

The Gabon Letter

December 2020

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From the editor's desk: Bonne année!

A banner issue, with a record number of contributors and pages, including one long excerpt from Eric Madeen's re-issued book. Also want to thank Darcy Meijer, Andrew Herman, Henk Brouwer, Jack Atkinson, Michael Reed, Michael Crane, Bob Weisflog and Drew Howard.

It doesn't go without saying, not this year. It's been tough and weird and unsafe and unpredictable and historic and I'm sure the list could go on. A year to remember and a year we can look to erase from memory at some point in the future.

The pandemic had to affect us all, one way or another, through work, play, love and hopefully not illness. With that in mind, next issue (usually April) perhaps we can share stories of how we coped, stories of resilience, stories of suffering, stories of helping.

We'll raise a glass this New Year's and disons "chin chin."

John

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The Friends of Gabon is an association of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers, Peace Corps Staff and others who are interested in the culture and welfare of Gabon. *The Gabon Letter* is published quarterly by the Friends of Gabon. Submissions are heartily encouraged.



Update from Gabon - News and views

Coronavirus -

As of December 30, Gabon had registered 9510 cases and 64 deaths. The sharpest spike was in May, and then the disease starting leveling off by early August. That said, the [CDC](#) still places Gabon in the highest risk category, level 4, recommending "travelers should avoid all travel to Gabon." [Check out the latest figures here.](#)

Meanwhile, according to a report [in the New York Times](#), Africa experiencing a resurgence of the virus. Eight countries, including Nigeria, Uganda and Mali, recently recorded their highest daily case counts all year. "The second wave is here," John N. Nkengasong, the head of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has declared.

Gabon may hold the clue about the next virus

Researchers at the Franceville Interdisciplinary Medical Research Center are working in remote recesses in the heart of the Gabonese forest. They explore caves populated by bats, animals suspected of being at the origin of many epidemics transmitted to humans in recent years." [Read the full story here](#)



Air Travel Declines - One measure of the economic impact from Covid in Gabon is air travel. A decline by over 50% in air travel through Leon Mba airport; falling from 588,000 passengers to 203,000 in the first nine months of the year.

[Read the story at Gabonreview.com](#)

Gabon appoints first woman prime minister

In July, President Bongo appointed Former Defense Minister Rose Christiane Ossouka Raponda as prime minister, making her the first woman to hold

the role in Gabon's history. She had served as budget minister and was the former mayor of Libreville. [Full story here.](#)



Gabon road and bridge link to Port-Gentil

A new 95 km road that connects Port-Gentil with the rest of Gabon is now complete, having cost nearly US\$663 million to build over a six year period

The new road link was built in two stages by Chinese and German contractors. The road link includes two long bridges of 4.7km and 4.5km, which are the third and fourth longest in Africa respectively. With the opening of the route, drivers can now travel directly from Omboué to Port-Gentil.

New biofuels plant to be set up in Gabon

The Singapore-based multinational firm will construct the plant in the southern part of Libreville, on an area of five hectares not far from the port.

The construction and commissioning of this biodiesel plant should provide hundreds of direct and indirect jobs. For the government, the production of biofuel will mean less polluting and will also strengthen the competitiveness of the palm oil sector as the country concentrates more on the preservation of the environment and the fight against climate change. [Full story here.](#)



And the downside

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is carrying out an [investigation](#) into whether Singapore-based agribusiness giant Olam, 'the world's largest farmer, deforested more than 25,000 hectares (62,000 acres), in contravention of sustainability criteria it had signed up to.

Peace Corps News

Did you miss it?

If you did, you wouldn't be alone, in the middle of a pandemic and election. On October 14, 1960, after midnight on the University of Michigan campus, Senator and candidate for President John F. Kennedy floated the idea of a national service organization to harness the energies and talents of young people to make a difference in the world. Sixty years and 200,000 volunteers later, Peace Corps continues, in one form or another, to make a difference.

Peace Corps Goes Virtual

The first phase of a Virtual Service Pilot program ended in December after connecting host country communities with returned volunteers who were evacuated due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Nine posts participated in the first phase of an 11-week pilot. A total of 45 returned volunteers donated their time voluntarily serving as private citizens to conduct virtual engagements with our host country partners and, were selected based on a match between their skills and host country partner needs. Volunteers donated their time as private citizens and collaborated with counterparts for approximately five to 15 hours per week for 10 to 12 weeks.

In addition to education, pilot participants engaged in health, financial literacy, agribusiness, and environmental protection activities.

A second phase is slated to begin in the new year.

It's still too soon for in person volunteers, but Jody Olsen the Peace Corps Director revealed in November that a small number of Volunteers are scheduled to return in early 2021. The first will be Cambodia and Saint Lucia, in January 2021. She also reported that partner nations have all asked for the return of Volunteers as soon as conditions permit. Olsen was speaking at the Commonwealth Club of California and, if you're really bored with



your quarantine, you can watch the whole speech here on [YouTube](#).

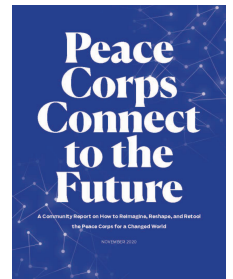
Peace Corps Connect to the Future

In November, the National Peace Corps Association released "Peace Corps Connect to the Future," a thirty page report "on How to Reimagine, Reshape, and Retool the Peace Corps for a Changed World."

The core issues highlighted in this report focus on the following topics and are divided into eight separate chapters: 1.

Fostering racial diversity, equity, and inclusion in the Peace Corps
2. Recruiting the next generation of Peace Corps Volunteers
3. Supporting Returned Peace Corps Volunteers during readjustment at home
4. Funding for the Peace Corps and Capitol Hill mobilization
5. Recalibrating Peace Corps programs for the future
6. Reexamining the Peace Corps' Second and Third Goals
7. Reforming Peace Corps' management policies for a changed world
8. Communicating, internally and externally, with the Peace Corps community.

[Read the full report here.](#)



Rafer Johnson (1934–2020)

He was considered the world's greatest athlete, winning the gold medal in the decathlon and setting a new world record during the 1960 Summer Olympics. That was just one of the many awards and honors he received in his lifetime both inside and outside of sports. The Olympic gold marked Johnson's retirement from competitive sports and catapulted him forward in the fight for racial and social justice.

Johnson began his civil rights work assisting the NAACP and Urban League 60 years ago, taking part in initiatives to combat housing discrimination and voting rights. Inspired by

Friends of Gabon Membership Application

Friends of Gabon receives all our income from individual supporters like you. Thank You!

Please stay current with your annual dues. Membership is only \$15 per year and there are several ways to pay:

- 1) Credit cards are accepted here. It's very easy, just click this link and make a payment (no account or password is needed): https://www.paypal.com/donate?hosted_button_id=5S79BABE7J6VE
- 2) If you already have a Paypal account you can send money to: friendsofgabon2@gmail.com
- 3) Old fashioned checks: Just send a check for \$15 a year made out to *Friends of Gabon* and mail to:

Friends of Gabon
21 Ivy Lane
Burlington, VT 05408

- 4) You can also become of member of FOG by joining the National Peace Corps Association and set up a recurring payment option through that website. You can pay for as many years in advance as you wish.

If you need an invoice or receipt, or for more information, please contact Mike Crane, Treasurer at: michael@craneassociates.us

MEMBERSHIP FORM

- ☐ Yes! I would like to join/rejoin the Friends of Gabon for \$15.00 for 1 year.
- ☐ Yes! I would like to join/rejoin the Friends of Gabon for \$30.00 for 2 years.
- ☐ Yes! I would like to join/rejoin the Friends of Gabon for \$45.00 for 3 years.

☐ Please accept the additional \$_____ as a donation.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Years of Peace Corps service _____

Peace Corps Job Title _____

Shout Out (tell us what you've been up to, where you are, and who you miss):

***Privacy Policy:** We will not share your contact information with anyone, no matter who they are or how much they try to bribe us.