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United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors
Office of Inspector General

Report of Inspection

Embassy Niamey,
Niger

Report Number ISP-I-09-22A, March 2009

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PURPOSE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE INSPECTION

This inspection was conducted in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspections, as issued by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspector's Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General for the U.S. Department of State (Department) and the Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG).

PURPOSE

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chairman of the BBG, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and the BBG. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved; whether U.S. interests are being accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; whether instances of fraud, waste, or abuse exist; and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

METHODOLOGY

In conducting this inspection, the inspectors: reviewed pertinent records; as appropriate, circulated, reviewed, and compiled the results of survey instruments; conducted on-site interviews; and reviewed the substance of the report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, organizations, and activities affected by this review.



**United States Department of State
and the Broadcasting Board of Governors**

Office of Inspector General

PREFACE

This report was prepared by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) pursuant to the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended. It is one of a series of audit, inspection, investigative, and special reports prepared by OIG periodically as part of its responsibility to promote effective management, accountability and positive change in the Department of State and the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

This report is the result of an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the office, post, or function under review. It is based on interviews with employees and officials of relevant agencies and institutions, direct observation, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations therein have been developed on the basis of the best knowledge available to the OIG and, as appropriate, have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. It is my hope that these recommendations will result in more effective, efficient, and/or economical operations.

I express my appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "H. W. Geisel".

Harold W. Geisel
Acting Inspector General

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KEY JUDGMENTS

The Ambassador and the deputy chief of mission (DCM) provide strong, collaborative, and inclusive executive direction to all mission elements, enabling the Embassy to achieve its primary objectives of combating terrorism, advancing regional stability, promoting democracy, and improving living standards. The Ambassador's calm, competent leadership, management guidance, and oversight ensure good internal controls, security awareness, and a positive work ethic resulting in high morale in an isolated, underdeveloped country.

Coordination and cooperation is very good between embassy officers and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) personal service contractors (PSC) who administer over \$122 million in 3-year U.S. assistance money. USAID administers the Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) Threshold Country Program (\$23 million) and manages the USAID Peace through Development programs (\$21 million) and food security programs (\$65 million).

There should be no further delays in a major embassy compound renovation project, scheduled for 2002 but delayed until 2010, that would address substandard electrical systems, (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) and safety hazards throughout the compound. The renovation of the compound is necessary for proper embassy operations and safety.

The public affairs section's (PAS) public access cultural center, which includes a self-sustaining English-teaching program and a circulating library, gives the mission excellent access to important audiences in Niger.

The inspection took place in Washington, DC, between September 15 and October 3, 2008, and in Niamey, Niger, between November 5 and 18, 2008. Ambassador Pamela E. Bridgewater (team leader), Tom Carmichael (deputy team leader), Betsy Anderson, Brian Blood, Ronda Capeles, Craig Cheney, Andrea Leopold, George Rivers, and Richard Sypher conducted the inspection.

CONTEXT

Niger is one of the least developed countries in the world with a population of 14 million people and the highest population growth rate (3.4 percent) of any nation. Despite its remote location and poor infrastructure, the Government of Niger



has partnered with the United States in the Global War on Terror and supports U.S. efforts to promote regional stability with strategic neighbors Algeria, Nigeria, Chad, and Libya. The 98 percent Muslim population practices a tolerant Sufi-Islam.

Relations between the Governments of Niger and the United States are generally friendly. There is some strain now due to U.S. concern with the Government of Niger over human rights issues related to the conflict north of Agadez between the Nigerien Army and Tuareg factions who are pressing for more equitable distribution of oil and uranium revenues. The government-imposed “State of Alert” limits the ability of residents, nongovernmental organizations, and the press to engage in routine activities there. Embassy Niamey suspended travel to that area, where there is a great need for development engagement, because of landmines, banditry, and insecurity. An isolated case of human rights abuse by a unit in the Nigerien army in the conflict zone led the U.S. Government to scale down military-to-military assistance until the perpetrators are brought to justice.

Niger is scheduled to hold presidential and legislative elections late in 2009, and the United States plans to help underpin this fledgling democracy by supporting election preparation and voter registration. There is concern that President Tandja might use unconstitutional or undemocratic means to enable him to seek a third term, undercutting the nation’s progress toward democracy. Moreover, President Tandja could use the ongoing northern conflict to rationalize postponing the 2009 elections.

U.S. foreign assistance focuses on enhancing economic and social development and ensuring democracy, good governance, and respect for human rights. The Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) is aimed at addressing youth alienation and expanding democratic governance. USAID, the Global Fund, Department of Defense, Peace Corps, and the new \$23 million MCC Country Threshold Program cooperate to maximize U.S. Government efforts to ensure food security, and to improve health, education, economic growth, and political stability.

Embassy Niamey staff include 31 direct-hire Americans and 417 locally employed (LE) staff. Mission agencies are the Department of State (Department), Department of Defense, Peace Corps, and a USAID field office. The Government of Niger presses continually for a full USAID mission, but this is unlikely. Embassy Niamey is located in a 1960s era compound that is due for a major rehabilitation in 2010.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTION

The Ambassador and the DCM provide strong and effective executive leadership to all agencies. This has been critical to realizing the primary mission objectives to strengthen democratic governance, promote human rights, combat terrorism, advance regional stability, and improve living standards. These objectives are in keeping with U.S. national security objectives. The Ambassador is a senior Foreign Service officer who arrived in Niamey in April 2006. She has consular expertise and prior experience in Africa and as consul general in Montreal. The new DCM arrived in August 2008 after several tours in Africa and a tour in Baghdad. He also has considerable economic expertise. He meets weekly with the management officer, the regional security officer (RSO), the economic/consular officer (conducting visa oversight), and the public affairs officer (PAO).

Using a collaborative and inclusive management style, the Ambassador guides staff to ensure that there are proper internal controls. She listens actively to the country team and LE staff, and provides counsel and direction. Interagency relations are excellent, and there is a strong team work ethic among mission personnel. The development of the Mission Strategic Plan (MSP) was fully participative under the overall direction of the former DCM. The country team was actively engaged throughout the process, and goal papers were consistent with the Bureau of African Affairs (AF) and Department strategic plans.

The Ambassador oversees and coordinates foreign assistance and maximizes the effectiveness of expenditures and impact of programs. The positive, collegial tone with which the Ambassador engages all agencies' personnel enables the mission to use financial resources and personnel to best meet mission objectives.

There is effective coordination with the Department of Defense to manage local operations in support of outreach projects primarily implemented with TSTCP funding. The Ambassador's appropriate use of the National Security Decision Directive-38 process and chief of mission authority has resulted in successful military engagement to realize mission goals.

President Tandja, the Foreign Minister, and other senior government officials and key opinion makers accord the Ambassador frequent and easy access. There are regular discussions with the host government on issues related to food security, education, health, and the recently signed \$23 million MCC Country Threshold

Program. Embassy Niamey's ongoing dialogue with the government also addresses the need to prosecute perpetrators of human rights violations and to protect press freedom so that full bilateral program cooperation, including military-to-military cooperation, can be reestablished.

Setting a positive example by her actions, the Ambassador is diligent in supporting the Embassy's security programs and policies regarding staff, facilities, and classified information. She regularly reviews the emergency preparedness procedures to ensure that the warden system is current.

The Ambassador exhibits personal interest in and gives attention to Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO). There are no EEO issues. The Ambassador includes all elements of the mission in representational events, including entry-level officers, Peace Corps volunteers, and the Marine security guards. Morale is high among all staff, a corollary of the Ambassador's open door policy and transparent engagement.

PAS receives outstanding support from the Ambassador, who knows and values public diplomacy. The Ambassador speaks French and studies Hausa, the most widely spoken language in Niger, recognizing that using local languages enhances the Embassy's ability to articulate U.S. policies effectively and clearly. Her extemporaneous remarks and speeches from written texts are equally persuasive. She participates generously in events sponsored by the PAS. The American Cultural Center's program on the U.S. electoral process held on the eve of the 2008 U.S. presidential election showcased the Ambassador's ease with the local electronic and print media in fielding questions in French. The Ambassador participates in wide-ranging public affairs media events to highlight programs to promote food security, youth engagement, initiatives on HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, and girls' education. Many of these programs are sponsored by USAID and the Department of Defense in collaboration with local partners.

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

FOREIGN ASSISTANCE COORDINATION

The Ambassador and DCM closely monitor and coordinate the various foreign assistance programs in Niger. The heads of the mission's two assistance agencies, USAID and the Peace Corps, actively participate in the country team and embassy-wide activities. The senior USAID representative represents the Embassy at in-country donor coordination meetings.

USAID closed its mission in Niger in 1998. In 2006, however, it placed a contract employee in Niamey primarily to administer programs under the TSCTP. At the time of the inspection, the USAID section consisted of two U.S. PSCs, one eligible family member specialist, and two LE staff. Recruitment is underway for another PSC and another LE staff member. In addition to the TSCTP program, USAID now also manages the MCC's Threshold Country Program, a large food security program and a number of smaller projects. All of the USAID-managed programs total approximately \$122 million over a three-year period. USAID contracts nongovernmental organizations to implement these programs.

The TSCTP element of the assistance program is referred to as Peace through Development and is a three-year, \$21 million program whose key activities are local governance development and youth training programs. The MCC Threshold Country Program agreement, signed in March 2008, is a 3-year \$23 million program. Its principal focus is on improving girls' primary education, but it also includes programs on reducing corruption, land rights, and improving the business environment. The food security program totals approximately \$65 million over 3 years. The food programs include the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food for Progress programs, USAID's PL-480 and Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance projects, and various other programs. A number of additional programs, including health and child survival and regional programs managed by USAID's regional office in Accra, Ghana, make up the rest of the funds.

The Peace Corps program in Niger has 125 volunteers spread widely throughout the southern, most populous part of the country. Their programs include health, education, agriculture, natural resource management, and community development.

The Ambassador's Special Self-Help fund sponsored grants of \$75,000, and the Democracy and Human Rights fund sponsored grants to local organizations of \$70,000 in FY 2007. The regional USAID office in Accra signs grants from both funds. A senior Niamey LE staff member manages the grants well. Peace Corps volunteers also support and informally monitor the implementation of many of these projects. During FY 2007 the Special Self-Help fund financed 10 activities in 37 communities, primarily in the basic health and small community business development. The Democracy and Human Rights fund financed a number of projects focusing on illegal trafficking in persons, young girls' civic education, and entrepreneurship training for women.

The U.S. African Development Foundation has 12 community-based and export-focused projects in Niger with a current total commitment of \$1.7 million. Local nongovernmental organizations manage these projects.

The U.S. Government suspended most military assistance programs in Niger in mid-2008 because of human rights concerns. However, some Expanded International Military Education and Training is taking place, focusing on human rights and understanding the principle of civilian control of the military. Two Special Operations Command Europe military personnel work on democracy promotion projects, delivery of humanitarian supplies, and other projects with a 2-year budget of approximately \$1.2 million. Once the Government of Niger addresses U.S. human rights concerns, the U.S. Government may restart military programs such as the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance and Foreign Military Financing programs. The Ambassador and DCM have established effective oversight and coordination of these military activities.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

Embassy Niamey performs reporting and advocacy well. Officers share information widely within the Embassy, guidance from the Ambassador and the DCM is clear, and reporting priorities as outlined in a reporting, travel and representational plan are in accordance with the MSP. The Ambassador and DCM are Embassy Niamey's primary reporting officers.

The Government of Niger closely holds its decision-making authority, and the President and his principal ministers essentially maintain control over it. The Ambassador, through her meetings with these officials and other knowledgeable individuals, gathers information and often prepares her own reporting cables to Washington and other interested addressees. Similarly, the DCM presents most of the

demarches and monitors events within the country, preparing reports as appropriate. Most reporting is spot reporting, which is well-written, concise, and usually contains appropriate analytical comments. Washington agencies said reporting was generally adequate to their needs. The majority of reporting is by cable although a substantial amount is by e-mail. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) team raised the importance of readily retrievable chronological and subject files, and the executive office will implement new electronic record-keeping procedures.

A mid-level economic/consular officer, who intends soon to split her time evenly between consular and economic responsibilities, also provides reporting. Having arrived in Niamey only two months before the OIG inspection, however, she is currently spending the majority of her time ensuring that the consular section has well-established priorities, procedures, and internal controls. She recently completed a required trade report and a cable with a comprehensive review of infrastructure constraints in Niger requested by the U.S. International Trade Commission. She intends to increase the proportion of time she spends on economic issues as soon as the consular section is fully staffed, which should occur within weeks of the inspection.

The DCM also just arrived this summer. During the transition between the former and present DCMs, the officers maintained the level of mission's advocacy and reporting activities without interruption. The Embassy recently received a new entry-level political officer position. A first-tour officer will fill the position in April 2009, just in time to assist in covering mid-year local elections and year-end presidential elections. One political and one economic LE staff provide substantial research, contact, and drafting support.

In addition to the weekly country team meetings, the Ambassador chairs a weekly LE staff reporting meeting attended by the DCM, PAO, the USAID representative, and the economic/consular officer. The Ambassador's schedule and political and economic developments are discussed and, in particular, the LE staff's views are sought and considered. Discussion is open; follow-up guidance and/or instructions are given. This meeting is an effective means to keep all policy and program staff fully briefed on developments and reinforces the embassy team concept.

Matters relating to the environment, science, and technology are a low priority for the Embassy, given its limited resources. The Embassy addresses environmental issues tangentially in sector reports.

COMMERCIAL SUPPORT

Very few potential U.S. investors or business people visit Niamey, but when they do, the Ambassador and/or embassy officers brief them on Niger and the potential for doing business. Several U.S. oil companies were interested in exploration tracts in the north/central part of the country, but their interest waned as Tuareg-led conflict in the north of the country moved the Government of Niger to impose a “State of Alert” that effectively blocks all travel in that area. No major U.S. firms have representatives in Niger.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION

The RSO has excellent relations with host government law enforcement agencies, and their cooperation is very good. The RSOs are the only U.S. law enforcement officers at the Embassy.

The RSO is the coordinator for the Anti-Terrorism Assistance program funded by the Department’s Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism. In 2008 the RSO arranged two program-funded courses in Niamey: one on interdicting terrorist activities and another on airport security training. The cost of these two courses totaled approximately \$100,000. The Embassy vets participants in these and the Expanded International Military Education and Training programs in accordance with Leahy Amendment requirements.

PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Embassy Niamey has an active public diplomacy program that strategically harnesses synergies among its program elements to address effectively MSP goals. The PAS is housed 10 minutes from the chancery in its free-standing American Cultural Center, providing public access to a modest auditorium, circulating library, English-teaching classrooms, and a small English-language bookstore. Although the aging building has deficiencies addressed elsewhere in this report, the public affairs staff is experienced, energetic, and competent. It executes a full agenda of Department programs in and outside Niamey through frequent travel and in partnership with two American Corners. The Ambassador fully supports public diplomacy activities, and other mission agencies praise PAS media support for their assistance programs.

Program Management

PAS is fully integrated in the mission. The PAO emphasizes to his staff mission coordination and strategic planning following MSP program themes. He is a member of the country team and consults formally with the DCM each week and several times a week on an ad hoc basis. The PAO ensures his staff is properly trained for their work and as backups to their colleagues. Washington elements have expressed the desire for more program reporting, and the PAO is addressing these concerns. The PAO noted, however, that these and his management duties keep him in his office too often rather than outside the center nurturing contacts and participating in outreach programs.

Cultural Programming

PAS carries out cultural programs that effectively target MSP goals promoting democracy, a just society, and recognition of the elements of the common cultural heritage enjoyed by the United States and Niger. PAS has been carrying out speaker and training programs reflecting mission priorities, such as the rights of the disabled, women's rights, media rights and training, and achievements of the American Civil Rights Movement. For instance, the section coordinates Black History Month programs in Niamey and elsewhere and has initiated basketball tournaments named after Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. Seeking to expose Nigeriens to the American democratic system, PAS held an election night watch in the American Cultural Center auditorium, which a member of the OIG team attended and noted the educational value. During the inspection, PAS was finalizing the Office of International Information Programs Speaker Program for an American imam that would take him to several cities outside the capital. PAS was also planning a "Hip-Hop Caravan" of Nigerien musicians to travel throughout the country to highlight the need to fight corruption and promote tolerance among ethnic groups.

PAS Niamey carries out a well-managed agenda of the Department's basic exchange programs, including modest Fulbright, Humphrey, and International Visitor's Leadership Programs. Niger does not have a Fulbright Commission. Washington elements recently rewarded PAS Niamey's stewardship of the Fulbright Program by doubling its allotment from five to 10 grantees.

Cultural Center

The PAO's cooperation with the Office of International Information Programs regional information resource officer based in Dakar is excellent. Together, they have enhanced synergies among the American Cultural Center's core program assets and elements; a public access compound, a program auditorium, a circulating library with research capacity, and a self-sustaining English-teaching program.

The PAS English-teaching program gives the mission excellent contacts, as well as effectively promotes English at minimum cost. A Nigerien U.S.-trained English as a Second Language professional supervises a program of 24 English-language teachers providing the best training available in Niger to 750 students, including businessmen, nongovernmental organizations employees, government civilian and military officials, and other professionals. These groups are the Embassy's target audiences from which PAS can identify exchange and other program candidates. Tuition revenues support the core program and subsidize courses for other important audiences and individuals. For instance, PAS also provides individualized language programs to other mission elements' prime contacts — including government ministers. In addition, core English as a Second Language program revenues subsidize a teacher-training program that promises to build a cadre of Nigerien English-teaching professionals.

PAS and the information resource officer address their program elements strategically, working to draw the English-teaching students into the Rosa Parks Library, a modest French, English, and Arabic-language circulating library. They have patterned the library more closely after former U.S. Information Agency libraries than today's Information Resource Centers, creating an institution more suitable to Niger's poor technical infrastructure and educational level. The library's database access and research support make it the most technically capable research library in Niger. The information resource officer and PAO are working to professionalize library staff and direct it towards expanding its outreach programs. The library now has its own strategic program and book collection management plan.

American Corners

PAS has productive relations with its two American Corners in Agadez and Zinder, and with its soon-to-open American Corner in Maradi. The library staff manages administrative relations with the American Corners, providing training to the corners in their collection of audience numbers and other statistics that keeps PAS well informed of their activities. This solid management approach towards this

cooperation has given PAS Niamey credibility in requesting support for its American Corners and helped convince the Department of the utility of the new Maradi center to open in January 2009.

Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership

PAS has set up a good structure to manage the \$450,000 in TSCTP funds given to it in FY 2008, requesting that it be able to use some of the funding to hire a full-time Nigerien PSC to provide program oversight. In addition, PAS has a well-trained program assistant who works with the PSC on the TSCTP programs, as well as PAS's public diplomacy grants, to ensure adherence to U.S. Government procedures. The OIG team made small technical suggestions concerning grant monitoring that the program assistant quickly implemented. PAS uses the TSCTP program funding to work closely with major target institutions such as a journalism training institute, a national commission supporting peace, and Islamic institutions promoting tolerance, providing them with training and equipment.

Support for Mission Media Coverage

Embassy Niamey PAS provides good support for media coverage for all mission programs — ensuring the U.S. Government's messages and news of its good deeds reach the Nigerien public. The expansion of USAID programs, the launch of the MCC Country Threshold Program, and implementation of the TSCTP grant programs will create greater coverage opportunities and challenges.

Coordination among PAS and mission elements has been informal, but Embassy Niamey's programs are expanding. The mission increasingly needs more formal procedures to prioritize programs and direct PAS' limited media support resources. Lacking such procedures, the embassy will not be able to take full advantage of its opportunities to highlight U.S. activities. A strategic public affairs plan that establishes a common frame of reference of the mission's target audiences and public diplomacy messages is a fundamental tool. An embassy public affairs calendar listing events of all mission agencies would also aid resource allocation.

Recommendation 1: Embassy Niamey should work with other mission elements to develop and implement a mission-wide communications strategy and public affairs calendar. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Contact Management

Embassy Niamey's public affairs program profile has the complexity of programs in larger embassies, giving it access to a wide variety of target audiences and the opportunity to nurture relationships valuable to the U.S. Government through program contact. PAS Niamey now maintains contacts in separate databases according to program section. A computerized contact database organized by MSP themes and target audiences that encompasses PAS' English as a Second Language students, Rosa Parks Library members and visitors, and other program participants would help PAS to maintain contact and assess program effectiveness. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that PAS Niamey purchase software and implement procedures supporting a computerized contact information database.

CONSULAR OPERATIONS

A tenured officer with two previous consular tours, who splits her time between consular and economic section responsibilities, capably manages the consular section. She has been at post two months and is concentrating her efforts on setting priorities and establishing good internal controls. The DCM pays close attention to the consular function, reviews the visa decisions, and provides guidance. The referral policy and accountability designations are up-to-date. The chief challenge is efficiently managing the workflow, which is difficult in the current space configuration.

Consular Staffing and Space

One LE staff member supports the half-time consular officer. The officer has hired a consular associate who is awaiting a security clearance. Workload is light, but the atmosphere on the twice-weekly nonimmigrant visa appointment days is bustling, given the tight space configuration and the need for the lone consular assistant to juggle multiple tasks. The Embassy receives excellent support from the regional consular officer in Frankfurt. A trained officer with a consular title serves as backup consular officer; the appropriate designations are in place.

Space limitations and the current office configuration hamper operational efficiency. Clients enter through a compound access control into a building separate from the main chancery and wait in a small waiting room, which can seat up to 19 people on benches. Appointments are scheduled with these space limitations in mind. The consular officer interviews applicants in a semiprivate booth, but other waiting applicants can overhear their conversations. There is no completely private

interview space for sensitive cases. To interview a U.S. citizen in distress, e.g., a victim of crime, the consular officer would have to clear the client through security. Inside the section, workspace is equally tight. The only entry to the LE staff work area is through the officer's office, which also contains the photocopier and frequently-used files. Most surfaces have multiple uses; an employee's desk doubles as a print station and the consular officer's wall contains blank forms and the public information sheets. When the consular associate comes on board, he will share nonpartitioned workspace with the LE staff member.

Recommendation 2: The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with Embassy Niamey, should expand and reconfigure the consular section's workspace. (Action: OBO, in coordination with Embassy Niamey)

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Two file cabinets are used to store nonimmigrant visa issuance and refusal records, which are required to be stored at the Embassy 3 years before shipment to the Kentucky Consular Center. Removal of even one cabinet would provide more badly needed work space. The Kentucky Consular Center is willing to accept files ahead of schedule from posts with space problems. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that the Embassy make arrangements to transfer enough files to eliminate one cabinet. The team also informally recommended that all files be purged of information that is easily retrievable from the material on the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Intranet site. This could empty another file cabinet.

Consular Cashiering Operations

The Embassy has proper designations in place for its consular subcashier and for the accountable consular officer for consular fees and alternates. There is no offsite bank collection of fees. (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) subcashier maintains an advance for change-making purposes of approximately \$25 in local currency and \$50 in U.S. currency. The Embassy adjusts the exchange rate for consular fees whenever there is an official change in the exchange rate. This obliges the subcashier to change the automated cash register system's settings frequently and to interrupt transactions to search for hard-to-find coins in local currency. The 4 FAH-3 H-325.2-3 b. (1) allows for collections for consular fees to be made at rates slightly higher than the bank-selling rate to avoid handling small coins. The local currency, the Communauté Africaine Financière franc, is pegged to the Euro and is used by over a dozen countries. A common exchange rate for consular fees would reduce workload for all the affected posts and provide consistency in the rates charged to applicants. This rate should be set to take into account the difficulty of obtaining small coins, and be reset periodically.

Recommendation 4: The Bureau of Consular Affairs, in coordination with the Bureau of Resource Management, should devise a mechanism for setting a common exchange rate for consular fees for countries sharing the Communauté Africaine Financière franc and for notifying affected posts. (Action: CA, in coordination with RM)

Visas and Fraud Prevention

The nonimmigrant visa workload is light. Appointments are generally available for the next business day. Applicants make appointments by calling one of two mobile phones, which are available at certain hours. An online appointment system would disadvantage applicants from outside Niamey, where Internet service is nonexistent while cell phones are ubiquitous. Immigrant visa workload, including diversity visas, is also light. There is usually a modest surge at the end of the fiscal year when diversity visa applicants reach the end of the period in which they are eligible to apply.

The consular section conducts a robust public outreach program to inform applicants about diversity and nonimmigrant visa application procedures. Applicants regularly obtain forms from Internet cafés in Niamey after making their appointments with the consular section. Many applicants are illiterate or semiliterate and require assistance to fill in forms, which they obtain before coming to the Embassy for their appointments. The OIG team observed that the consular employees' interactions with applicants are informative, calm, and courteous.

Most fraud is unsophisticated, consisting of document substitution or false claims to relationship. In some cases, interviewing the beneficiary of a family-based petition reveals that the petitioner has entered the United States based on a sham marriage, and the case must be referred to the Department of Homeland Security for possible revocation of status. The consular section has an excellent relationship with the regional security office, which conducts verifications of documents. Fraud reporting is up-to-date.

American Citizen Services

Most of the 400 or so U.S. citizens in Niger are Peace Corps volunteers, non-governmental organizations workers, or missionaries. The warden system is based on organizational affiliation. The American citizen services caseload consists mainly of passport renewal or replacement, notary services, and voting information. There are no prisoners, no recent death cases or crime victims, and no pending adoption or abduction matters.

Consular Management

The sole LE consular employee has been with the Embassy since 2002. She has yet to participate in any Foreign Service Institute training, although she attended a

regional consular officer workshop in Dakar in 2003 and received individual training there in 2005. She would benefit from the consular correspondence courses, and the OIG team informally recommended that she enroll. She would also benefit from interacting with more experienced colleagues at a Foreign Service Institute training course or regional workshop. The OIG team recommended informally that the embassy nominate her for such opportunities.

In such a small section, a backup officer can expect to fill in at times for the consular officer in case of emergency or scheduled leave. A set of locally developed standard operating procedures for the most commonly encountered types of consular services would make this task easier and provide the backup officer with some assurance that procedures are being followed correctly. The OIG team informally recommended that the embassy produce these standard operating procedures.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Embassy Niamey's scores on OIG questionnaires were high. The management section is fully staffed with American officers. The management, human resources, and financial management officers arrived at the Embassy shortly before the inspection team. The information management specialist is doing a fine job and has spent months without an information management officer and other support. The newcomers and the staff who have been here for 1 or 2 years are working together to focus on customer service and to get ready for eServices and the Collaborative Management Initiative.

Agency	U.S. Direct-Hire Staff	U.S.PSC	Locally employed staff	Eligible family member	Total Staff	Total Funding FY 2008
Diplomatic and Consular Programs	9	0	4	1	14	\$1,376,500
ICASS	6	0	62	4	72	3,294,000
Public Diplomacy	1	0	33	0	34	404,200
Diplomatic Security	1	0	214	1	216	1,139,522
Marine Security Guard	6	0	0	0	6	127,229
Representation						16,800
Overseas Buildings Operations	1	0	54	0	55	655,021
USAID	0	2	2	1	5	211,950
Defense- Humanitarian Assistance Program and Civil-Military Support Team	2	0	0	0	2	122,408
Defense Attaché Office	2	0	2	0	4	267,153
Peace Corps	3	2	46	0	51	Not under embassy management
Total	31	4	417	7	459	7,614,783

Embassy Niamey is not slated for a new embassy compound. It is scheduled for a major rehabilitation in 2010. This renovation was originally scheduled for 2002. The present 15-acre compound contains the chancery, two annex buildings, small storage buildings, a separate mail room, workshops, and automobile repair facilities. The school and recreational facilities are located on this compound in a public access area separated from the rest of the compound by a wall and an entrance controlled by embassy guards. The chancery and other buildings date to the mid-1960s and are replete with broken tiles, sagging ceilings, exposed wiring, an open and dangerous stairwell, and show other serious signs of aging.

The compound has not been repainted recently and has not been upgraded in decades. The electrical systems do not meet requirements, and (b) (2)(b) (2) (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations plans to renovate some buildings, add an elevator to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 (amended 2008) requirements, and move the consular section.

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The 2010 renovation will relocate workshops and overhaul infrastructure. The plan mentions relocating the school but does not provide details. The estimate and plans have not been updated since earlier planning and may not account for further deterioration and greater infrastructure needs.

The issue of relocating a warehouse onto the compound has been pending since 1997 when an OIG report first discussed it. OIG's 2002 report¹ stated that a plan to move the warehouse to the embassy compound was needed, and the annual savings would amount to more than \$27,000, including lease, transportation and travel costs, and local guard and general service staff salaries. The annual lease cost for the off-site warehouse (State 559-OBO) is now \$30,409, raising the potential savings of a relocation to nearly \$35,000 annually.

¹Inspection of Embassy Niamey, Niger, Report number ISP-1-02-42, dated August 2002.

GENERAL SERVICES OFFICE

The general services office and its employees are competent and attentive to customers' needs. However, many staff members are not accustomed to the services a facilities management officer provides and mistakenly call the general services office for maintenance and repair services and similar needs. At the same time, the facilities management office receives procurement requests and requests to address landlord-related complaints. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that the management section send out a management notice defining the roles and responsibilities of each of those offices to end confusion and speed service request processing.

Warehouse

Embassy Niamey leases a warehouse for \$30,409 annually, but it is not large enough. Consequently, the general services section is using three containers at the warehouse and two shipping containers on the chancery compound to store furniture and appliances. Storage space at the Embassy is limited as well; therefore, the Embassy is using premium office space to store expendable supplies and easy-to-pilfer items. The April 1997 and August 2002 OIG inspection reports contain recommendations to relocate the general services office and to provide warehousing on the embassy compound.

OIG closed a portion of the April 1997 recommendations in June 1999 when USAID vacated the building the Embassy now uses for general services, facilities management, human resources and financial management, the community liaison office, and a small number of USAID offices. At the same time, the Office of Foreign Buildings Operations (now the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations) indicated that it would provide funding for a warehouse on the embassy compound; however, it has not funded the project.

In the past 2 years, Embassy Niamey has made an effort to reduce the number of items in the warehouse and storage containers by conducting two annual disposal auctions. However, property assets have increased because new U.S. direct-hire staff has been assigned to Niamey, and limited warehouse space cannot accommodate the additional suites of furniture and appliances.

The last two OIG inspection reports recommended an on-compound warehouse that would save lease and security costs, time, and transportation expenses. The OIG team once again recommends an on-compound warehouse. A prefabricated warehouse might be used as a lower cost alternative.

Recommendation 5: The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations should construct a warehouse on the embassy compound. (Action: OBO)

Furniture Pool

A furniture pool could offer Embassy Niamey financial and administrative advantages noted in 6 FAH-5 H-471.8 b. When properly administered, an International Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS) furniture pool works in conjunction with the embassy's ICASS housing pool. A furniture pool ends the need for warehouse staff to move furniture and furnishings from one house to another and minimizes wear and tear on furniture items. The furniture pool serves to reduce inventory needs and will assist the Embassy's efforts to dispose of excess furniture stored in the warehouse and containers.

Recommendation 6: Embassy Niamey should implement a residential furniture pool. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Facility Maintenance

The general services and facilities management offices are understaffed and thus cannot keep up with embassy demands and the facility section cannot perform preventative maintenance. The lack of staff is apparent when looking at the condition of the Embassy. The facilities management team faces challenges in making residences ready for new occupants in a timely manner.

Establishing a preventive maintenance program eventually reduces workloads by preventing the need for major repairs. Guidance for establishing and scheduling a preventive maintenance program is located in 15 FAH-1 H-118.

Recommendation 7: Embassy Niamey should establish a preventive maintenance program and begin scheduling preventive maintenance visits to the residences. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Procurement

Mission personnel complain about poor customer service in the procurement section, primarily the delays they experience in getting the products or services they request and the lack of feedback on the status of requests. The customers believe the process should be better organized, orders should be tracked, and customers should not need to monitor the process. The OIG team discussed the importance and value of customer service with the procurement staff.

The Embassy Niamey procurement unit does not use the requestor portion of the WebPASS procurement application; consequently, requestors cannot track the status of requests. Therefore, they rely on the procurement staff to keep them informed. WebPASS is most successful if all of its applications are implemented.

Recommendation 8: Embassy Niamey should use the complete WebPASS procurement software application. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Customs and Shipping

The customs and shipping section is understaffed. Two LE staff are responsible for all shipments including unaccompanied air baggage and household effects that arrive at the Diori Hamani International Airport, Niamey, Niger, and bulk materials and supplies that arrive, via ships at the Port of Lome in Togo and Port Benin in Cotonou, Benin. Items that arrive in Togo and Benin must be transported by truck to Niamey.

Some goods and bulk items ordered from the United States may take from 3-to-6 months to arrive at the Embassy. The items that arrive at the ports in neighboring countries are received by general services employees from those embassies because Embassy Niamey does not have sufficient staff to allow one LE staff to work at the distant locations for several days.

An additional staff member in the customs and shipping section would enable one employee to be dispatched to the Ports of Lome or Benin when the section receives notification that shipments have arrived. Locating a knowledgeable staff member at the ports will prevent delays associated with incomplete Bills of Lading and Air Way Bills that have caused delays in the past.

Recommendation 9: Embassy Niamey should add a locally employed staff member to the customs and shipping section. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

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(b)(2)(b)(6) In 1996, the school and the Embassy entered into a revocable license agreement covering a period of 25 years. At that time, the school paid one dollar (\$1) for the 25-year period. The agreement states the Embassy can revoke the license with one year's notice and that permanent structures and fixtures would be transferred to the Embassy should it decide the school should vacate the property.

The license states that the property belongs to the Embassy but also stipulates that the school accepts all responsibility for the use of the property including injury to persons and indemnifies and holds harmless the U.S. Government for claim of any kind arising out of the use of the property.

Should the school vacate the property either voluntarily or based on an embassy decision, the property and the permanent structures and fixtures that would revert to the Embassy would provide an ideal location with public access for public diplomacy programs, the Rosa Parks Library, and English-teaching classrooms. Moving the public diplomacy section to the property vacated by the school would save lease (\$19,165), guard service, utility, and miscellaneous costs. It would also eliminate fire safety and electrical wiring problems that prevail at the American Cultural Center building.

A new memorandum of understanding between Embassy Niamey and (b)(2)(b)(6)
(b)(2)(b)(6) was signed in May 2008. The memorandum specifies that the embassy cashier will provide accommodation exchange for the school director and U.S. citizen teachers. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that the Embassy should delete that paragraph from the memorandum.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Embassy Niamey has a small human resources office. The regional human resource officer has two LE staff and an eligible family member who provide support for more than 400 LE staff, including more than 200 guards. Each of the local employees is qualified to classify positions using the computer-aided job evaluation tool. The OIG team discussed the LE staff interest in retirement planning, and the human resource officer welcomed the opportunity to help with this need and plans to provide a seminar on retirement planning shortly.

The OIG team met with two of the LE staff committee's executive officers concerning an embassy appeals board that adjudicates denials to the educational allowances. The board now meets ad hoc. The LE staff would like to be informed about the composition of the appeals board and when it meets. The OIG team made an informal recommendation that the LE staff be informed more fully about the appeals board meetings.

The Embassy is reviewing unexpected changes to the health insurance plan and is working to restore the medical evacuation benefit to allow staff to visit health care providers in neighboring countries when necessary. When the health care contract is modified, the Embassy has agreed to notify staff about the changes.

The regional human resources officer provides support to Embassy Ouagadougou and visits there quarterly. Embassy Ouagadougou's human resource section has six LE staff; however, one will leave the Embassy shortly. AF's executive office has decided to move the human resources officer position permanently from Embassy Niamey to Embassy Ouagadougou when the incumbent human resource officer's tour ends. The rationale for the change was that the sole management officer at Embassy Ouagadougou has responsibility for human resources and financial management while Embassy Niamey has had both human resources and financial management officers. However, the Office of Management Policy, Rightsizing and Innovation's September 2008 rightsizing report suggests that a senior LE staff member might replace the Niamey financial management officer. Should this change occur, Embassy Niamey will then be in the same position that the bureau's executive office is attempting to ameliorate at Embassy Ouagadougou.

Given plans to move the regional human resource officer position and the small size of the section, the OIG team believes it is time to review future staffing needs in the section. Further, staffing shortfalls are hindering customs and shipping and maintenance staff from providing timely and adequate services. The 2008 rightsizing study does not take into account these issues and recognize the customer service

telephone radio technician, and one mailroom clerk, along with an information management officer and an information management specialist run these programs and systems.

At the time of the inspection, the section was fully staffed; however, the information management officer is expected to leave shortly. Keeping the position staffed has been problematic. For example, there was a several-months gap in the position beginning in summer 2008. Despite this gap, the first-tour information management specialist did an admirable job of keeping the section operating. The section's scores on OIG questionnaires indicate that embassy employees have a high regard for the section.

Relocating Unclassified Telephone Equipment

The facilities management officer has prepared a statement of work for the construction of a separate building to house unclassified telephone equipment and connect the local telecommunication company's fiber network and the Embassy's voice and data network. A separate building will allow local technicians access to the equipment when necessary and provide a demarcation point outside controlled access area space. The project has not yet been funded.

Recommendation 10: The Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, in coordination with Embassy Niamey, should build a structure to relocate unclassified telephone equipment. (Action: OBO, in coordination with Embassy Niamey)

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Limiting Access to Cleared Personnel

The embassy telephone frame room is a limited access area according to 12 FAH-6 H-021. Only authorized U.S. citizens with security clearances are permitted unrestricted access into limited access areas. Cleared personnel must escort un-cleared personnel into limited access areas. (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2) (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)

Recommendation 12: Embassy Niamey should develop and implement procedures to ensure that cleared American personnel escort any un-cleared personnel into the embassy telephone frame room. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

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Recommendation 14: Embassy Niamey should identify and label wiring and cabling and remove unneeded wiring throughout the compound and the American Cultural Center. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

High Frequency Radio Checks

Embassy Ouagadougou has not contacted Embassy Niamey regularly as required for high frequency radio checks. Embassy Ouagadougou responded to the OIG team’s question about unsuccessful radio checks saying that the checks had not been conducted for about 3 months. When they are conducted, if the Embassy does not respond, there is no follow-up to determine what went wrong and to develop a solution. Sometimes there is a radio link but no voice contact. The reason for voice connectivity during radio checks is to check that the network control center can ascertain if the Embassy is operational and can be contacted or can call in during an emergency.

According to 5 FAH-2 H-723, operational testing is required on the high frequency radio equipment weekly and the results recorded as specified in network operation instructions. The Regional Information Management Center Frankfurt, per 5 FAH H-724, has temporarily designated Embassy Ouagadougou as the network control station. Per 5 FAH H-724, as the assigned network control station, Embassy Ouagadougou is required to perform challenge and authentication checks weekly.

Recommendation 15: Embassy Ouagadougou should conduct the required weekly high frequency radio checks with designated posts within its contract range, including Embassy Niamey. (Action: Embassy Ouagadougou, in coordination with RIMC Pretoria and Embassy Niamey)

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QUALITY OF LIFE

Scores on the OIG's quality of life questionnaire were exceptionally high. Morale is also high. The energetic and enthusiastic community liaison office coordinator is establishing required and innovative programs for the community. The health unit's Foreign Service health practitioner is highly respected and competent. Embassy Bamako provides regional medical support, and Embassy Accra provides regional medical psychiatric support on schedule. The ^{(b)(2)(b)(6)} is sometimes the reason staff extend for a third year. They cite the quality of the school's education and its amenities.

A recreation association closed in 2001 because of financial and management problems and weak internal controls. The residual \$11,000 will remain in an escrow account with the Bureau of Administration's Office of Recreation and Commissary Affairs until 2011. The Embassy could use that sum should it decide to reopen a recreation association and commissary. A swimming pool, tennis court, and snack bar at the school substitute for a recreation association, and the facilities are available for an annual fee but free for families whose children attend the school. The former recreation association gave the pool, snack bar, and other recreational facilities to the school when the American Recreation Association was disbanded. There is also a very popular contracted snack bar on the embassy compound that serves breakfast and lunch at reasonable prices.

Community Liaison Office

The community liaison coordinator is new to the position and has not yet had training. The training will be scheduled for spring 2009. In the meantime, she is following her predecessors' activities schedule. A great many of the community liaison office activities are coordinated with those at the ^{(b)(2)(b)(6)}, and many proceeds of fund raising activities go to the school and local charities. For example, a traditional raffle provides funds for school projects. There is an active sponsor program and orientation program, and the community liaison lounge is accommodating, with an Internet terminal and a large library.

Health Unit

One regional Foreign Service nurse practitioner and a locally trained nurse staff the health unit. Embassy Bamako's regional medical officer visited just before the OIG inspection. The Foreign Service nurse, who arrived at in Niamey in October 2008, also covers Embassy Ouagadougou. There are very limited local medical services. One local clinic has a small intensive care unit and fairly reliable X-ray equipment. The embassy health unit has an informal agreement with the Peace Corp doctor that each will support the other in case of emergencies and/or absences.

The health unit sees about 35 patients monthly. Over the last 12 months there were eight medical evacuations, five for obstetrical reasons. New arrivals are given a health briefing soon after arriving in country and provided with a copy of an up-to-date and comprehensive health unit information guide. The Embassy's medical supplies are stored securely and properly inventoried. There is a limited supply of controlled substances, which are also securely stored and properly administered. The unit keeps logs regarding use and disposal of expired medications.

School

The Bureau of Administration's Office of Overseas Schools supports the ^{(b)(2)(b)(6)}_{(b)(2)(b)(6)} with grants, which totaled \$40,000 in FY 2008. **(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)**
(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6) In the fall of 2008, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools renewed ^{(b)(2)(b)(6)}_{(b)(2)(b)(6)} accreditation for its prekindergarten through Grade 9 programs. ^{(b)(2)(b)(6)}_{(b)(2)(b)(6)} offers grades 10-12 instruction through correspondence study with the University of Nebraska. Embassy Niamey follows Department procedures in overseeing the grants.

The school's director stressed that the Office of Overseas Schools has provided good advice on Department procedures and support for overseas schools. However, an Office of Overseas Schools representative last visited the school in 2003. Small international schools such as ^{(b)(2)(b)(6)}_{(b)(2)(b)(6)} need the guidance and close attention that on-site consultations provide.

Recommendation 17: The Bureau of Administration's Office of Overseas Schools should visit the **(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)** during its next regional consultations visit. (Action: A)

The Embassy's relations with the ^{(b)(2)(b)(6)}_{(b)(2)(b)(6)} are good. The RSO provides regular security advice and attention. The Ambassador strongly supports the school, attending and participating in school events, often done in cooperation with the Embassy. The Ambassador is well informed on school issues through direct communications and through the Ambassador's representative on the school board. Two additional embassy employees serve on the seven-member school board; one is the chairman.

Embassy staff noted that school board meetings are well run, occur with regularity, and the board actively oversees the school. Such attention is wise. (b)(2)(b)(6)
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(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6) The snack bar provides meals, and the community association provides pool and tennis court access. Management of the community center and its services has become a financial drag despite an annual \$400 fee for members whose children do not attend the school. The board is reviewing the organizational wisdom of this relationship, including the need for closer financial oversight of this complex arrangement.

MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

Embassy Niamey's 2008 Annual Chief of Mission Management Control Statement of Assurance (Niamey Cable 000759, dated August 11, 2008) reported no internal or management control weaknesses.

In response to the Under Secretary of Management's request (State 00118457, dated November 6, 2008, paragraph 7), the OIG team counted the vehicles at post and verified that the physical inventory was accurately reflected in the Integrated Logistics Management System records.

Consular Affairs

The OIG team found a control weakness in the collection of consular fees related to when the fees were deposited with the Embassy's Class B cashier. According to 7 FAH-1 H-771.2-5, consular fees must be deposited with the Class B cashier daily. Although 7 FAH-1 H-747 provides for after-hours collections in emergencies, it specifies that written procedures must be established to accommodate for this situation. Contrary to this requirement, the OIG team observed that fees were held until the next day, sometimes longer, because the consular subcashier could not meet the Class B cashier's deposit deadline. The OIG team discussed this matter with the accountable consular officer and the financial management officer, who agreed to work together to establish a written standard operating procedure for the deposit of consular fees that includes a realistic deadline.

Recommendation 18: Embassy Niamey should establish and implement a standard operating procedure for after-hours collection of consular fees. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Recommendation 19: Embassy Niamey should establish a standard operating procedure for the deposit of consular fees with the Class B cashier. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Recommendation 11: (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)
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Recommendation 12: Embassy Niamey should develop and implement procedures to ensure that cleared American personnel escort any uncleared personnel into the embassy telephone frame room. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Recommendation 13: (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)
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Recommendation 14: Embassy Niamey should identify and label wiring and cabling and remove unneeded wiring throughout the compound and the American Cultural Center. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Recommendation 15: Embassy Ouagadougou should conduct the required weekly high frequency radio checks with designated posts within its contract range, including Embassy Niamey. (Action: Embassy Ouagadougou, in coordination with RIMC Pretoria and Embassy Niamey)

Recommendation 16: (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)
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(b) (2)

Recommendation 17: The Bureau of Administration's Office of Overseas Schools should visit the (b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6) during its next regional consultations visit. (Action: A)

Recommendation 18: Embassy Niamey should establish and implement a standard operating procedure for after-hours collection of consular fees. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

Recommendation 19: Embassy Niamey should establish a standard operating procedure for the deposit of consular fees with the Class B cashier. (Action: Embassy Niamey)

INFORMAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Informal recommendations cover operational matters not requiring action by organizations outside the inspected unit and/or the parent regional bureau. Informal recommendations will not be subject to the OIG compliance process. However, any subsequent OIG inspection or on-site compliance review will assess the mission's progress in implementing the informal recommendations.

Public Diplomacy

The PAS maintains several separate contact lists in various formats.

Informal Recommendation 1: Embassy Niamey should obtain software and implement procedures supporting a single computerized public affairs section database.

Consular

The consular section is very short on space. Removal of one or more file cabinets would increase available workspace. The Bureau of Consular Affairs' record retention policy requires posts to retain nonimmigrant visa issuance and refusal files for three years before shipment to the Kentucky Consular Center. There are exceptions to the policy allowing earlier shipment of files for posts with limited space. Consular staff also maintains files with Department instructions and policies, all of which are available on the Bureau of Consular Affairs' Web site or in Foreign Affairs Manual or Foreign Affairs Handbook guidance.

Informal Recommendation 2: Embassy Niamey should seek authorization to ship its issuance and refusal files to the Kentucky Consular Center ahead of schedule.

Informal Recommendation 3: Embassy Niamey should purge its files of telegrams and policy documents that are available electronically.

The LE consular assistant has had little formal training in her 7 years with the embassy. She would benefit from taking the consular correspondence courses and especially from participating in a Foreign Service Institute training course or regional workshop where she can interact with peers.

Informal Recommendation 4: Embassy Niamey should enroll its locally employed staff consular assistant in the consular correspondence courses offered by the Foreign Service Institute and nominate her for attendance at an appropriate Foreign Service Institute training course or regional workshop.

The Embassy does not have a set of locally developed standard operating procedures to help a backup officer perform consular services efficiently in the temporary absence of the consular officer.

Informal Recommendation 5: Embassy Niamey should develop standard operating procedures for its most commonly encountered consular services.

(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6)

In May 2008, the Embassy signed a memorandum of understanding with (b)(2)(b)(6) that specifies that the Embassy cashier will provide accommodation exchange for the school director and U.S. citizen teachers.

Informal Recommendation 6: Embassy Niamey should revise the May 2008 memorandum of understanding to delete the reference to accommodation exchange and notify the (b)(2)(b)(6)(b)(2)(b)(6) director and U.S. citizen teachers that it will not provide accommodation exchange for those employees.

General Services

Customers are confused about the responsibilities assigned to the facilities management staff and the general services office. Customers frequently direct work requests and complaints to the wrong office.

Informal Recommendation 7: Embassy Niamey should issue a management notice listing the responsibilities of the general services office and the facilities management office.

Embassy Niamey's housing handbook was recently updated. It contains incorrect references to the Foreign Affairs Manual and responsible Department offices.

Informal Recommendation 8: Embassy Niamey should review the housing handbook and update the complete document with correct Foreign Affairs Manual references, Department offices' acronyms, regulations, and policy changes.

Facility Maintenance

All residential fire extinguishers are not checked regularly. Embassy Niamey's housing handbook states that each resident is issued one fire extinguisher located in the kitchen. Some residents have more than one fire extinguisher and most of those have not been serviced annually or visually inspected monthly.

Informal Recommendation 9: Embassy Niamey should implement a program to check fire extinguishers monthly.

Some residences have more than one fire extinguisher.

Informal Recommendation 10: Embassy Niamey should implement a program to ensure that all residences have the same number of fire extinguishers. Further, if some are removed, the resident should be informed.

Financial Management

In the past, subcashier supervisors have failed to provide cash counts for the subcashiers.

Informal Recommendation 11: Embassy Niamey should send periodic management notices reminding supervisors regarding cash count requirements for the subcashiers.

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Informal Recommendation 12: (b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)(b) (2)
(b) (2)

Human Resources

Local staff would like more information about retirement and retirement planning.

Informal Recommendation 13: Embassy Niamey should provide a retirement planning seminar for local staff.

The local compensation plan restricts educational allowances to six children, including biological children and legally adopted children. When the allowance is denied, an appeals board is convened to adjudicate the claim. LE staff want to know when the board convenes and the outcome of its deliberations.

Informal Recommendation 14: Embassy Niamey should notify local staff regarding the appeals board's meetings and the outcome of the deliberations.

The new health insurance plan does not include medical evacuations to health care providers in neighboring countries. The Embassy did not review or agree upon unexpected changes before the insurance plan implemented them.

Informal Recommendation 15: Embassy Niamey should review the health care contract and ensure it meets staff needs. The Embassy should discuss the outcome with the local staff directly in a town hall or other embassy-wide meeting.

There are gaps in customer service and concerns that staffing in several ICASS related sections is inadequate to meet current and future needs and growth.

Informal Recommendation 16: Embassy Niamey should review all International Cooperative Administrative Support Services staffing and request positions for sections where staffing is inadequate.

Information Management

Embassy Niamey is not using individual development plans to manage and schedule training. According to 5 FAM 121, the information management section should ensure that the training and development needs of information management staff are met.

Informal Recommendation 17: Embassy Niamey should ensure the information management section uses individual development plans for information staff.

The help desk does not have an automated system to track and manage help-desk calls.

Informal Recommendation 18: Embassy Niamey should acquire and implement an automated help-desk tracking application.

PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

Name	Arrival	Date
Ambassador	Bernadette M. Allen	04/06
Deputy Chief of Mission	Eric P. Whitaker	08/08

Chiefs of Sections:

Management	Sonja K. Rix	08/08
Consular/Economic	Karan E. Swaner	08/08
Public Affairs	Stephen J. Posivak., Jr.	05/06
Regional Security	Jeffrey A. McGallicher	01/06

Other Agencies:

Department of Defense	Wilneld Pognon	08/08
Peace Corps	Patricia Nuwanyakpa	03/07
U.S. Agency for International Development	Mark G. Wentling	08/06
Humanitarian Assistance	Sgt. Emil Wojeik	08/08

ABBREVIATIONS

AF	Bureau of African Affairs
AINN	American International School of Niamey
DCM	deputy chief of mission
Department	Department of State
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
ICASS	International Cooperative Administrative Support Services
LE	locally employed
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MSP	Mission Strategic Plan
OIG	Office of Inspector General
PAO	public affairs officer
PAS	public affairs section
PSC	personal services contractor
RSO	regional security officer
TSCTP	Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

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