

ASSOCIATION



Niger Zinder, October 2019

Le rêve d'Isabelle: un avenir pour les enfants au Niger!

un film documentaire de
Jean-Philippe Rapp



2^e partie:

«**NOUS**»

Marc Donnet-Monay

Yann Lambiel

Mardi 3 décembre 2019

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Structural Reorganisation of the Centre



An evaluation I carried out last March and June with the Centre's local staff revealed that a structural reorganisation was necessary. In order to relieve overloaded positions and to restore efficiency, organization and authority, a new organizational chart has been constructed with the addition of a local accountant. I am pleased to announce that the Centre is now operational and run by an accountant, secretary, nurse and a nanny! In Niger, progress and the responsibilities taken by women are encouraging and will stimulate others to take this path, including the young girls learning at the Centre!

My next objective is to hire a general advisor. Students are always advised by a college principal and an elementary school principal.

2009 – 2019

Over the course of 10 years, and having started with loads of energy, courage and a pinch of despair, I tried to fulfil a dream. And in order to do that, it was necessary to bring awareness and solidarity among the benevolent people who would believe in and nourish this dream with me, all for the children of Niger!

Thanks to each and every person we met along this path of sand and hope. 320 orphaned children, 20 albinos and child-mothers are now happy and fulfilled as they learn and grow at the "Après-demain" Centre, built thanks to our dear late and caring Doctor Mauvernay. In 2010, a small room was rented from the Sisters of the Assumption, followed a year later by the rental of a house, to transform it into school classes. Then in 2012-2013, financial assistance was obtained to build on a 7,642 m² plot of land, made available by the City of Zinder. The babies of our child-mothers, who were then aged from 3 to 24 months, are now enrolled in primary and middle school at the Centre! The second generation is well on its way, all assiduous and attentive to a very promising future!

Thanks to the construction of a school complex for middle school and dressmakers in 2018, more than 80 students are studying there and are already thinking about which professional path to take. Our first five girls to receive a diploma were directed to the vocational school of Zinder, an initial success for them and for the association! In 2020, 23 new students, who are currently in the fifth grade, will join the college level at the Centre.

Albino children

Public and Child Protective Services came to visit the Centre and informed us of the presence of seven albino children in a bush village, in difficult living conditions. We arranged for transportation with their parents to show them around the Centre. In order for an albino child to be received and cared for at the Centre, we must always obtain the permission of both parents and the village authorities. There are superstitions and strong popular beliefs about albinos. They are kidnapped for their organs, limbs and ritual sacrifices.

In Niger, for example, the disease affects 1 in 1,000 births, compared to 1 in 17,000 in Europe. Albinism is much more pronounced in Africa than in Europe, due to lower genetic mixing and the permanence of isolated areas, according to the hypotheses of a researcher (Libération newspaper).

Two albino sisters had been welcomed at the Centre this summer, in my absence. They were accompanied by their father but not their mother, from whom he was separated. At that time, the person in charge of the Centre was satisfied with the approval of the father and the village representative. A few months later, when the mother learned that her two albino daughters had been taken to a Centre in Zinder, she panicked and filed a complaint for kidnapping, believing they had been taken for ritual sacrifices. The head of the Centre, who had welcomed these two young girls, was summoned by the courts, who demanded an explanation and the return of the two albino girls to their mother. Since the risk of being put in jail was great, he went to court with the President of Niger's Association of Persons with Disabilities as an advocate and witness of what the association is doing to help albino children in the region of Zinder. They returned very late that night, after pleading for hours to prove their good faith and intentions. On social networks, accusations against the Mayor of the bush village, where the albino sisters lived, were spreading and Zinder's justice had to intervene to stop the allegations.

That is why I am always very cautious, vigilant and demanding in Niger and Switzerland, to avoid such situations. Two weeks ago, a 15-year-old albino boy came to the Centre with his parents and his little sister, also an albino. The little girl was able to join the Centre and go to school, but unfortunately, for lack of structure at the moment, I have not been able to welcome the boy, as he is too old.

My new dream is now to be able to build a Professional Training Centre, which would contribute to the continuity of the association's activities at the Centre and would fundamentally contribute to the continuation and curriculum studies and completion of student training. I could thus help these young albinos who have not had the opportunity to go to school before. Manual work would be ideal for young people who do not want to study or who do not have this potential. This would give them a sense of personal value, and a place in society. It also avoids the exodus and departure of young people in need of guidance and recognition, to armed and terrorist groups.

For this purpose, I went to visit some of the land in Zinder. The road to this new project will be long, because we will have to reassure, argue, convince and negotiate. This in Switzerland just as in Niger! Any collaboration and pooling of ideas and strengths will be welcome!



There are currently 20 albino children at the Centre. They are dressed in light colours to reflect Zinder's strong rays of sunlight.

Daily life in Zinder

Mosquitoes are still as aggressive and bloodthirsty as ever and the children at the Centre are not spared. Little girls fell into a coma after neurologically aggravated malaria. They were hospitalized in a serious condition, but fortunately were very resilient (thanks in part to the lifestyle, hygiene and food at the Centre), and emerged unscathed from the nightmare. They have regained their strength and now smile again with their schoolmates! Aboubacar, six years and a student at the Centre, lost consciousness and remained in a coma for two weeks. He had to undergo surgery, after dialysis. He is now back with his mother, a young woman taking classes at the sewing school.

Bertrand came for a week in October to participate in renovation and improvement work. How fortunate to be able to count on the motivation, volunteerism and professional capacities of these helpers who come to the field! Bertrand, magnificently coached by Frédéric, our precious technical assistant on committee in Switzerland, was able to fill in holes, check the electrical work, change bulbs, check capacity of the 200 m² solar panels, the condition of fans, switches, sockets, mosquito nets, rainwater drainage channels and water evacuation, visible cracks at the expansion joints, and the transformation of a room into a dormitory for boys, who grow up fast and can no longer share a building with young girls. Bertrand played football every night with the children, who fully enjoyed the outstanding and highly educational coach, even under a 45° sun!

Beautiful and colourful football jerseys, basketballs, caps and T-shirts, generously donated by clubs in Switzerland, were distributed to the students! They came to class in these shirts exclusively over the following days; it was impossible to coerce them into wearing their uniforms, they were too proud!

The days rolled on, and we worked from 6:30 am to 11 pm to make this Centre more efficient and autonomous than ever.

Visits continue between Zinder and Niamey, to inform and seek advice from the Sultan of Damagaram, the Governor of the Zinder region, the Labour Inspector, the Swiss Cooperation Office, colleagues and friends of the associations and the Chief of Staff of the Minister of the Interior of Niger, with whom I hope to have a fruitful and constructive collaboration establishing many more "Après-demain" Centres across Niger!

Travelling to Niger and back to Switzerland is always very complicated, exhausting, and requires a lot of patience. While driving to the Geneva airport, we were delayed by an accident on the highway. Fortunately, thanks to the vigilance and reactivity of my driver, we were able to take a highway exit to avoid the traffic jam and returned to the highway a little further on. I checked in my baggage just 10 minutes before check-in closed, wow!

Experience has taught me that if a trip starts out like this, I'm in for an interesting adventure. Indeed, having landed at Paris CDG airport, we had to wait 20 minutes in the plane before an airstair was brought to disembark. I arrived just in time to get on the plane to Niger! But as soon as we were seated (well, as best as one can be in these planes...), we were told that a surprise strike by the ground staff had just been declared. They gave us magazines, movies and water while we waited, seated, for almost 3 hours.

Can you guess which company it was?

Finally, by near nightfall, I arrived in Niger. I was able to pick up my two suitcases (27kg and 30kg), full of surprises for the children, sponsored at the Centre. Jörg, my very efficient and available technical manager, had already sent along eight boxes full of gifts and equipment for the children and the Centre.

Upcoming Events

Saturday-Sunday, November 23-24, 2019

Christmas Market in Villaz-St-Pierre – Salle Communale Saturday 10.00-20.00 / Sunday 10.00-17.00

Saturday-Sunday, November 30 – December 1, 2019

Christmas Market in Semsales – Salle Polyvalante Saturday 10.00-17.00 / Sunday 10.00-17.00

Tuesday, December 3, 2019

CHARITY EVENING in celebration of the Association's 10-year anniversary
20.00 at CO2 in La Tour-de-Trême

Animating will be comedians YANN LAMBIEL & MARC DONNET-MONAY

Screening of the 3rd documentary film by Jean-Philippe Rapp and Ian Jaquier

***Le rêve accompli d'Isabelle – Un avenir pour les enfants au Niger* (2018)**

I'm looking forward to seeing you!



December 5-6, 2019

EPFL Lausanne

Booth at the Franco-Swiss Medical & Pharmaceutical Day

Friday-Saturday, December 6-7, 2019

Artisan Market in Romont – Place du Château

Friday 17.00-21.00 / Saturday 11.00-20.30

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

With my warmest and most grateful thoughts, and with the smiles of 320 children and young girls at the 2nd Chance School!

Wishing you a beautiful winter and a sparkling 2020!

Isabelle Macheret

Founder of the Association *Au Coeur du Niger*

Zinder Niger, October 2019

www.aucoeurduniger.ch