

## **WRD 2014: Niger Government hails UNHCR for its support,**

In his message on the occasion of the World Refugee Day 2014, the Minister the of Interior, Public Security, Decentralization, Customary and Religious Affairs, Hassoumi Massoudou, speaking on behalf of the President of the Republic HE. Mahamadou Issoufou, the Government and the people of Niger, hailed and acknowledged UNHCR for supporting Niger in its efforts at protecting, assisting and seeking durable solutions to the problems of refugees hosted on its territory. The minister said the choice of the theme "*One family away from home, is too many*" challenges states to seek all ways and means in preventing conflicts and ensuring better protection for refugees. According to the minister, Niger has hosted refugees from neighboring countries within the last twenty years regretting as it were that "the global phenomenon does not seem to stop, especially with the many hotbeds of tension around the world which are forcing millions of people to abandon everything and go into exile.

On the same occasion, the UNHCR Deputy Representative in Niger, Kofi Dodzi Adossi expressed the gratitude of UNHCR to the Government and people of Niger for their solidarity and generosity in hosting refugees from Mali, Nigeria and other countries. He reiterated UNHCR's commitment to continue to support the Niger authorities to provide protection and assistance to refugees. Since 2012, Niger hosts approximately 50,000 Malian refugees in three camps Mangaize, Tabareybarey and Abala (Tillaberi), the two "refugee hosting areas" of Intikane and Tazalit (Tahoua) and urban areas of Niamey and Ayorou. Niger's Diffa region is also home to more than 50,000 displaced people from Nigeria since the declaration of a state of emergency in May 2013 in the north-east of the country.

### **The thrill of activities**

The influx of refugees into Niger in 2012 brought along a dynamic UNHCR Branch Office in Niamey with its unending upbeat innovations such as the refugee hosting areas and the One stop shop refugee Centre( Guichet Ungque as it is known in its French appellation). Refugee day 2014 was another occasion for an imaginative programme of activities that kept awoken Niamey to a lively and eventful show at the STIN public school where urban refugees thrilled the public with many activities. There were four refugee dance groups, among them, the Malian (Tuaregs) Takamba group that held the public spellbound including the US Chargé d'affaires to Niger, Richard Bell, the Malian Ambassador to Niger and UNHCR Deputy Representative to Niger, Koffi Adossi. It was indeed a lineup of dances drawn from various countries of origin of the refugees, including Ndombolo from the DRC. Another significant item on the Day's agenda was a sketch by refugee youths aimed at sensitizing refugees and the public at large on the nefarious effects of forced and early marriages at the detriment of education for young girls. The youths were trained in the production of sketches and drama as a tool for conflict resolution among refugees in the urban areas and the camps by UNHCR's partner Search for Common Grounds (SFCG). A traditional fashion parade and much more was also part of the show.

Earlier in the day, a press conference was held at the Refugee One-Stop-Shop Centre. The Deputy Representative assisted by the External Relations Officer Amaria Belaskri informed journalists on the history of World Refugee Day which was chosen to coincide with Africa Refugee Day to commemorate the coming into effect of the ground-breaking convention of the African refugee convention. They presented the evolving refugee situation in Niger, before fielding questions from the women and men of the press in Niger. The UNHCR video "The

Nation of the Displaced” was also screened. The press conference provided an opportunity for journalists to update their knowledge on the current refugee situation in Niger and UNHCR’s strategy for protection and assistance. For instance, journalists were concerned about the turn of events regarding the new arrivals of Malian refugees whose recent increasing numbers in Agando area of Tahoua the region has taken an unprecedented rate (as June 23, 2014: 2893 persons of 385 households). Speaking at the press conference, the president of the refugee committee in Niamey expressed satisfaction with the quality of service and the ease with which refugees are now served in the city thanks to the institution of the One-Stop-Shop Centre. He also responded to a journalist’s question about the shortcomings of assistance, and insisted on food in particular. Prior to the D-day June 20, many run-up activities were organized for the refugees by the UNHCR and its partners. A 2 km race and a football tournament involving Niger youths and refugees were organized and sponsored by a local telephone service provider. In the run-up, refugees also organized a collective blood donation to the National Centre for Blood Transfusion, as a token of recognition to the people of Niger who generously received them, and a symbolic gesture to help other people in need. Similar activities were held in UNHCR field offices and other refugee locations in the country.