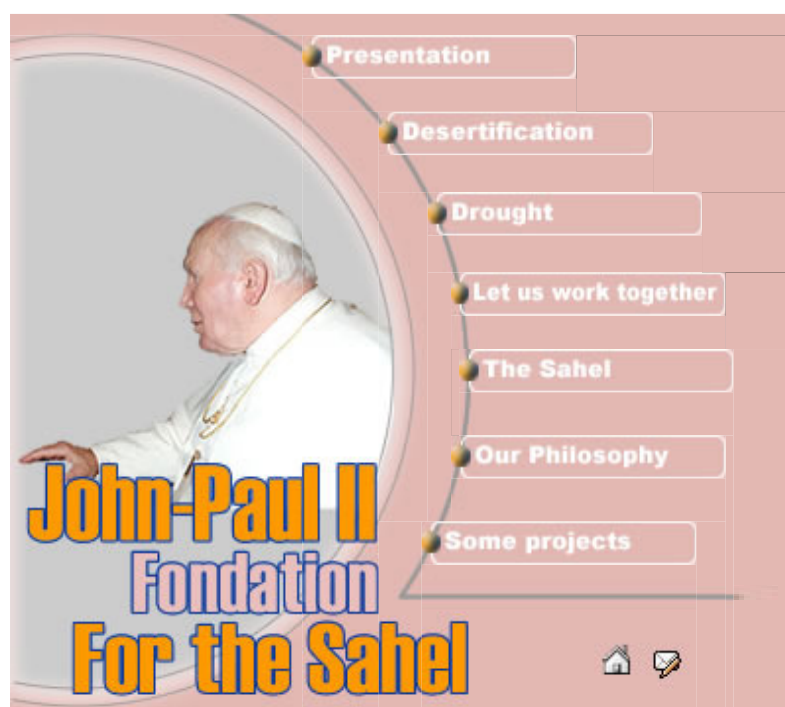


French



The Sahel

The Sahel is a transition zone between the arid Sahara in the north and the humid tropical regions in the south. It is an arabic word meaning shore. After crossing the ocean of sand which is the Sahara, one finds a shore where life is possible. In the past, the Sahel was a region of big empires : Ghana (now Mauritania), Mali, Songhai, Mossi, etc. The Sahel countries were areas abounding in gold that was distributed to the rest of the world through Maghrebian traders and on the occasion of trips of sovereigns to Mecca. The stories of the first explorers who visited the Sahel countries describe a region of hard working farmers working as hard as the farmers in Europe.

This has nothing to do with the current images of famine and drought. The Sahel is also a political entity with the Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel which is composed of 9 countries. In geographical terms, the Sahel spans the sahara-sahelian zone and the sahel-sudanian zone. Annual rainfall ranges between 100mm and 800mm. Insufficient rains badly distributed in time constitute one of the major constraints facing the Sahel. The problem of the Sahelian farmer is that of rainfall uncertainty and variation from one year to another. Located on the banks of the Sahara, the Sahel is threatened by desertification and is subjected to cyclical drought periods: 1880, 1910-1915, 1940-1942, 1953-1954, 1958-1963, 1968-1970, 1972-1974.

The ecosystem of the Sahel is unbalanced; man does no longer live in harmony with nature. The John Paul II Foundation for the Sahel endeavours to assist the Sahelians in reversing this trend of repeated drought periods, of desertification.

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