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Africare

A private, nonprofit organization providing
development and emergency assistance to
Africa since 1970

October 29, 2007

To the Family of Oumarou Youssoufou,

The news of Ambassador Youssoufou's death was as a sharp knife piercing my heart's septum. Not since the deaths of my parents had I felt such pain. Though he was not a blood brother he was, in fact, a brother in every other sense of the word.

Oumarou was indeed a man for all seasons. His philosophy and goals for Africa were very clear:

He wanted ethnic groups to stop killing each other.

He wanted peoples of different cultures, religions, and races to work together; he believed in diversity.

He believed that men and women of good will could solve most problems, however complicated.

With this as philosophical background, Oumarou accepted his nomination to the United Nations as the Ambassador from the OAU. There he earned an outstanding reputation for facilitating discourse among or between peoples of different accords: all seeking the common good.

He came to the United Nations with plenty of experience. Years earlier, he had been deeply involved with solving border disputes with Chad, Burkina Faso and the Ivory Coast as well as the Niger/Nigeria Mixed River Commission. The late President of Niger, Hamani Diori, who inspired Youssoufou's passion for development, sent him on numerous Special Presidential Missions. President Diori had recognized in him, a talented diplomat with enormous personal aplomb and wisdom beyond his years.

Once, under President Diori's direction, I traveled with Ambassador Youssoufou to Kuwait, Tehran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Dubai, and Abu Dhabi. We were in search of assistance to help with the creation and funding of a Washington based Africare that would focus on developing nations in Africa the resources and efforts of African Americans and others of similar persuasion. Thus, much of the success Africare achieved

in Africa over the past forty years is attributable to the support and advice of Ambassador Youssoufou.

When serving as his nation's Ambassador to the United States of America, we traveled to New York City in search of funding for Africare. We held meetings with officers of major corporations, religious organizations and private foundations. His innate fundraising skills emerged and he used to his advantage his tall demeanor, his striking toss of the flowing white or blue gowns and his impeccable English. Those who met him became enamored with him and were convinced of the authenticity of our cause. We were not always successful, but rarely would our request be met with a "no." Ambassador Youssoufou was respectfully persistent, a special talent in the fundraising business.

There are countless ways that Ambassador Youssoufou can be remembered. Many are recounted here. None however had the impact, I believe, on both the Niger people and the Peace Corps as did his unique service on behalf of President Diori as his Personal Assistant. Here is where initially our lives connected.

In the early seventies, Sargent Shriver, Peace Corps Director transferred me from Togo to Niger. I was reluctant to go. Rumor had it that the weather was oppressive with 100+ degree temperatures, and volunteers lived in distant villages great distances from the capitol, Niamey. Moreover, some volunteers had resigned and others were threatening to do so. Sarge Shriver made it quite clear, "Niger or nothing!" My acceptance of the transfer was the beginning of one of the greatest experiences of my life. I loved the assignment as I met warm, genuine, and hospitable people. Among them, I met Youssoufou.

It was Youssoufou's assignment to act as liaison between the Peace Corps Niger Director and the Niger Government. Introductions were made with the appropriate government offices with direct interface with the Peace Corps Niger projects. We subsequently met with each remaining volunteer and learned, with few exceptions, that there were mismatches between volunteers and jobs. These were rectified quickly by the masterful interventions by Youssoufou.

Peace Corps Niger became one of the best Peace Corps programs throughout the world. Frequently Sargent Shriver singled out the work of these Peace Corps Niger volunteers in his conversations and speeches. Thanks to Oumarou, President Diori learned English as a second language from one of our Peace Corps volunteers.

Oumarou's contributions to Peace Corps Niger and Africare were supported and encouraged by his loving and gracious wife, Rahila. His family was important to him and the pride he had in and for his family was evident in his constant references to them. To them we owe sincere appreciation for allowing your husband and father to work so diligently and creatively outside the home. Accept our condolences; cherish your memories. Know that the lives and institutions touched by this remarkable husband and father continue his vision of a continent unified and strengthened by a common destiny based on a commitment to the hopes and dreams of all its ethnic groups.

May your hearts mend and your memories stay strong.

C. Payne Lucas

C. Payne Lucas, Sr.
Africare Board of Directors