

ASSOCIATION



Niger Zinder, October 2020

## 10<sup>th</sup> Au Cœur du Niger General Assembly



On Wednesday, October 7th, the *Au Cœur du Niger* Association Committee presented its activities in Niger along with accounts and changes made within the committee during its 10th General Assembly, held in the presence of 47 people who were kind enough to make the trip.

A Statement of Satisfaction and Honour was awarded to Mr. Charles Phillot for his 10 years serving as co-President alongside Ms. Solange Berset, then incumbent Association President. A very warm tribute was paid for the following:

- Dedication and service since the founding of the Association in 2010;
- Attention and assistance given to more than 300 orphaned children, albinos and child-mothers who have been schooled, educated and trained at the *Après-demain* Centre, as well as their families and entourage;

- Valuable technical counsel and contacts for the construction of the *Après-demain* Centre in 2013;
- Positive atmosphere and excellent collaboration within the committee;
- Presence and rigor throughout 49 Committee Meetings, 10 General Assemblies, seven support evenings, two concert evenings with the Armaillis de la Gruyère Choir and six booths, to name a few;
- Good advice and contacts, as well as the extensive trust placed in the founder, making her dreams a reality!

Gratitude also went to Mr. Frédéric Chobaz, who was part of the Association Committee from 2018 to 2020 as technical and logistical manager for work and construction at the Centre. He was recognised for his deep commitment and meticulous follow-up of the renovation and construction of the two-story school complex in 2018, expansion of the infirmary, and the new kindergarten that were finished this year.

To make up for their departure, we had the joy and honour of introducing new people to join the *Au Coeur du Niger* team as the faces of our Association! Mr. Grégoire Piller, a notary lawyer, has accepted the position of President. He is fully committed to the children of the Zinder region and we look forward to the many upcoming meetings and assemblies that will take place under his presidency.

Ms. Amalia Risse, from La Roche, will reinforce Events alongside Ms. Anita Clerc from Fribourg. Ms Risse is already enchanting us with her many ideas and creativity!

Mr. Jean-Marc Egger returns to the Association Committee after having supported as a sponsor in the early days of the Association. I am extremely grateful for such friendly commitment that will ensure the continuation of *Au Coeur du Niger* in a beautiful atmosphere and with a deep sense of serenity.

I am ever appreciative of Mr. Jörg Stämpfli's professional commitment, without whom hundreds of postal boxes would not have gone to Niger. Thanks to Mr. Stämpfli, three containers made the sea and land journey to Zinder, and without his expertise the obstacles peppering my journeys to and from Geneva would have been innumerable. He organised and managed events that ran seamlessly!

Special mention to Mr. Cédric Margueron, without whom it would be impossible to present accounts, prepare budgets, control payments and expenses so that our dear and very professional Accountant, Gilbert Butty in Ursy, can present his report during our assemblies!

### **Our first professional contract signed with a young student from the Centre**

The greatest pleasure that these children could have brought to me at the *Après-demain* Centre was the signing of a contract with one of the young students who had been welcomed there, and it happened last September, during my stay in Zinder.

Rayana had joined the Association in 2010 as a child-mother with two very young children; 10 years later, she received an official work contract as a seamstress, teaching girls at the Centre. She passed her tests as a seamstress two years in a row, and can now teach other girls at the Centre. We hope that even more girls and boys from the Centre will sign contracts in the coming years, and will be the much hoped-for future. Five girls received their sewing diploma during my last stay in Niger: Rayana, Jamila, Samira, Mariama and Zara!  
CONGRATULATIONS to them and keep up the good work!



The first professional contract signed with Rayana, a young seamstress!

## End of school fiesta

Last September, we organized School's Out party and it was a moment of joy and awards for the most deserving students. The first five in each class were invited to choose a prize. Pencils, books, balloons, backpacks, T-shirts, stuffed animals, games, bicycles, skipping ropes, toiletries and clothes were spread out over three large tables, and the children had a hard time making up their minds!

Together, the staff and children prepared a big surprise for me, too! I received my "Special Founder" award! The accountant had prepared a certificate of satisfaction, which was delivered by top student, Ayouba, who led the class with a final mark of 19/20. They signed the certificate with their fingerprints, a typical local custom.

Our staff, together with the Psycho-pedagogue of the State of Niger, distributed the educational awards to the students, under the proud approval of their teachers:

Ousseina, Mariama, Ayouba, Fatima Zara, Ibrahim, Rabiou, Salissou, Moutari, Djafar, Balkissa, Hamida, Ramatou, Ouma, Oumarou, Aïchatou, Abdoul Rachid, Yasmina, Soufianou, Safia, Ibrahim, Fatma Zara, Absatou, Sakina, Aïcha, Falila, Amina, Yousseuf, Abdoul, Ouma, Yousseuf, Zoulehat.

For most hardworking and disciplined girl: Aïchatou Moussa  
Hadiza Yahaya

For most hard-working and disciplined boy: Ayouba Moussa

For most helpful and dedicated housekeeping:  
Fassouma Moussa – Harira Amadou – Fadila Maman

For most encouraging: Rabiou Tsahirou – Abdoul Raouf  
Yousseuf et Midjitaba Sitou

For the most smiles: Fatma Zara - Falila Mahamadou  
Ayouba Moussa

For the best mood: Gaïcha Aboubacar

For best personal hygiene: Fati Sidi – Imane Isabelle – Fatouma Clément

For most beautiful hairstyle and maintenance: Safia Amadou and her sister Balkissa  
Haoua Hassane and her sister Roukaya

For best improvement efforts: Saâdou Inoussa  
Adamou Mahamadou  
Saratou Illiassou

In technology: Ayouba Moussa

In French: Ismaël Ali – Ibrahim Harouna

For solidarity and camaraderie: Souéba Amadou – Harira Amadou  
Aïchatou Moussa

In Braille: Farida (albino girl, 10 years)

For goat care: Saâdou Inoussa – Oumar Farouk

For kitchen help: Zalika Maman Nafiou – Fassouma Mahamadou  
Zeinabou Hamidou

For best artist:	Ayouba – Ibrahim – Ahmed – Mohamed – Roukaya – Hadiza – Zeinabou – Zalika – Faïza Kadija – Hassia – Fati – Ouma – Charifa - Hawa
In placemat making:	Falila – Karima – Ousseina – Aïcha – Kadija - Firdaoussi – Mariama – Nafissa – Zeinabou – Zalika – Roubaya – Haousaou – Djawahir – Absatou – Fatma Zara – Mariama
For most undisciplined (a small pebble):	Farida – Rabi – Chapaâtou – Roubaya
In sewing:	Rayana – Djamila – Samira – Mariama - Zara
For respect for elders:	Balkissa – Mariama – Safia – Habou – Charifa Ibrahim – Salamatou – Naïma – Mahamadou – Ibrahim – Karima – Ismaël – Hadiza Lawali
Middle School Award:	Fassouma Moussa – Aïchatou Nanzir – Ayouba Moussa
For most industrious:	Aïchatou Ado
For maternal conduct, High School and College:	Ouma Saïdou – Ibrahim Dambou – Zeinab
For best class:	CM2
For most faithful employee, role-model:	LA NOUNOU AICHATOU Hired in 2010.

### **Technical Assistance Awards at the Centre:**

Abdourahamane, our efficient and tireless technical manager, can count on many little hands to follow him around from morning to evening, when classes are over. Brave future builders! Saâdou, Oumarou, Ibrahim, Almoustapha, Ismaël, Saley, Ousmane and Mohamed love to lend a hand to the technical manager in their free time.

Abdourahamane has an endless list of work to show them, and the older boys are eager to get involved and learn the basics. These are the future candidates for contracts as technical assistants and valuable workers, no doubt about it!

It is very important to value and motivate the boys at an early age, to foster an interest in small jobs around the Centre, which helps them channel their vast energy. This way they feel useful, and are happy to show off their successes! Abdourahamane is really very skilled at teaching

masonry, as well as the various repair and maintenance jobs that need to be done daily in and around the Centre.



The young boys are happy to get involved with small jobs, under the attentive and benevolent eye of our technical manager, Abdourahamane.

### **Daily life and safety in Zinder**

In December 2019, we fired our Director for various types of professional misconduct. A teacher by trade, he did not have the potential to manage such a Centre, or the ability to see the needs of the Centre and its staff. We hired an accountant in October 2019 to take over accounting and human resources. Unfortunately, the latter has just given her resignation and will go to work for another NGO. It is very difficult to find good, reliable and dedicated local staff that one can rely on. I have discovered and experienced over the years that handling the children is not the most difficult task, instead it is human resources.

Those who work in corporate HR will most certainly agree with me. When I was employed, I didn't realize what it means to be an employer; to manage different personalities, sensibilities, cultures, individual and group issues, to find solutions, maintain relationships, working conditions, to seek funds, to ensure salaries, social charges, pregnancies, accidents, illnesses, replacement staff, to respond to diverse and multiple demands, and to think about sustainability. I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to congratulate and very warmly and humbly thank all the independent people and entrepreneurs from around the world!

During my stay in September, we spent time recruiting for the empty accounting position. We received six applications and selected two of them, which corresponded to the specifications for the position. We retained a young woman, who was given an aptitude test by the accountant. She started her trial work on Monday, and on Friday of the same week, her husband told her that she would not be coming back to work in the Centre. The new accountant had left the Centre one day with her hijab on her arm, and her husband could not accept that our rules (of a secular school) did not require employees to wear one. Therefore, we are looking for another accountant; let the games begin!

Following the murder of six young French humanitarian workers and two Nigerian employees of the French NGO, security has become unstable. Unfortunately, I had not been able to return to Niger since April, first because of the novel coronavirus, which had closed the airports and borders of Niger, and then by this unfortunate human tragedy, 60 km from the capital Niamey. I am always very careful when I go into the field, and gather information from my security contacts in Niger, France and elsewhere before and as I travel.

For this reason, I vacated the house we had been renting for 10 years. Ever since 2010, I had been living in Zinder at first for three-quarters, then for half of the year to follow up on Association activities and projects. This year, I was only able to go twice, and for a mere three weeks each time. The Minister of the Interior of Niger and the Governor of the Region of Zinder will provide solid counsel for future visits.

Following the attack against the French and the many travel obstacles to Niger (Air France had cancelled my last flight to Geneva again) due to the coronavirus pandemic, I have thought a lot about the current situation. For years I have been asked to think about the "sustainability" of the Centre, which was very dear to our late Honorary President, Dr. Rolland-Yves Mauvernay. An ideal scenario would be to join forces with another NGO that also works in Zinder. I contacted three structures to discuss possibilities that would allow everyone to ensure a better foundation for Zinder, to share and join forces.

On my return to the capital Niamey, I met the Director of the Swiss Cooperation Office, who encouraged me in this direction, "instead of everyone doing their own little activities in their own corner," as I had often been told. I am finally ready for this and am looking forward to being able to join forces, to unite our resources in terms of infrastructure, local employees and vehicles, all the while maintaining our own activities and structures.

*"Alone we go faster, together we go farther."*

*African proverb*

Working together under the best conditions and with the appropriate supervision contributes to collective success, mutual dignity and respect. It's a never-ending quest... but it's worth the effort! This effort is collective and based on solidarity!



September 2020 at the *Après-demain* Centre

## Upcoming Events

**Wednesday, 28 October 2020**

**10am – 11am RADIO FRIBOURG**

"La Cafète" by Thierry Savary  
with Isabelle and Jonathan, who will present the sale  
of T-Shirts of the Association RW - Solidarity,  
in favour of *Au Coeur du Niger* children.

**Friday – Saturday**

**4 – 5 December 2020**

**Booth in front of the bookshop LA RUMEUR  
in ROMONT**

To be confirmed, pending pandemic restrictions.  
For Christmas gift ideas!

You will find authentic artisanal products from Niger, the 3rd documentary film by our Ambassador, Jean-Philippe Rapp, "Isabelle's dream - A future for children in Niger" and I will be delighted to sign copies of the illustrated colouring book *Words to Grow By*.  
For additional orders, do not hesitate to contact me by phone (079/407.70.24) or by email (isa.macheret@bluewin.ch), and I will happily organise it for you!

**Christmas and Autumn Markets:  
Ursy - Villaz-St-Pierre  
Semsales - Romont**

Unfortunately, all markets are cancelled due to the  
current pandemic.



## Jonathan and Nicolas' humanitarian action - T-shirt sale

Jonathan and Nicolas are two young and dynamic students from Gruyère. Through their association, RW-Solidarité, which they created to support humanitarian aid activities targeting *Au Coeur du Niger* children, they involved several schools in Gruyère (Orientation Cycle of La Tour-de-Trême, Bulle, Riaz and the Collège du Sud in Bulle). Jonathan and Nicolas took up the challenge to sell T-shirts in favour of the activities and projects that support these children. A drawing competition was launched among the pupils of the OCs and the Collège du Sud, with a focus on education and schooling. The student who wins the drawing competition will have his or her work printed on the T-shirts. These will be sold by OC and Collège du Sud students with the aim of raising funds, which in turn will be donated to the *Au Coeur du Niger* Association, thus actively participating in the activities and running of life at the Centre. Very generous sponsors, such as the Raiffeisen Moléson bank, will help to reduce production costs. You will hear more on this from Jonathan, on **28 October, Radio Fribourg, from 10 to 11 am, during Thierry Savary's programme "La Cafète"**.

**Very much worth-reading is an article** recently published by ROADSIGN, in French and English. Many thanks to Jérôme and his beautiful team who made this happen:

<https://www.roadsign.eu/isabelle-et-les-enfants-de-zinder/?lang=fr>



Thanks to your generous and invaluable support, today and tomorrow are better for all the children at the *2ème chance* school in the Heart of Niger! Thank you so much!

I wish you all a beautiful autumn, take care of yourself, enjoy every moment and stay healthy please!

Very special thoughts and prayers to those who have lost a loved one, and for the dedicated friends and family of the Association, ambassadors, sponsors, donors and supporters who have taken their leave to Peace in this year 2020.

With my warmest and most grateful message, and the joyful and hopeful smiles of 340 children and young girls!

Isabelle Macheret

Association *Au Cœur du Niger*  
Founder

Zinder Niger, October 2020

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