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**Puget Sound Residents Broker Peace and Partnerships in Oil-Rich Niger Delta:
Grassroots Citizen Diplomacy Accomplishes What Governments Can't—or Won't**

SEATTLE, October 28, 2005 – On November 16, nineteen Puget Sound residents will embark on a life-changing journey to Nigeria. Seattle-based Global Citizen Journey (GCJ) organized the trip as part of its mission to make grassroots connections and build bridges of peace around the world. GCJ trips are designed to promote cross-cultural understanding and educate the public about little-known regions of the world.

GCJ representatives and Nigerian partners broke ground last month for the first library in the entire Niger Delta riverine region. Attending the foundation laying ceremony in the Ijaw village of Oporoza were Itsekiri tribe members—an unprecedented event between tribes recently locked in violent conflict. This was considered so significant that a Nigerian national newspaper carried the headline, “Americans Break Wall of Jericho.” Itsekiri tribal leaders have invited GCJ back next year to do a follow-on project in one of their villages.

Also attending were government officials, some of whom had never been to the Delta. Chevron too is participating in the library project and has made a major financial contribution—an unusual step in a region devastated by the environmental impact of oil production, where relations between villagers and oil companies are tense at best.

These developments are the result GCJ's grassroots approach to building cross-cultural bonds and global neighborhoods. During the upcoming November trip, the Puget Sound delegates will join Nigerian delegates and Oporoza villagers for two weeks of finishing library construction and workshops on conflict resolution and compassionate listening. These are ordinary people from all walks of life who believe—and are proving—that individuals who join together with open minds and willing hands can make a profound difference in the world.

“The events that unfolded last month taught us that as international citizen diplomats from outside the country, we arrive with tremendous power,” says Susan Partnow GCJ founder and executive director. “We are learning to ‘leverage our privilege.’ It has opened many doors and allowed us to bring much-needed attention and support to this significantly challenged part of the world.”

GCJ is partnering with African host organization Niger Delta Professionals for Development (NIDPRODEV) to bring the group to Oporoza. The library they build will provide vital learning resources for the entire region, which has only 40% literacy and classrooms without books. Nigerians who grew up in the Delta stress the importance of empowering both children and adults with reading skills and books that will introduce them to a wider world with more possibilities to advocate for their community and reach their potential.

GCJ and NIDPRODEV hope the journey will draw attention to the conflict-ridden Niger Delta, which multinational corporations have developed into the seventh largest oil-producing region in the world, causing significant environmental and economic challenges for the area's indigenous tribes. NIDPRODEV founder and acclaimed peace mediator, Joel Bisina, who is from the region, commented: “Nigeria is Africa's largest nation and considered the leader in political and economic issues. Continued social and economic unrest there could have a deeply destabilizing effect on both the African continent and the global community. We hope that a more complete understanding of the real story behind the impact of oil production over the last 45 years will motivate people to address these issues before they become a crisis.”

The public is invited to a send-off celebration November 10, from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm at Antioch University, 2326 6th Avenue, Seattle, Room 201. The evening will include African music, refreshments and a short presentation. Donations of books, videos and DVDs for the library are welcome. For more information, contact Leslye Wood 206.282.0880. The event coincides with the 10th anniversary of the death of internationally renowned Niger Delta writer, environmental leader and human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and is dedicated to his memory. Saro-Wiwa was executed in 1995 by the then-military regime in Nigeria.

Global Citizen Journey, www.globalcitizenjourney.org, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building cross-cultural understanding and global connectedness by bringing people of diverse cultures together to work on community projects, develop leadership skills and create sustainable communication networks. GCJ evolved from international grassroots efforts including The Compassionate Listening Project, its fiscal sponsor.

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