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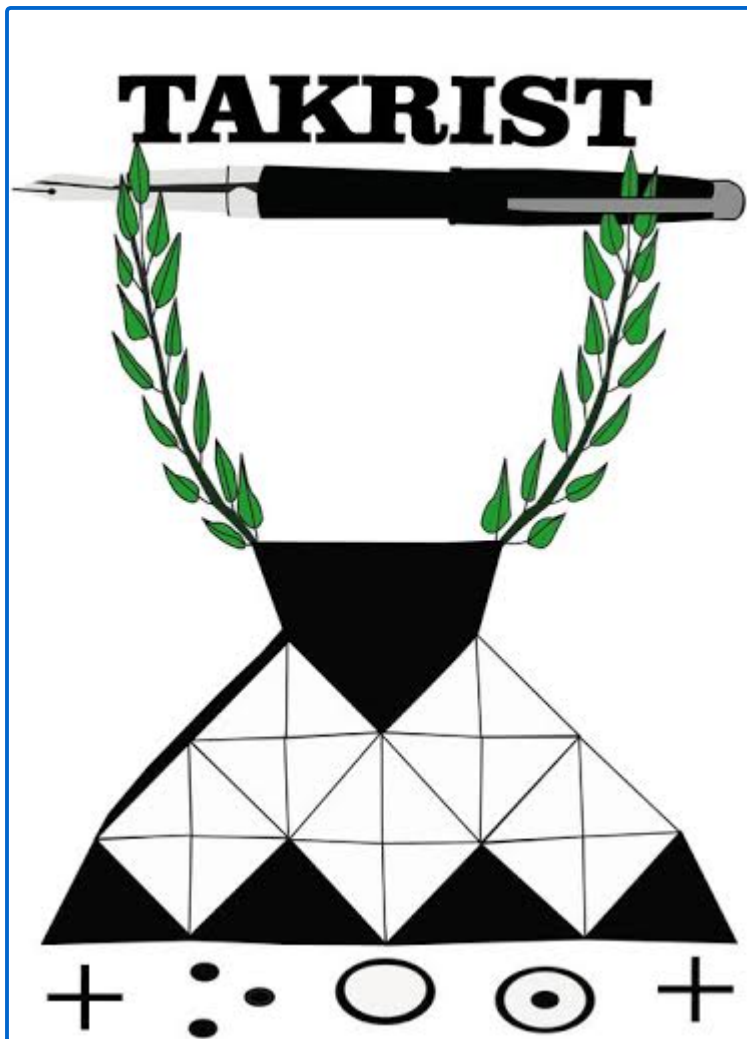
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The Intercession of Mary

[DOCUMENTARY](#), [WALKARTROAD Magazine](#) | April 21, 2014 by [Walkartroad](#) | [0 Comments](#)

Mary Lindekens expedition to the desert brought her so close to the Touaregs of Mali in the northern part of the African country. A tribe she described as one of honor due to their communal life and close brotherhood. She saw the love among the group and she fell in love also. Mary found the spirit of compassion that hardly exist anywhere among the tribe and she has been interceding in her little way. A journey of victory for the Belgian native.



The country of Mali in the western part of Africa is in turmoil. Civil war has broken out and presently the French government is supporting the Mali army through military occupation to save the country from this ethnic and religion orchestrated war that has caused so much strife and pandemonium leaving thousands already dead. The government has been crying for help from the international community and friends of Mali, though with appreciable success stories that are somehow peculiar to Africa's peace-keeping mission. Modern war in Africa is being classified as terrorism influenced war that seems far from Africa and Africans home grown culture of communalism. Women and children suffer the more in this Malian conflict that is almost taking the country to a brink of collapse. In Mali, cultural traditions and historical monuments have been destroyed in high proportions in the northern part. Education and primary health care are now mere illusion. Basic needs of life such as food, shelter, water are beyond the reach of the people, women and children are the worst hit. They run for cover in refugee camps and enclaves, with countless families missing their loved ones. Yet, Mali is the country that has given the world great Kora music, musicians and traditional griots from the Mande culture, and desert ballads from the Touaregs, winning countless Grammy Awards. Mali is the same country everyone falls in love with at the hearing of the great Timbuktu market.



Mary Lindekens and the Touaregs of Mali

Mary Lindekens, a Belgian with a large heart studied travel and tourism and worked with an American law firm in Brussels. She had travelled to the Sahara, first as a coincidence. During her first trip, she met the Touaregs people of Mali and was immediately fascinated by their culture, music and lifestyle. She travelled down several times over due to the 'love at first sight instinct', moving to and fro, Mary found love in the arms of a Touareg native and got married to him. "I met a man with the kind of human nature that I have been craving to see in my man. His warmth and breath as a Touareg are so wonderful to feel. But his people are reduced to mere nomads, servitude to some who feel they are more equal and privileged than the Touaregs of Mali." Mary and her husband decided to float a Non-governmental Organisation known as 'Takrist', inviting along two friends, a Touareg who lives in the United States and another one living in Brussels respectively. By that time, the usual African conflicts of ethnic divisions has broken up in Northern Mali called "Azawad", the foundation came in to save providing help and assistance. 'Takrist' means construction in Tamasheq language being spoken by the Touaregs. The written version is called Tifinagh. "We are a young organisation, founded in 2013. We are running the blocks and moving forward, though with great accomplishment, we feel fulfilled." Being active will surely lift the soul of Takrist and the foundation is not relenting on her oars, as Mary still believed they haven't scratched the surface yet, "we try to be as active as possible, organising different events promoting Touareg culture. The funds being raised from these activities and events will go a long way to support or provide humanitarian projects in Azawad (Northern Mali) mainly to assist in providing health care, water and education. Sometime last year, the organization raised some funds for the downtrodden people of Touareg tribe in Mali coming up with such a brilliant idea to save a tribe in Africa with concert, performance and an exhibition in September, 2013. The concert was titled 'Concert Kel Assouf' with appreciable contributions from world visual artists through an organized exhibition. An idea originally conceived by a good friend of Mary, called Carine Vanderstraeten an artist, illustrator and album designer. Carine

proposed to exhibit for Takrist, and along the way, she invited three more artists to join and an enthralling performance by Kel Assouf. It was a fantastic weekend for everyone.



The Touaregs in the desert

The Takrist Foundation is presently based in Brussels, Belgium and three of the founding members live in Belgium. As Mary would put it, “this is great because Belgium needs extra promotion on the Touareg culture. Not many people know about it and we are glad to expose it.” Still being run by the four hard working members of the board of administration who fully love and appreciate what they do. Getting closer to one another the more has helped them to gain the confidence of the people that hear about their missions and objectives.

Mary Lindekens remembers the ‘Love thy Neighbour, the way Thou Love Yourself’ in the scriptures of the Christian Bible. A commandment that is so difficult for the human race to admonish and adhere to. The world views of humans have always being bedevilled by self-centeredness, to the extent of help from other source may be extremely difficult for an organisation like Takrist to run as many programs as possible to raise funds to save the lives of an existing tribe through hope to live. “For now all the funds are generated by us solely. As I said, we organise as many activities as possible to promote Touareg culture through concerts, exhibitions, artefact sale such as silver jewellery and leather ware, dinners and more. Other times, non-Touareg related events such as garage sales or flea markets with products receive from donors. We try to do a lot with the Touaregs artifacts. They are one of the most beautiful in the world. The men blacksmith make fantastic silver jewelry, one of the nicest in the world, excellent quality and original pieces. The women make all the leather ware, like bags, pillows, key chains, and many more. The flea market is a nice way of recycling. We get objects such as clothing, decoration, books, kitchen ware, and more from people that don’t need them any longer. Instead of throwing them out, they give them to us. We sell these objects at cheap and reasonable prices at flea markets and the entire money raise go to Africa. Is that not a nice way of recycling? Soon, on May 18, 2014, we will be participating at the 20 km run of Brussels. We will have a team of runners

that will be looking for sponsorship from family, friends and colleagues. The entire money raised would go to the Touaregs in Azawad.

Takrist has also exploited the power of Touareg music, since music is universal and it unites people, thereby, creating bonds and affinity. The Touaregs are known for their music. They have an entire history on music, starting with traditional music, moving to the introduction of the guitar. They have plenty of good musicians with some famous bands like Tinariwen, Tamikrest, Bombino and many others. According to Mary, “we want to promote their music and musicians, as well as their lovely culture, instead of just asking people for money, we prefer to offer them a concert and ask them for money. At least they get something back as well. It’s a win-win situation. Though we continue to seek for sponsorships and subsidies, but firstly, we want to prove that we are a reliable organisation. At this first stage, we want to inform the world community of the existence of the Touaregs. Then we would sensitise them on the prevailing problems the people are facing that are visible and dehumanising. We don’t want to continue to witness the lack of support from the home and local governments. In the future we would like to work and do collaborations with more non-governmental-establishments and local governments by creating that awareness of civil rights of the tribe.”

The road to freedom can be so long sometimes. Mary had been a figure skating coach for close to 25 years, definitely, she knows the thorny and stormy roads of success stories. “I have learnt to work hard. To fall and get up again due to my training and an instructor as a figure skating coach, all these experiences are very important in running this organisation. Presently, I am the secretary of the organisation and I also run the administrative and legal matters.” The hard working Belgian native abhors laziness and dismisses people without engaging attributes. She loves to be surrounded by people with inspirational qualities and visions. But if there is one thing Mary would like to change about the world we live in, she is so sure it will be getting back to basic values and getting rid of accessories. “When I am in the desert, I do not have much. There, you will find nature family, friends, tents for housing, food not to make you hungry. You live in harmony, no external factors pulling you down, no clock ticks to remind you of anything, in the desert, everything is simple. It’s a shame the world has not had another Ghandi for a long time.”
Images courtesy of Takrist Foundation.



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