abundant rains were unleashed in several regions, destroying the only bridge and roadway from Benin to Niger, blocking all trucks with their supplies and contents. Even with all these delays, our container still made it to Niger since the bridge was urgently repaired.

On a Friday night in Zinder, after a very long wait, the container finally arrived at the customs office, where it remained completely blocked. In the clearance documents drawn up by the customs department in Niamey, an error had slipped into the description of material in the container ... and another several weeks in hell began all over again!



Routing of one of the two vans filled with materials for the school, arriving by container from Switzerland and authorized by the customs office.

No administration could or wanted to help us to release the container that contained the necessary material for both the inauguration of the new building and the beginning of classes!

Once finally released, the truck and container, which were rented, had to depart immediately for Benin, preferably empty. After having spent night and day imploring the customs and other administrative offices of Zinder with the Director of the Centre, who was exhausted and felt his back lock while my neck protested, we were able to get the delivery of two small vans filled with a minimal amount of material, which was sufficient, according to the authorities, to ensure a good opening.

Still waiting...

The day before my departure from Zinder, I was at the customs office at 9 pm to oversee the unloading of equipment so that the truck could leave the next morning. Of course, we had to pay for this space in the customs office, as well as for theft insurance. At 10 pm, under the threat of being removed from the premises or obtaining a permit, I was still taking pictures with about twenty children from the Centre in their beautiful tangerine-marsala red uniforms, to show our generous donors of all this material that it had arrived in Niger, if not yet in place in the new building! I remain hopeful that by the end of the year everything will be in order.

We always say that we will never do this again, only to start all over the next time!

Daily Life in Zinder

I never thought that for not one or two, but for three nights I would lose sleep over such adorable and melodious grasshoppers! To hear them during the day, hopping busily about, reminds me of warm holidays in the south or hot fields in summertime.

But these adorable and noisy (especially at night!) grasshoppers give off a shrill and sharp sound continuously, twenty-four hours a day!

My nights being particularly short and not very regenerating in Zinder, I set out to locate where the noise was coming from – not an easy task, what with Zinder's endless power outages. But how did such noisy grasshoppers infiltrate, and how many were there? I discovered that they had taken up residence, after an abundant rainy season that favoured reproduction, in every possible location! There were some in the houses, the cabinets, inside the pipes, and in every crack and drawer! The grasshopper hunt became a veritable survival of the fittest! With the growing noise of Zinder, I needed my sleep more than ever before.

Every hour of the night, I was up with mosquito repellent in hand, chasing the shrill sound of each grasshopper – even deep into the plumbing, where they resonate with valiant force!



Playground at the *Après-demain* Centre

Throughout my stay at the Centre, about 15 young orphaned children and girls waited at the gate each day with their mothers, grandmothers, or uncles, to be recruited and receive coaching, schooling, and training from our staff.

On my last day, there were up to 45 children and girls outside the gates. It upset me to see so many sitting on the sand or under the trees from nine o'clock in the morning until nine at night. I wish we hadn't had so many problems with the container, and wasted so much time at customs. I would have liked to have helped many more children, but instead could only ask them to come back when I return next time.

This ever-increasing presence of parents with their children reflects an awareness on their part of the need to educate them. They are now more and more likely to be reassured, and are aware of the need for and benefits of schooling and well-structured care. Moms and grandmothers who brought their first child to the Centre are now coming back with a little brother or sister.

Two young albino children aged five and seven have just been recruited. The parents are nomadic pastoralists who live and travel more than 600 km from Zinder. The father, who is very responsible and aware of the dangers for albino children, came to visit the Centre two months ago to learn about our activities. Today, Rabi and Mamoudou learn and play freely with their schoolmates!

One Tuesday morning, I welcomed four siblings into the Centre. This was an exception since I generally limit to one or two the number of children per family, in order to give an

opportunity to several families. This mom of eight had touched me deeply; at first, she was nervous, virulent, and aggressive in her comments, telling me to take all her children into my care. Speaking softly to her in the Hausa language, I touched her arm and she began to cry, loudly, and to tremble. She was clearly exhausted with the workload and the stress of feeding her children since her husband had fallen from a wall and died. The children had a haggard look, as if they didn't know who they were or where they came from, waiting for their destiny to end, having no way to impact their future...

These new arrivals compensate a little bit for the girls and seamstresses who are called back to Heaven by bouts with malaria or untreated infection when they spend weekends or holidays with their families. Because they have no money, their entourage does not even think to bring them back to the Centre or to a dispensary. Everything is put in the hands of God or the marabouts.

To date, 255 orphaned and albino girls and boys have participated in the life and progress of the Centre! The second generation is already present in kindergarten and primary school!



THANK YOU from the children!

Association Committee

Bernard Guillaume, our very efficient and professional treasurer, leaves his position in the hands of Cédric Margueron, also a banker, after almost 10 years of availability, fidelity, and commitment! We sincerely thank Bernard Guillaume for his involvement and support

of the children of Niger! We wish Cédric Margueron a warm welcome to the *Au Coeur du Niger* Committee, as well as our warm thanks for his commitment to Africa's poorest!

Events:

- Sat-Sun 17-18 November** **Christmas Market Villaz-St-Pierre**
Sat 10.00-20.00 – Sun 10.00-17.00
Community Centre (near the church)
Booth with products from Niger and dedication of the illustrated colouring book, *Words to Grow By*
- Saturday 24 November 2018** **PAYOT MONTREUX – Av. du Casino 49**
100 year anniversary of Payot in Montreux,
Dedication of the illustrated colouring book,
Words to Grow By - 15.00 – 16.00
- Sat-Sun. 1 - 2 December** **Christmas Market in Semsales – Community Centre**
Sat. 11.00-18.00 – Sun. 10.00-17.00
Booth with products from Niger with dedication of the illustrated colouring book, *Words to Grow By*
- Fri-Sat. 7 and 8 December** **Christmas Market in Romont – Place du Château**
Fri 17.00-21.00 - Sat. 11.00-21.00.
Booth with products from Niger and dedication of the illustrated colouring book, *Words to Grow By*
- Friday 3 May 2019** **Gala dinner and show at the V-Center in Vallorbe**
Organised by the Lions Club Vallorbe &
Vallée de Joux
To celebrate the 10th Anniversary of *Au Coeur du Niger*
Screening of the Association's third documentary film
with Jean-Philippe Rapp

Gift idea

The illustrated 60-page colouring book, *Words to Grow By*, is fun and educational! Following the letters of the alphabet, discover the simple daily life of a population in a region of Niger, where temperatures can soar up to 52° in the hot season! This book supports the activities of the *Au Coeur du Niger* Association, which educates and trains Zinder's orphaned and albino children, as well as child-mothers. The 28 drawings are made by Arnow, artist from Fribourg!
CHF 20

2009 – 2019

Au Coeur du Niger will celebrate 10 years of activities in 2019 in Niger in support of the poorest children of Zinder!

The third documentary film by Jean-Philippe Rapp, our humanist and benevolent sponsor, and Ian Jaquier (cameraman) is complete! We are terribly impatient to unveil this third part, which tells the great adventure of the Association, from the original 5-6 children to a total of 255 today! See how we expanded from a rented space in a building belonging to the Sisters of the Assumption, to a rented schoolhouse, and on to our very own *Après-demain* Centre, ending 2018 with the construction of a two-story education building!

With my kindest regards, brightened by the grateful smiles of the children!

Wishing everyone a beautiful and sweet New Year and wishes that good health may accompany you at every moment!

Isabelle Macheret
Founder
Au Cœur du Niger

Zinder Niger, October 2018

www.aucoeurduniger.ch