

# Freddie Petett reports on Nairobi Women's Conference



FREDDYE PETETT (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

by Robert Lothian

Freddie Petett returned from her trip to the Nairobi Women's Conference impressed with how little is wasted by women in Africa.

During a side trip from Nairobi, Petett said she witnessed women in a Kenya village carrying water for three miles. Under those conditions, "You don't waste it," she said.

Petett said she was also impressed with how much time is spent by women to gather firewood, the main cooking fuel in many Third World countries. "Food is grown anywhere there is a plot of land they can take care of," she said.

Returning to the United States, Petett said the relative wastefulness in America showed in stark relief. "How we use water around the house has changed."

The former director of the Urban League in Portland reported on her trip in July to Nairobi, Kenya, in East Africa, and Ivory Coast and Senegal in West Africa to a meeting of the World Affairs Council of Oregon Nov. 12.

The main theme of the conference overall, she said, was "to make peace a priority issue." One of the benefits of the conference, which discussed issues and formulated policies affecting women through the year 2000, she said, was making contact with women from all over the world. "I have them all computerized and I have my mailing list," Petett said. She hopes to exchange information about how women plan their time and about different methods of management in the various countries.

The conference was actually two conferences—the one for official U.N. delegates on one side of Nairobi and another for non-delegates on the other side of town, Petett said.

Since she had press credentials from the *Oregonian*, Petett said she was able to attend the official conference for an afternoon. She described the presentation by U.S. delegate Maureen Reagan as disappointing. "Even though there are things left to be done, women in the U.S. are in great shape," Petett paraphrased the president's daughter. And regarding illiteracy, "In our own

country, we've got it licked, that's exactly what she said. That's the kind of information our delegation was putting out."

About half of the official delegates were men, according to Petett, who said the unofficial conference offered more contact with international women.

In spite of differences, discussion was reasonable at most of the dozens of workshops, except for the one on Israel-Palestine, which had to be called off when a shouting match developed, she said. Ironically, "Some of the workshops relating to peace had more tension in them than others," she said.

Many more women attended than were planned for, so housing and group size were problems, she said. "If there was anything negative about the conference it was that there was never a group small enough so you didn't have to yell across so you could be heard." And there weren't enough translators, which meant that she only understood "about every tenth word."

Talking to women at the conferen-

ce about social services in various countries made her realize the importance of community social services, families, churches and schools, in supporting young women in Portland. "Particularly in the Black community it seems to be something we've gotten away from in recent years," she said.

Petett said she has one more year to go on her three year Kellogg Foundation Fellowship. The fellowship has enabled her to take time off from her 15-year career in government and non-profit agencies to travel and take part in events like the Nairobi Conference. She has traveled to Mexico, Africa and Paris as a Kellogg Fellow, and she hopes to study art in London Museums during her third year.

Petett has also started a management consultant business in Portland—she is currently reorganizing a city bureau and consulting for a political campaign.

"I did leave a career and start a new one, at age 40 plus," she said. "The positive thing is that I don't have to be in night meetings any more."

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