

## **EXPERIENCE—MALINA MOORE, SANTA MONICA, CALIF. MAKING FRIENDS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Where to begin?! It's hard to articulate my 16-day experience (Nov. 27–Dec. 11, 1999) in Cape Town, South Africa, because I feel it changed my life on so many levels. It allowed me to deepen my faith and conviction in being an SGI member and caused me to explore my self identity — as a Buddhist, a woman, a black person. And best of all, it gave me the opportunity to make great friends with whom I feel I'll be able to share a lifetime of experiences.

When I found out that I was to accompany SGI-USA's "Treasuring the Future: Children's Rights and Realities" exhibit to Cape Town for the Parliament of the World's Religions, I really had no idea what to expect. On the day of our arrival, SGI-USA Vice General Director Gary Murie and I were greeted by 90-degree sunny weather with intermittent hot winds rushing down from glorious Table Mountain. We were immediately in awe of Cape Town's intense natural beauty.

Our main purpose was to set up the exhibit at the Cape Town Civic Center. People from throughout the city walk through the Center from the central train station to pay car registrations, city taxes, etc. Therefore, not only the 7,000 registered participants for the Parliament of the World's Religions could experience the exhibit, but the local people could as well. All day, we talked with the many people passing by, looking at the Children's Rights exhibit. I was struck by their genuine interest and concern and reflected on my own experience in the United States where the issue of children's rights (and especially the U.N.'s Convention on the Rights of the Child especially) is often misunderstood.

My secondary responsibility was to serve on a panel to present the exhibit and the Youth Peace Conference's Victory Over Violence project to the Parliament. Serving on this panel and hearing the other presentations, I gained a renewed sense of pride and conviction in the SGI as a religious organization that truly takes action for the sake of the people. While most of the religious representatives agreed that religion plays an important role in shaping positive societies, I found that the SGI really stood out in terms of its consistent efforts on a grassroots level.

My most treasured memory, however, is the time I was able to spend with the incredible SGI members in Cape Town. We spent almost every day with them. From chanting desperate daimoku together to get the exhibit through customs to being driven from venue to venue to attending their World Peace prayer meeting, I developed a closeness and sense of familiarity that will always be in my heart. I was able to dialogue openly and honestly.

When I asked one Cape Town member what he felt was different in post-apartheid South Africa, he explained that under apartheid, the system's opponents had a common focus in fighting injustice and there was an overall sense of hope and optimism. He said that of course many other factors are involved, but now the focus has sort of dissipated and that sense of optimism is somewhat diminished. A non-SGI Parliament participant commented that it would be the SGI members who would be the hope and propel the sense of optimism for South Africa in the future. I totally agree. In fact, if I can articulate anything about my experience in South Africa, it's that I came away with the infectious spirit of the SGI Cape Town members and I am filled with joy and hope for the future.