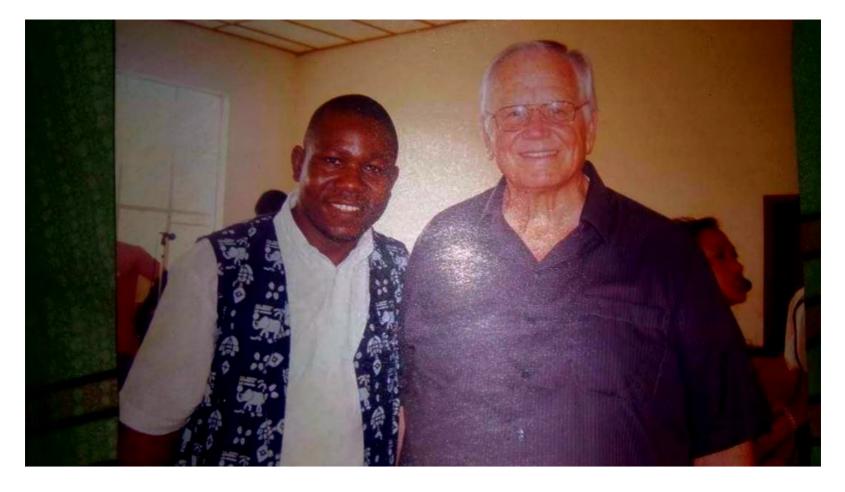


Those who work for God's Kingdom (translated from Zarma)





Dear friends,

At the start of this newsletter we want to honor Loren Cunningham, the man who founded YWAM. He passed away on October 6, 2023 at the age of 88. Till the very end of his earthly life he remained actively involved with the ongoing work of YWAM world wide. He leaves behind an incredible legacy and will be remembered for his passion for the work, his humility and how to others he was "an inspiration, a model, a teacher, a mentor, a visionary, a leader, an encourager, a friend", as David Hamilton (one of Loren's close friends and collaborators) wrote. Loren Cunningham was a pioneer and, "a disruptive innovator, a cutting-edge thinker, a globally-aware futurist, and a paradigm-shifting leader" (D. Hamilton). Even if Loren continued to be deeply involved with the YWAM work till very recently, he never made the work dependend on him. And so, YWAM and its worldwide work will continue, but Loren and everything he represented, will be missed. Our thoughts are in particular also with his wife, Darlene, and his children and grand children.

In what follows in this newsletter we predominantly write about the prevailing situation in the country and how this has been influencing our daily lives. However, at the same time we continue the work and we include a brief overview of what has keeping us busy at the end of the letter.

"Loren Cunningham was an inspiration, a model, a teacher, a mentor, a visionary, a leader, an encourager, a friend" "Loren Cunningham was a disruptive innovator, a cutting-edge thinker, a globally-aware futurist, and a paradigm-shifting leader"

Jeannette tells how they are doing as a family in Niger in these turbulent times.



Dear friends,

On July 26 we were all going about our daily business while hearing rumours of a putsch and wondering what exactly was happening, because everything seemed to be very normal. Late afternoon, at the moment that various messages and other news indicated that indeed something like a putsch seemed to have happened, I also received a phone call from the Dutch embassy to check whether we were actually in Niger and if we were still living at the place they had in their records. This clearly indicated that the situation was being taken very seriously by the international community. Nevertheless, for us it continued to be rather unreal, because in our neighbourhood everything was just as quiet as always.

Reactions

During the following days the situation unravelled and people started reacting. Mostly these reactions have been peaceful. There were only few demonstrations at very specific locations where properties were destroyed or attempted to be destroyed by certain groups of people participating in these demonstrations. One of these demonstrations was in front of the French embassy where anti-French feelings were aired loud and clearly.

European countries as well as several others decided to advise their citizens to leave Niger. As a consequence many organisations told their people to follow this advice and leave. So the international community (in particular in Niamey) has been significantly reduced in size for now. But, going around town I have not at any moment felt threatened. And I've heard the same from our colleagues from the SIM who also continue to be here for the most part (except for those who had left Niger for their holidays before the putsch, and of whom many are now waiting for the airspace to open up again to be able to return). Of course, we continue to be careful and avoid (for example) going out when a demonstration has been announced. Nevertheless, on the ground here things are peaceful enough (though not without tensions) and at this moment the main challenges the country is facing in relation with the situation, are sanctions imposed by a part of the international community as a result of the putsch.

Shortages are not too bad

One of the consequences, for example, is that the country receives much less electricity. So each day here in Niamey we deal with so called rolling power cuts (while certain neighbourhoods have power, others don't, and after a couple of hours this switches). But thus far our power is still more on than off. And for power cuts after dark we are very grateful for our small generator. It's still rainy season and therefore not too hot, so we avoid using it during the day because running a generator is quite costly.

For now we have not experienced shortages for food or other household necessities. In the local markets prices of certain foods like millet, corn, beans, rice and oil have gone up. Partly that always happens during this period before the produce from the new harvest becomes available, but partly it is also in relation with the present situation of the border closures. However, we continue to be hopeful that this situation will be resolved before too long.

Starts school year

The part of our daily lives that has been significantly impacted is the start of school for Caleb and Phoebé. As I mentioned above, there is a number of people that were preparing to come back to Niger when the border closure intervened. So, there are teachers that have not yet been able to come or come back, other school staff members, students. School was supposed to start on August 16. At first this was pushed back to September 4, but with all the uncertainty it has been quite a roller-coaster of trying to figure out what would be the best course of action. As the situation stands at present (August 20), it has been decided to start high school during the first week of September. But during the first semester they will be using online classes. A prospect that Caleb is not enjoying. He has had some experiences with online classes already and it's a form of education he struggles with. It's a good thing he has workout equipment at home for this year (borrowed from his sports teacher who is on home assignment). That will help him put his mind to something else than online classes. And, of course, it's also a real bummer that this happens during his last year of high school. We certainly hope that second semester will be (more) normal. For Kindergarten through to middle school the start of school has been postponed till some time in October. For Phoebé this means that she will have to find ways to keep herself busy for several more weeks.

Blaise in France

The border closure also impacted our family in another way. Blaise and Boureima, one of the other YWAM team members here, had travelled to France to participate in the bi-annual conference for YWAM North-Africa. The putsch happened while they were there, so they could not travel back when they were supposed to at the end of the conference. When it was announced that the borders would reopen on August 5, the travel agent worked on finding a place for Blaise and Boureima. They got new tickets for August 8. But on August 6 the borders were closed again. At that point however, the airline told them that the first part of the trip to Casablanca was maintained, only the second part to Niamey was cancelled. This meant that they had to travel to Casablanca and from there decide what would be the best option. Fortunately there are some friends in Casablanca where Blaise and Boureima could stay. They decided that the best option was to change their destination to Cotonou (in Benin), but there were no places available before next Sunday (August 13). A friend who lives in Lome (Togo) told Blaise that he would come and pick them up in Cotonou to drive them to the border with Niger. On the Niger side Boureima's brother was going to drive to the border to pick them up and drive them back to Niamey. They had to cross the border on foot, so they got a bit of exercise on the way, but at least it was possible (a good thing though that there were teenagers around making use of the opportunity to earn a bit of money by helping carry the luggage). They left Cotonou on Tuesday morning and arrived in Niamey in the early hours of Wednesday.

How further

In other ways we continue our daily lives quite normal; working on the renewal of projects, continuing to work on some details for the transition of the school in Maradi to Association Cornerstone, starting to think about preparations for the new school year at Training Centre Caleb, etc.

And as for the rest, we will say: to be continued, and we pray and hope that it will be with good news!



The good news, the challenges and our work



The last time I wrote I finished by saying that the story of how things were going in Niger following the coup, was to be continued and hopefully with good news. Well, we're very glad that we can indeed share some good news about the situation, even if challenges persist too.

The good news

Throughout the situation in the country and in Niamey has remained calm and without chaos, even when demonstrations took place. Driving around Niamey there is hardly anything that is different from before. The only things outwardly noticeable are the abundance of small Nigerien flags (the ones that can be stuck to the windscreen of the car) that are being sold by ambulant sellers mostly on the intersections in town and the occasional vehicle adorned with the Nigerien flag. Other than that everything is open in town, there is a new government in place and at work, schools started normally on Monday October 2 in accordance with the start of our school year and all around us in our neighborhood people continue the construction of their houses. The airspace was opened up again for commercial flights a few weeks ago and a good number of people who expected to return to Niger in August have now returned or will be returning soon. At Sahel Academy the lite-program for grades K-8 finished on October 12. They are on October break now and after the break everything seems to be pointed in the right direction to be able to start the normal program again. The high-school students will continue their online classes till the end of the semester, but also with the possibility of more in the classroom input.

The challenges

Despite all this 'normalcy' there are challenges too. The main issue is the political situation at the international level. Since the new government continues to stand firm on the position it has taken, the international sanctions that were decided upon remain in place. In practice this means (without being exhaustive) that the land borders with Benin and Nigeria are still closed, making importation and exportation of goods much more challenging and resulting a.o. in a further increase of prices and the unavailability of certain goods (but no worries, our family continues to have more than enough to eat). It also means that access to money is less and the country continues to have less electricity with as consequence structural power cuts. This is not the place to go into detail about the how and why of the situation. Suffice it to say that amid the normalcy, our everyday lives have become a tad more challenging, and we continue to pray for the socio-economic and political situation of our country, its government and the restoration of international relationships.

Our work

All along our work has basically continued as usual. But since several of our activities are dealing with education, those activities were slow till the start of the new school year.

I, Jeannette, continue to be in touch with both the farm manager and the health trainer on a weekly basis and do the necessary work for the bookkeeping and administration. This year the project plan for Sowing Seeds of Change in the Sahel needed to be renewed. That involved organizing an external evaluation, writing up an evaluation as the project manager and develop a new project plan. I finished this proces during the first part of September and submitted it for approval to SIM Niger and subsequently it will go to SIM International. At the same time I worked on developing a new project proposal for the part of JEMED's work that is supported by Tearfund UK, as well as finishing the report for the project we ran during 2022-2023. Now that all that is done I can focus again on the more practical side of the work. Since I was in Maradi in June I have not been back again with the uncertainty of the situation. But I hope to be able to go there again around early November.

Blaise has been busy preparing the new school year at Training Centre Caleb. Beside coaching Sunday, the centre's manager, by phone, he also went to Maradi late September for a week to see how things are on the ground and to have face to face meetings.



Regular online meetings or calls with



various groups to discuss the ongoing work as part of his involvement with the international YWAM leadership for North Africa and also the international King's Kids leadership, take up quite some of his time as well. More recently he has gotten involved with a Christian private Training Institution (bachelors and masters level studies) in the area of business training. The institution continues to be under development and Blaise has been asked to head up the module of leadership. And, of course, there are his ongoing responsabilities

as the director for YWAM-Niger, the radio work he is involved in and (not to forget!) with the local football competition.

Now that the activities at Training Centre Caleb, the Discipleship Training School and AECM are starting up again, we hope to be able to share some more 'on the ground' stories in the months ahead.

Fun fact: our weather today (16 October) is very sunny and 34°C inside.

To thank for:

- That calm and order have continued to be our everyday experience
- That the school year started normally at the beginning of the month of October
- The staff at Training Centre Caleb and their faithful work year after year

To pray for:

- Wisdom on all fronts for the new leadership and government of Niger
- Provision of sufficient resources for the work we're involved in (in particular Training Centre Caleb and the King's Kids activities)
- Flexibility and adaptability for students and staff at Sahel Academy for whom the working environment is very different yet again this year

With our love, Blaise, Jeannette, Caleb and Phoebé

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