

AROUND THE SOUND

VOICES

The people and personalities who
make this place unique

GIVING

Each week the Seattle Post-Intelligencer profiles someone from a charitable organization that needs support. Today we hear from **Joel Dimiyen Bisina of Nigeria, who is host director for Global Citizen Journey, a Seattle-based group dedicated to fostering peace and improving communication in often-ignored regions of the world through one-on-one interaction, conflict resolution workshops and other outreach. The group will take its first trip, to the Niger Delta in Nigeria, in November.**



Bisina

What spurred you to create the group?

"Global Citizen Journey is not my own creation. I met Susan Partnow, who is the executive director of Global Citizen Journey, in November 2003 when I came for our international conference on the practice of peace on Whidbey Island. In the course of our (conference) . . . she shared the idea of the Global Citizen Journey and what the objectives of the group would be and I felt motivated and excited."

Your group is dedicated to building peace. Can you give some details about how you do that?

"That means working with local women's organizations, youth organizations, community leaders at a grass-roots level . . . training in . . . mediation and advocacy and negotiation skills."

Tell us a bit more about your first trip in November.

"The delegation will be leaving for Nigeria on the 17th of November and coming back on the 3rd of December. While in Nigeria, they will fly into Lagos and spend some few days in Lagos to visit places of historical importance, like the slave port in Badagry. They will also stop by the American Embassy to register their presence in the country. Then we will proceed to Benin City, where they will pay a courtesy (visit) to Oba of Benin, which is one of the oldest dynasties in the West African sub region. There they will proceed . . . to meet with government officials to acquaint them with their mission, then proceed to the community . . . Oporoza in the delta, where

they will stay with families in the communities and work on a community project, which is building a library, the first library in the entire region."

What's next after that trip?

"I think there is another trip planned for Burundi in 2007 in line with the mission of the organization."

Do you envision your approach spreading throughout Africa, or staying focused on Niger?

"It will spread around the whole of Africa and to other parts of the world that are least known, least talked about and least reported."

Many U.S. citizens are unfamiliar with problems in Nigeria. Why do you think that is?

"My time here in the Northwest has shown that not many Americans know about issues in Nigeria and the Niger Delta. . . .

"They have very little knowledge about Africa. So many see Africa as a single country, not a continent. I think part of it also has to do with the fact that the focus is on other parts of the world, like Europe and Asia, and then in the Middle East.

"There is so much frustration, so much mistrust, so many tribal and communal conflicts in the (Niger Delta) region.

"So I see this as an opportunity for people of good will from the United States to have an opportunity to go into the delta, to live in a community and experience the day-to-day lives of the people of the delta. So that when they come back, they will be ambassadors of the Niger Delta. (They will) tell the stories of how the environment has been destroyed and how the local economy has been ruined during many years of oil exploration and exploitation in the delta by multinational corporations and their collaborators, the national government of Nigeria."

Can people get involved here in the Puget Sound area?

"People can volunteer their time to work . . . here in the United States. People can donate cash to sponsor the library and books for the library.

"There are still openings . . . (on the trip)."

HOW TO HELP

Global Citizen Journey needs a variety of materials and help. It plans to build a library in the Niger Delta and needs books, videos, software, art supplies, a projector, Internet access and solar cells. It also needs volunteers for news updates, research and outreach, as well as design and technical advice.

The group will hold an informational party from 7 to 8:30 p.m. June 29 at the Phinney Neighborhood Center, 6532 Phinney Ave N., Seattle.

For more information, call Susan Partnow at 206-789-8697.

— Paul Nyhan

@ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

To learn more, visit Global Citizen Journey's Web site:
www.globalcitizenjourney.org