



Niger Zinder, June 2013

CONTAINER ARRIVES FROM SWITZERLAND, SOLAR PANELS IN PLACE!



A container arrived from Switzerland after three weeks of delays, administrative hurdles and red tape at the border. June 15, 2013



Generously filled by the Swiss Association of the Order of the Malta, Fribourg, and Jörg, the Association Technical Director, the container arrived in good shape after two months of travel! First stop: Cotonou, Benin, followed by an arduous journey to Zinder. When a 1,500km trip (Cotonou-Zinder) becomes as toilsome as an expedition around the world, you're talking huge lessons in patience!

The container arrived in the middle of the night, which kept me up quite late with mixed feelings of joy and despair as I waited to see its arrival! As usual, we met with every obstacle possible between Cotonou and Zinder: forgotten customs papers at the Niger border, a flat tire, misplaced cell phone, prayer, another flat, no service with which to locate the truck, yet another flat, road block and more prayer! Ten kilometres out, I was informed of the truck's arrival; three hours later I was still waiting – naively and full of hope! - at the customs office. Early the next morning after a swift inspection of the container, I was told that the exemption forms generally prepared in the capital Niamey were not in order. I waited, I called, and sudden reversal of fate! The customs inspector had seen me angelically waiting on my container the day before and must have been struck with pity to see me so distressed and disappointed that my container was not going to make it to the Centre as quickly as I'd hoped. We still had 56 solar panels (80 m²) to unload, along with all the necessary building materials. The installer had been in Zinder for a few days and was waiting, as patiently as I, for the panels that had been

sent by his company Soleol in Estavayer-le-Lac to arrive so he could begin the long, day and night process of installation since his flight out was imminent!

After two attempts at corruption (seriously?), the massive truck was allowed to follow me back home, where the job hadn't even begun. Time to find (in a space of two hours) a crane capable of lifting a 40 foot long container and trailer – no easy task in Zinder! The crane arrived much later from a site outside Zinder.

Workers were busy moving things, and I was counting on them (bad idea?) not to maim our brand new front gate with this huge metallic box! That's what I call living dangerously... And I was right to worry because as the container approached the gate, the workers set round metal bars on the sand and lowered the container onto them. Pulled by a trailer and handled by the workers from behind, the container slammed into a concrete pillar, taking part of it with it! I love it when things run smoothly!

When the first container arrived back in February 2012, I had to bust through the front gate of my house to have it unloaded in the courtyard; so a simple pillar paled in comparison.

The panels and solar equipment were the first to touch ground in Zinder. Joy! The technician with Soleol, Dominique, made quick work of it, labouring day and night alongside a hard-working team! By Sunday afternoon, the 56 solar panels were installed on a roof measuring 80 m², located on the girls' dormitory.

Our invaluable school supplies (desks, chairs) and boxes full of educational treasures – photocopy machine, computers, mattresses – were so much fun to open! The entire process had to be supervised, before and after the container was unloaded onto its well-earned concrete throne!

Many of the buildings remain to be completed with regard to details and cleaning. With a fine layer of sand still very present, we clean for hours every day. Everything will be set up in the classrooms, dormitories and offices before the move at the end of August, after yet another meeting with the students' mothers, grand-mothers and grand-fathers. It is my hope that every scholar be allowed to sleep at the Centre from Monday to Friday, and return home for the weekends. Certain mothers are worried that no one will be available to help them fetch water, wood or sell cola. We've already organized a visit that would allow parents to experience why they should leave their children at school during the week. Not everyone is convinced as yet, but I'm working on it and we'll get there!

A young artist in Zinder is painting artwork on the classroom walls, corridors, dining halls and dormitories! He's already created magnificent results, and I want to share them with you!



One of 6 classrooms at the Centre, with pretty artwork! June 17, 2013

Electricity was also installed at the Centre: pylon and lines were up in early May after a three month wait and dozens of trips to Zinder Electric.

Two water towers were connected to the water pumps recently. The installation of an electrical pump from Gruyère Energy – after being stuck in Niamey customs for two months – was carried out using a local company and the reactive, constructive support of Frédéric Meyer of Gruyère Energy through email.

Dozens of fruit, edible landscaping (moringa) and shade trees, as well as hedges were planted, and are watered regularly thanks to our pump (1,000 litres/hour at 97 metres deep!). With the rainy season soon upon us, everything will grow lush in record time. Zinder's Public Utilities and Forestry Departments will supervise our small garden world for three months!

So many baby goats, or kids, are being born to the delight of everyone here! We have a veterinarian coming regularly to check in on the 43 goats and 16 chickens, in this broiling time of the year! 52 goats have already been given to the school girls and boys who take care of them in their banko homes. We saw temps reach 52°C on Sunday afternoon! The school guard regularly sprays the chicken coop with water, where the poor beasts suffer in the heat! We

dewormed the chickens and goats, and were ordered by the vet to keep water troughs out of the goat pens at the night as the snakes slide in to keep cool!

Life at School



Happy scholars at the Association school! June 2013

The 116 scholars are the pride and joy of the personnel that takes care of them morning to night! Our staff is currently at 25 local employees, with arrivals and departures, establishing a team that will soon constitute a solid and sustainable team. It is my hope that there will be more girls and boys full of smiles and joy to follow!

Every Friday, the girls and boys at school are given a meat sandwich and fruit juice prepared in the streets of Zinder (a luxury and moment of indulgence for them!) if they are all present every day that week without being late in the morning. It works! They are so motivated to get their end-of-the-week reward that they hold each other accountable; woe to he or she that keeps the others from getting their treat because of an unexcused absence or for having played hooky from school to wander the sandy streets!



The *Après-demain* Education and Development Centre in Zinder. June 2, 2013

Life in Zinder

These last two months were difficult due to the searing heat in Zinder and regionwide. Almost every day the mercury reaches 50° with incessant, never-ending electrical and internet outages. Water is distributed to homes every two days, and sometimes for a few hours only. People have to stay close to their spigots so they can quickly fill up cubes, pots or, for the more fortunate, water towers.

I was visited at my home by two new grey cats that have finally decided to live with me permanently! I suspect that receiving portions of canned tuna or sardines has coerced them to stay. On the other hand, I'll be sure not to make the same mistake I made with my first cat, which disappeared after six months with me. I think I fed and cared for him too well, and some starving soul captured him.

This little corner of Niger gives us faith as a few clouds pass over. That gives us hope. But hope is not long in staying, and often deserts us without even shedding a tear. Inch' Allah! In a few days or weeks, the first rains will fall on our dusty land and provide months of growth before the cycle of oppressive heat begins again!

My dear friends!

On behalf of Niger, thank you for having taken the time to read my newsletter, for your attention, and for hoping along with me for the street children and child-mothers in Zinder!

Thank you for your kind words, your thoughts that warm my heart (even warmer than it is now, is that possible?), and for the many acts of kindness toward the children in Zinder.

Enjoy your summer wherever you are; be safe!

With friendship and good thoughts from Zinder; smiles of gratitude and joy from the school children!

Sanou!

Isabelle

Zinder Niger, June 17, 2013

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“Let your dream devour your Life,
lest your Life devour your dream.” Dalai Lama