

Reflections from my journey to Africa, November 2003

During my first years in school we celebrated the UN-day (24th of October) each year. One time my contribution to the celebration was a poem about peace on earth. I can still remember how much I thought and wondered about the reasons for that the world looks like it does.

In November 2003 I went to Kenya and Uganda with the Globetree Organization. They want children to believe in the future and therefore work with Agenda 21 and the Rights of the Child, in many special ways. So special ways they've become a consultative instance to the UN.

Children's Garden

In the slums outside Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, they've started a school called "Children's Garden". It's like a big green oasis in the middle of the mishmash of shantytowns. Moses Ndungu is the man behind the whole idea, and he's running it together with some other teachers and help from the Globetree. Children's Garden is far beyond an ordinary school. There is no single building; only grass, trees, bushes, small plants and a brook. The children in the school learn to grow plants and take care of water and soil in a good way. The idea is that this important knowledge will be brought home to the families and in that way spread in the society.

My visit to Children's Garden was a strong experience. When we arrived, all the curious small children surrounded us immediately. They took turns holding my hand and showed me around. I couldn't miss how proud they were telling me all about their school and the plants and trees they had planted. Later they held a wonderful performance with songs, dances, and theatre. The message of the theatre was that it's important with knowledge to know more about life and the future. Most of the songs were about problems with AIDS.

Children's Meeting Place

On the UN-area in Nairobi Globetree has received a big tree, which became the first Children's Meeting Place, in 2001. The idea is that it will be a Meeting Place for children and politicians, and the politicians are the ones that shall listen to what the children have to say. A dialogue is held, but in a different way than the politicians is used to. The children are in the centre and they express themselves in their own ways.

During my stay we spent one day under this tree. There were lots of kids from many different schools in Nairobi, also from Children's Garden. The tree was decorated with big banderoles the children had made themselves. One said "Save environment, give earth a chance". Each school had performances with various songs and dances. So did I and the three other girls from Sweden. Most of the songs were about AIDS and pollution. It wasn't hard to understand that these things are very important to talk about for the children.

Our United Water and Soil Ceremony

Later during the day we made the Water- and Soil Ceremony, where both the elements were united in a symbolic way. All the children had brought both water and soil from

their homes, and I from my home. The ceremony is held to show the importance of clean water and soil and to show that we all belong together. Connected with the ceremony some children read poems they had written about clean water and soil, and what we need it for; to drink, make food, wash clothes and grow plants. Some children handed over Our United Water and Soil to our Guest of Honor, Mr. Shafquat Kakakhel from the UN. He thanked the children with a long speech. Among other things he said: "We are one people living on this planet. It's the only one we have so we must take care of it. If we don't, how will we survive? We are making it difficult. I'm happy that you have decided to take care of what belongs to you, to all of us." He poured some of the water around the children's tree and then led us all to another very small tree.

Anna Lindh was honored

This tree had been planted in memory of our previous foreign minister Anna Lindh. Some years ago, I watched her from the stands in the Globe Arena in Stockholm, when she was the children's Guest of Honor and received Our United Water and held a speech. Mr. Kakakhel honored her in his speech and told us what a great work she had done, both as a foreign minister and as a minister for the environment. He poured the rest of the water around her tree to unite it with the children's tree – The Children's Meeting Place.

AIDS

After these two days in Kenya we went to Uganda where we visited four cities. In each new place we met the mayor and his colleagues. In three of the cities we carried through inaugurations of new Children's Meeting Places, and it was always a tree near the mayor's office. And I never stopped being touched by the Our Uniting Water- and Soil Ceremony. In the first city, Mukono, the children showed us many songs and dances. Richard, a guy in my age, sat beside me and translated what was not in English, so that I could understand. It was at this point I really started to realize how much the children suffer from the problems that AIDS creates. How it every day affects their lives and how helpless they feel. Their songs, poems, dances and plays showed it so obviously. Like a scream for help.

Adults need a dialogue

I think the adults need this kind of dialogue just as much as the children. I think that they, by sharing the children's messages, questions and thoughts about the world, realize the obvious in working for a better environment. I believe there is no one that has left a meeting with children in the Globetree without being deeply touched in the heart.

The children's dialogue

Of course this dialogue is important for the children. It's a way for them to express themselves in their own way, and get the politicians to listen to what they have to say. Children really have important things to say! Not just the children I met on my trip, but all children in the whole world.

As I said, I still remember everything I thought and wondered about when I was small and wrote a poem about peace on earth.

by Jessica Warringer, 2005.

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