

Forum enlightening, exciting, memorable.....

FIVE LAS VEGAS RESIDENTS ATTEND FORUM '85 IN NAIROBI

Four Las Vegas residents Esther Langston, Rheba Lindsey, Margaret Crawford, Dr. Norma Porter and Harriet Babbero, last month's FORUM '85 in Nairobi, Kenya, was an opportunity for each woman to enhance her personal growth.

"It was an unforgettable experience to meet women from various parts of the world and address the status of women," Langston said.

She said many of the conference participants were unaware that the problems of women in their native homelands were similar to those of American women.

"It was a shock to know that women from other parts of the world experience many of the same difficulties as we do," she said.

The workshops dealt with women in government, birth control, and male-female relationships, Langston said.

"The theme was equality, development and peace and there were over a hundred or so workshops that dealt with different aspects of different women's groups across the country," Crawford said. "I think one of the reasons that many women were there was to find out what was happening around the world."

By Margaret A. Crawford

FORUM '85, The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO), United Nations World Meeting for Women was held in Nairobi, Kenya July 10-19. Dame Nita Barrow, Convenor of the forum stated it was an encounter, a happening, a meeting of the minds of women.

FORUM '85 was the culminating international event for the Decade For Women. It was an attempt to assess what progress had been achieved in the advancement of women. It was a time to identify any remaining obstacles preventing the full realization of the decade's goals — Equality, Development and Peace.

Nairobi, a modern metropolis, did not appear to be experiencing the type of racial tension and turmoil so well publicized about other African countries.

The phrase "Women of Color" was the term used to collectively

describe the general population of over 12,000 plus women. There was no concerted effort to distinguish women because of race, color or creed.

Women from all cultures, countries, and contentments descended upon Nairobi with the idea of learning, sharing, observing and gathering for a purpose — Harambee — Let's Get Together.

Women came for many reasons. Some were elected delegates of organizations or countries. Some were members of coalitions representing specific causes. Some were workshop presenters, exhibitors, and vendors. Others viewed the forum as "The Great Peace Journey." It was time for dialogue which would create a new basis for international negotiations for peaceful disarmament and development. To many Black women, it was a pilgrimage to the Motherland. It was time to form a linkage with past and the African continent. The wearing of African garments, hairstyles, jewelry, and head dress; the review of historical data and family origins; the Swahili language and the evolution of dialects were some of the linkages.

Still others came independently or were representatives of colleges and universities. The reasons were endless.

The University of Nairobi, site of the majority of the conference activities, proved to be conducive to learning, personal enhancement and challenge. A petrified wood relief monument of a giraffe in the university courtyard, free roaming and common to the Serengeti of Kenya, was symbolic of the university motto, Aim High. This is the goal of achievement given to university students so stated a university professor. Ironically, it formed a linkage with the theme of the conference.

A prelude to entrance to the university and some hotels was a security check which included inspections of hand baggage, passage through x-ray walkways, and/or the use of hand-held metal detectors by police or security personnel. Other hotels were patrolled by numerous policemen. Security precautions sometimes produced long lines. It was an indication of the cautiousness exercised by the



From left, Dr. Norma M. Porter, Rheba Lindsey, Margaret Crawford and Esther Langston

government of Nairobi regarding the welfare of its visitors and people.

The hospitality of the people of Nairobi was commendable. It included home hospitality, coordinated visits to projects and schools, tips on where to shop and interaction sessions. One student from the University of California at Berkeley was in need of housing for a portion of her stay. A home was opened to her and transportation provided.

Margaret A. Crawford attended Forum '85 held in Nairobi, Kenya and gives a synopsis of the conference. She is an educator employed in the Clark County School District, a graduate of Wayne State University, Detroit with a Master's Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation and Special Education, is currently president of the Las Vegas Pan-Hellenic Council; Vice-president of the Assault on Illiteracy Project (AOIP); Secretary for the Black Community Organizations Network (BCON); Member of the Black Las Vegas for African Relief; Vice-president of Les Femmes Douze; past president of Theta Theta Omega Chapter, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority; Member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Far Western Region Program Thrust, Women Involved in Global Issues.

Her reasons for attending the FORUM '85, the non-governmental organization (NGO) world meeting for women were:

- To gain insight and information about the countries of Kenya, Ivory Coast and Togo while on tour;
- To form a communication and cultural linkage with a Kenyan school, its teachers and headmaster;
- To seek information that would compliment the educational program of her students through Language Arts, Social Studies and Art;
- To extend professional growth and find out what other women are doing in community and educational activities through networking.

Kenyan women were patient and smiled as the foreign visitors struggled to make wishes and requests known because of the language barrier and as we took "forever" to count our shillings. When all else failed regarding monetary transactions, calculators were instantly whipped out. The calculator was a universal tool no matter where you shopped. Technology at work. Interpreters were often also secured to give assistance when needed.

At a dinner/fashion show hosted by the American Women of Kenya, a Kenyan woman wanted to know what I and other women expected when we came. Did we expect to see people swinging from the trees? Did we expect to see people running around in grass skirts and living in dirt huts? My answer was NO! I knew better. There were no illusions of seeing Kenyan women as so often depicted in the "Tarzan" jungle movies. I went on to explain why I had come, my levels of interests, and the insights gained from friends before my arrival. She was glad to hear positive comments and appeared to be relieved.

Interestingly, the question often asked by men was, "What are you women doing?" "Why are you here?" Though the answers were as varied as the women in attendance, to discuss issues that influence the development of society, and women in particular, and bring about change was the general consensus stated many different ways. One man's answer to such statements was, "Don't talk about us too badly."

My personal priorities were many. First, I wanted to gain insights into the arts and crafts and art history of Kenya by visiting art galleries and museums. Secondly, I wanted to visit a Kenyan elementary school for a comparison of the educational procedures and curriculum of Kenya with our school district. Thirdly, attendance at Forum workshops and activities was a means of enhancing personal and community involvement skills and finding new approaches to activities. Fourth, there were opportunities to interact with women from other parts of the country and the world.

Conference participants found that three things were essential before embarking upon the daily schedule. A first was to check the currency rate of exchange for the U.S. dollar. This was essential for financial survival. A second was to obtain a copy of the FORUM '85

newspaper. This tool, published daily, kept you abreast of conference happenings and workshop changes and additions. A third was to prioritize time lines, workshops to attend, and subsequent locations.

Nairobi educators were eager to have other teachers visit their schools. Many were interested in forming alliances with teachers and students of other countries. This was viewed as an approach to help students learn about each other and extend their knowledge of other cultures and countries. Developing pen-pal programs and sharing educational ideas and materials would also be a part of the communication.

My visit to a Nairobi elementary school was coordinated by an employee of the Nairobi City Council. City schools in Nairobi are controlled and funded by the city council through the Minister of Education and Industry Office.

Interviews with the Headmaster and teachers highlighted interesting data relevant to procedure, curriculum, and the status of schools before and after the achievement of Kenyan independence.

Our Kenyan hostess extended home hospitality which included refreshments, a short language lesson, a tour of her home, and family introductions.

One teacher from Maryland had an ongoing support program with her home school and an adopted village school in the rural area of Nairobi. One of her priorities was to deliver a package of educational materials, gifts and letters from her school during her visit.

A gala to salute the National Steering Committee, the Kenya Government Secretariat and the Women's Bureau on the occasion of the U.N. Decade for Women Conference 1985 and FORUM '85 was sponsored by the African-American Institute in cooperation with 13 participating organizations. The featured speaker was Coretta Scott King.

She proposed January 20, 1986 as an international day devoted to the goals of the U.N. Decade for Women. The day would coincide with the birthday observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. It could become a rallying point for citizens of the world to dedicate themselves to the principles of non-violence, peace, and equality.

Gifts of peace and friendship, presented by organizational presidents, included scholarships for Kenyan women to American universities, historical documents, gold medallions, and honorary organizational memberships.

The FORUM '85 NGO Information Resource Guide was representative of a geographical road map of the world. It was filled with over 1000 activities. There were lectures, workshops, film festivals, exhibitions, tours, artistic presentations, songfests, and receptions. The events presented varied in both form and content all focusing on women's issues. Workshop captions were Equality, Development, Peace, Employment, Health, Education, Religions, Older and Younger Women Networking, etc. They were indicative of the immediate community and global concerns of women present and future.

Under these broad captions were the universal concerns of sexual discrimination, pay equity, affordable and quality day care, governmental policy, drug abuse, infant mortality, single parenting, environmental degradation to list just a few workshop areas.

Workshops were conducted by well prepared, competent, committed and well-informed women. Tours for delegates and participants conducted by Kenyan women to rural and urban projects such as retail businesses, water projects and rehabilitation centers were daily occurrences.

In addition, Kenyan women were seeking contacts and methods for increasing their economic base by finding a suitable and reliable market for products made by women groups in the country. They are often exploited by middlemen who purchase the products at unacceptable low prices and resell them in urban areas and foreign countries for much higher prices.

Petitions, proposals, and protests as a means of expression were sometimes the order of the day. A French NGO petition condemned its government for conducting nuclear tests and for building a submarine base for nuclear ships. The Women of Europe made an appeal for equal rights, for a life in peace and for the dismissal of nuclear weapons. The Kenyan Government's order for some women to vacate first, second and third class hotels sparked protests by U.S. and other women. The rooms had been prepaid and guaranteed, solution for refunds and substituted housing were finally reached. Lesbians had defied a "pack and go" or "stay away" order rumored to exist because their presence might offend some and for fear of harassment by police. Women with handicaps held a news conference to protest inadequate assessability to the buildings where some activities were being held. Placecard-carrying delegates demonstrated peacefully against apartheid, Israel and U.S. intervention in Nicaragua.

The statement, "If women ruled the world..." prompted lively discussions on strategies for education, decision-making, power thrusts and new perceptives. Answers to the question, "What is feminism?" pointed to the growing awareness that feminism is not

just a women's issue but a broad political agenda with a world view. The international flavor of the answers in general had strong ramifications for changes in the legal systems for roles of political advocacy and for understanding diversity.

An informal survey of NGO participants asked whether there should be another international meeting during the interim years of the decade. Some supported the idea because of the rapid changes taking place in society, the need to keep women educated and informed, to continue outreach and mobilization of women's groups, to assist in implementing measures to help women achieve equality and to change social attitudes.

Other women felt that the additional session would divert the U.N. funds from needed projects and were concerned about personal costs.

Next year is The International Year of Peace. It will see increased efforts to inform as many people as possible about the work toward creating a new basis for international negotiations, for disarmament and development. Dialogue between Soviet and American women produced an agreement to work together for a joint peace demonstration this autumn.

FORUM '85 was an exciting place to be. The Harambee Spirit — Let's Get Together will be remembered around the world. Three things from the forum are certain; how women think today determines what happens tomorrow, women believed in each other and, CHANGE.

West Coast News Tidbits

LYNWOOD, California business or having connections to the racist regime in South Africa.

LYNWOOD, California (KNS) — Dr. Charles Mae Knight resigned as superintendent of the Lynwood School District and accepted the Lynwood School Board's offer of \$154,000 to quit. On the condition that neither she nor the five-member board make negative or derogatory comments about each other and that she drop a lawsuit seeking \$5 million in damages, the board agreed to stop an investigation into her administration. The district attorney already had investigated allegations against Dr. Knight and exonerated her last year of any wrongdoing.

DALLAS, Texas (KNS) — The Dallas County Medical Examiner has identified the sister of jazz musician Herbie Hancock as a victim of the fatal Delta Airlines Flight 191 that crashed and exploded into flames just short of runway 17. Jean Carole Hancock, 41, of Half Moon Bay, was confirmed by a coroner's office spokesperson as one of the people killed when the L-1011 went down August 2.

LOS ANGELES (KNC) — By a 14-0 vote, the Los Angeles City Council this week ordered the withdrawal of city deposits from local banks doing business in South Africa, and recommended that the city's \$4 billion in pension funds be purged over a five-year term of stocks in companies doing

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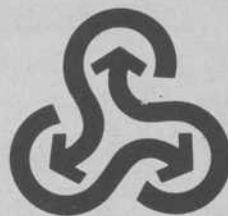
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Outstanding Nurse Sought

Do you know a nurse working in maternal/child health or pediatrics who is outstanding in her profession? Nominations are now being accepted from anyone wishing to nominate a nurse for the Nevada Nurses' Association/March of Dimes Nurse of the Year Award.

The winner will be selected on the basis of involvement in maternal/infant or pediatric health nursing, contributions made in nursing care given to mothers and children through application of the Maternal/Child Nursing Standards of Practice, and evidence of involvement in continuing education. Criteria for the award and nominations forms are available from the Nevada Nurses' Association, 3660 Baker Lane, Reno, NV 89509, or by calling 825-3555 in Reno.

The \$250 award will be presented to the winner at the annual Nevada Nurses' Association convention in mid October. Deadline for receipt of applications is September 15th.

Register