

Voter education 'can work'

From Page 13

Canadian-born Thompson served as Deputy Chief Electoral Officer of Untac, directing an intensive voter education programme. She recently visited South Africa to report to the Canadian government on appropriate assistance for South Africa in the run-up to elections.

Thompson says that when Untac started its voter education campaign ("peace and democracy is a viable option to violence") Cambodians did not have a clue about the meaning of democracy. "Being in opposition meant that you got shot or put in jail," she said.

Although conditions were dangerous, Untac had the resources to conduct very effective voter education, largely by means of radio broadcasts and personal contact. While the electoral staff numbered only 650, Untac had its own radio station and hundreds of Cambodian nationals were hired to do personal or face-to-face voter education.

The campaign drew logistical support from some 20 000 Untac staff in Cambodia (civilians, police and soldiers). They saw to it that the trainers were delivered to the voters, "by boat, ox-cart or helicopter", said Thompson.

Untac had 11 months in which to prepare a fairly illiterate population for the election. "It was not enough time," said Thompson. "One can never start early enough." Radio broadcasts began at three hours a day and peaked at 15 hours.

"When the UN arrived, there were high expectations that we would deliver peace and prosperity," said Thompson. "Very soon great distrust set in, but we got over that and people started developing an understanding of what we were doing."

She emphasises that voter education is a trust-building exercise. Voters don't trust outsiders and they don't trust state radio services.

Most important was to get across the message that the ballot was secret and safe. This was part of every phase of the education programme, which culminated in an intensive six-week campaign on how to vote and where to vote.

Thompson believes that both political parties and NGOs need to do voter education, especially since political parties can never hope to be seen as non-partisan.

Her experience in Cambodia was that voters had great difficulty in deciding for whom to vote, often because the parties could not provide adequate information about their policies. "Every one of the 20 registered parties, for example, claimed to stand for peace and democracy."

Thompson said she was very impressed by the contribution made by civil society in South Africa, and by the quality of NGO voter education programmes.

From her discussions with South Africans, Thompson gauged significant support for a limited role in the elections for the international community. "In the end though, no outsider group can make it happen for you. You must do it for yourselves."



THOMPSON: Real skepticism about secret vote.

Welcome waits for 'lost child' of Africa

Tanzania, unwavering foe of the apartheid state, home to thousands of Umkhonto we Sizwe cadres, has long seemed a place that would be unhealthy for white South Africans. Cape Town journalist TONY WEAVER, travelling with film maker Liz Fish to whom he is married, was happily surprised.

KYELA, Southern Tanzania. - This crossing from Malawi into Tanzania is notorious among African travellers. This is the big ugly, where the Tanzanian authorities strip-search you and your vehicle, where five-hour waits are shortened only by the production of reasonable wads of US dollars.

Just a few short months ago, white South Africans stood less chance of getting through than the UN has of bringing peace to Somalia. Getting a Tanzanian visa was easy enough: the High Commission in Harare couldn't have been friendlier. The visas took 24 hours to process, despite warnings we'd had from British travellers that theirs took a week.

We drove nervously through the 20 km of no man's land separating Malawi from Tanzania. No matter how good your papers, if a Tanzanian border official doesn't like you and stamps "prohibited immigrant" into your passport, that's it, the end of your African safari. And three days earlier, we'd heard the news on the BBC: Chris Hani assassinated by a whitey. We reckoned we'd be as popular as Joe Slovo at an AWB rally.

The customs man inspected our visas through mirror sunglasses, his face grim and unsmiling. He'd just finished grilling two Dutch backpackers who walked in cocky, stumbled out pale-faced - and they were leaving Tanzania, for heaven's sake.

He thumbed our passports, took off his shades and stuck out a meaty hand. "I am deeply sorry about your loss. Chris Hani was a great son of Africa," he said.

"You know," he continued, "you are among the first white South Africans to cross this border and we want to show you that you have nothing to fear from black Africa. South Africa is the lost child of Africa, the naughty one that strayed. We are all the family of Africa, waiting to welcome you home."

I am recording his words in detail, not only because they made a profound impression then, but because they set the tone for the welcome we were to receive throughout Tanzania. The customs man pondered a while then said: "Your President De Klerk is a great man of Africa, a man of history. Together, he and Nelson Mandela will change the history of Africa."

We chatted a while. He was amazed to hear that my family had been in Africa for several hundred years. "We thought all whites



WARM HEART OF AFRICA: Anxious that South Africa should pull through.

were wazungus, Europeans. But you are not wazungus, you are watu mw'Afrika, people of Africa, Africans, not like the whites of Tanzania."

He gave a perfunctory glance in the back of our Land-Rover and waved us through. We spent three months there; the memories pile up like favourite old books: drinking whisky with a drunk Catholic priest, sailing a dhow over cobalt-blue and starfish-orange coral reefs with six men all called Ali, sweating out malaria and amoebic dysentery in a fairytale mountain outpost, celebrating Eid in Zanzibar, dining on coconut, pawpaw, giant lobster, octopus and oysters on a phosphorescence-lit tropical beach.

We even ate homemade koeksisters and boerewors, and drank a bottle of KWV Roodeberg with a boeremeisie from Kuils River who travelled on a Norwegian passport and had only been able to admit to being South African in the last six months, after two years of living in Tanzania. But that's another story for another day.

She had an old copy of *Die Suid-Afrikaan* lying around. In it, an article on African cinema deplored the Euro-centricity of white South Africans, and the writer, a white South African, referred scathingly to "restless white youth travelling through Africa in Land-Rovers, carrying cameras instead of guns, not too different from their colonial forebears" - words to that effect.

The poverty of those words came back to us many times as we met other restless white youth, and elders, travelling through Africa, all of them, without exception, overwhelmed by the warmth and welcome with which they were received north of the Limpopo.

One man, a Kalahari farmer from Kenhardt in the northern Cape, with a *brei* thick enough to rope *tollies*, remarked: "Ek wens my mense die goeters jare terug kon gesien het" (I wish my people could have seen these things years ago). "Dis so lekker, die mense het g'n haat in hulle nie" (It's so great, these people have no hate in them).

Without exception, the white South Africans we met had all made a startling discovery: they were Africans and were accepted as Africans by other Africans: they were not wazungus like their pig-

ment brothers and sisters who came to goggle at the game, videotape the tribal dancers, and return home having been in *Out of Africa*.

But this is not an easy time to be travelling "abroad" as a white South African. The BBC news tells us why every night: massacres in Sebokeng, Thokoza, Kenilworth; Eugene Terre'Blanche telling the volk to "prepare for war".

An old family friend and his brother, committed Africans, committed peacemakers, are gunned down on the Wild Coast where they had holidayed since they were kids. Letters from home are filled with despair and fear. The Prague Spring is over.

A strange thing happens in Tanzania and Kenya, over and over again. A black person asks us: "Natoka wapi?" (Where are you from). We reply, "Afrika Kusini" (South Africa). They grasp our hands and reply: "Pole sana, pole sana." (We are so sorry, so sorry).

Because Africa is in agony over South Africa. Victory was so close and now they see it slipping away, sliding towards the kind of nightmare they knew in Uganda, Zanzibar, that they know all too well in Somalia, the Sudan, Zaire and Angola.

Because South Africa was the symbol of what could be: it is further down the road to democracy than Malawi, Tanzania; there are more basic democratic freedoms than in Kenya; things work "down south"; corruption is still something to be ashamed of; the basic wage is five times that of a professor in Tanzania (incredible, but true) and most of the politicians are in the game for their people, not for themselves.

Still, there is hope, and a kind of breathless waiting, a terror of what the next day's headlines will bring from "down south". A Ugandan man whose family fled the terror of Idi Amin and Milton Obote said to us: "If Uganda can go through what it did, and be such a happy place today, then South Africa can pull through."

Meanwhile, the family waits up north, waiting to see if the naughty child will come home, or hover indefinitely at the garden gate.

© Copyright, Tony Weaver 1993

(This article first appeared in *The Cape Times*.)