NIGER

LOCATION

The Republic of Niger is located in West Africa. It is located along the border between the Sahara and Sub-Saharan regions. Niger borders seven countries on all sides. It borders Nigeria and Benin to the south, Burkina Faso and Mali to the west, Algeria and Libya to the north and Chad to the east.

GEOGRAPHY

Niger’s geographical coordinates are latitude 16°N and longitude 8°E. It’s area is 1,267,000 square kilometers (489,000sq.mi.) of which 300 square kilometers (115sq.mi.) is water. The lowest point is the Niger River, with an elevation of 200 meters (722ft.). The highest point is Monts Bagzane at 2,022 meters (6,634ft.). It is the worlds twenty-second largest country.

CLIMATE

Niger’s subtropical climate is mainly very hot and dry, with much desert area. In the extreme south, there is a tropical climate on the edges of the Niger River basin. The terrain is predominantly desert plains and sand dunes, with flat to rolling savannah in the south and hills in the north. Because of the weather, there are some times of year you should definitely not go. Avoid April and May, when it is the hottest, driest and dustiest. Avoid rainy season, June through September; October might be the worst month because it is hot and humid. November
through February are the coolest months (nights are generally quite pleasant), although the
harmattan (an arid trade wind) blows the sand around, particularly in November.

**POPULATION**

The population of Niger in July 2005 was estimated at 13,957,000 people. The highest
ethnic groups in Niger are Hausa, who also constitute the major ethnic group in northern
Nigeria and the Djerma-Songhai. Both groups along with the Gourmantche, are sedentary
farmers who live in the arable, southern tier of the country. The remainder of Nigerians are
nomadic or semi-nomadic livestock-raising peoples. They are Fulani, Tuareg, Kanuri, Arabs and
Toubou. With rapidly growing populations and the consequent competition for natural
resources, lifestyles of agriculturalists and livestock herders have become increasingly into
conflict in the recent years. Niger has a high child mortality rate (deaths of children between
the ages of 1 to 4). It is 248 per ever 1,000. It is due to poor health conditions and inadequate
nutrition. Niger has the highest infant mortality rate and fertility rate. The fertility rate is 7.2
births per woman. This mean that nearly half (49%) of the Nigerian population is under age 15.

**CURRENCY**

The official currency of Niger is the CFA Frac. CFA is Communaute Financiere Africanine.

**EDUCATION**

Schooling in Niger takes students from primary to lycée (high school) level. A primary
school (from French école primaire[1]) is an institution where children receive the first stage of
compulsory education known as primary or elementary education. Lycée La Fontaine in
Niamey, Niger, is a French-speaking international school attached to the French Embassy. It was established in 1962. In 2005 it had some 785 students (42% French, 39% local citizens, and 19% from other countries) and 53 educators.

**LANGUAGE**

The official language is French, inherited from the colonial period. Depending on how they are counted, Niger has between 8 and 20 indigenous languages. The discrepancy comes from the fact that several are closely related, and can be grouped together or considered apart. It is spoken mainly as a second or additional language by a relatively small percentage of the population. The usual categorization of languages of Niger mentions eight national languages. They are Hausa, Zarma & Songhai, Tamajeq, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Colloquial Arabic, Gurmantche and Toubou.

**RELIGION**

The majority of Niger’s population practices Islam (80%), while 15% practice Animism, and 5% practice Protestant and Catholic Christianity. The Nigerian culture is mainly based on a traditional Muslim culture.

**AGRICULTURE**

Niger's agricultural and livestock sectors are the mainstay of all but 18% of the population. Fourteen percent of Niger’s GDP is generated by livestock production—camels,
goats, sheep, and cattle—said to support 29% of the population. The 15% of Niger's land that is arable is found mainly along its southern borders with Nigeria, Benin and Burkina Faso. Rainfall varies and when insufficient, Niger has difficulty feeding its population and must rely on grain purchases and food aid to meet food requirements. Although the rains in 2000 were not good, the three following years brought relatively plentiful and well-distributed rainfall, resulting in good harvests. Millet, sorghum, and cassava are Niger's principal rain-fed subsistence crops. Cowpeas and onions are grown for commercial export, as are limited quantities of garlic, peppers, gum arabic, and sesame seeds.

TRADE

Uranium is Niger's largest export. Foreign exchange earnings from livestock, although difficult to quantify, are second. Actual exports far exceed official statistics, which often fail to detect large herds of animals informally crossing into Nigeria. Some hides and skins are exported, and some are transformed into handicrafts.

The persistent uranium price slump has brought lower revenues for Niger's uranium sector, although uranium still provides 72% of national export proceeds. The nation enjoyed substantial export earnings and rapid economic growth during the 1960s and 1970s after the opening of two large uranium mines near the northern town of Arlit. When the uranium-led boom ended in the early 1980s, the economy stagnated, and new investment since then has been limited. Niger's two uranium mines—SOMAIR's open pit mine and COMINAK's underground mine—are owned by a French-led consortium and operated by French interests. However, as of 2007, many licenses have been given to other companies from countries such as Canada and Australia in order to exploit new deposits.
Exploitable deposits of gold are known to exist in Niger in the region between the Niger River and the border with Burkina Faso. On October 5, 2004, President Tandja announced the official opening of the Samira Hill Gold Mine in the region of Tera and the first Nigerien gold ingot was presented to him. This marked a historical moment for Niger as the Samira Hill Gold Mine represents the first commercial gold production in the country. Samira Hill is owned by a company called SML (Societe des Mines du Liptako) which is a joint venture between a Moroccan company, Societe Semafo, and a Canadian company, Etruscan Resources. Both companies own 80% (40% - 40%) of SML and the Government of Niger 20%. The first year’s production is predicted to be 135,000 troy ounces (4,200 kg; 9,260 lb avoirdupois) of gold at a cash value of USD 177 per ounce ($5.70/g). The mine reserves for the Samira Hill mine total 10,073,626 tons at an average grade of 2.21 grams per ton from which 618,000 troy ounces (19,200 kg; 42,400 lb) will be recovered over a 6 year mine life. SML believes to have a number of significant gold deposits within what is now recognized as the gold belt known as the "Samira Horizon", which is located between Gotheye and Ouallam.

Substantial deposits of phosphates, coal, iron, limestone, and gypsum also have been found in Niger. Niger has oil potential. In 1992, the Djado permit was awarded to Hunt Oil, and in 2003, the Tenere permit was awarded to the China National Petroleum Company. An ExxonMobil-Petronas joint venture now holds the sole rights to the Agadem block, north of Lake Chad, and oil exploration is on going. The parastatal SONICHAR (Societe Nigerienne de Charbon) in Tchirozerine (north of Agadez) extracts coal from an open pit and fuels an electricity generating plant that supplies energy to the uranium mines. There are additional coal deposits to the south and west that are of a higher quality and may be exploitable.
The economic competitiveness created by the January 1994 devaluation of the Communaute Financiere Africaine (CFA) franc contributed to an annual average economic growth of 3.5% throughout the mid-1990s. The economy stagnated due to the sharp reduction in foreign aid in 1999 (which gradually resumed in 2000) and poor rains in 2000. Reflecting the importance of the agricultural sector, the return of good rains was the primary factor underlying economic growth of 5.1% in 2000, 3.1% in 2001, 6.0% in 2002, and 3.0% in 2003.

In recent years, the Government of Niger drafted revisions to the investment code (1997 and 2000), petroleum code (1992), and mining code (1993), all with attractive terms for investors. The present government actively seeks foreign private investment and considers it key to restoring economic growth and development. With the assistance of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it has undertaken a concerted effort to revitalize the private sector.

HISTORY

While most of what is now Niger has been influenced by the inhospitable Sahara desert in the last two thousand years, five thousand years ago north of the country was fertile grasslands. Populations of pastoralists have left paintings of abundant wildlife, domesticated animals, chariots, and a complex culture that dates back to at least 10,000 BCE.

One of the first empires in what is now Niger was the Songhai Empire. During recent centuries, the nomadic Tuareg formed large confederations, pushed southward, and, siding with various Hausa states, clashed with the Fulani Empire of Sokoto, which had gained control of much of the Hausa territory in the late 18th century.
In the 19th century, contact with the West began when the first European explorers—notably Mungo Park (British) and Heinrich Barth (German)—explored the area, searching for the source of the Niger River. Although French efforts at "pacification" began before 1900, dissident ethnic groups, especially the desert Tuareg, were not fully subdued until 1922, when Niger became a French colony.

Niger's colonial history and development parallel that of other French West African territories. France administered its West African colonies through a governor general in Dakar, Senegal, and governors in the individual territories, including Niger. In addition to conferring French citizenship on the inhabitants of the territories, the 1946 French constitution provided for decentralization of power and limited participation in political life for local advisory assemblies.