

Grassroots perspective on an international peace conference

By BARBARA SCHINDLER JONES

Since attending the Soviet-American Citizens' Summit in Alexandria, Va., recently, was my first venture into international peace efforts, I wasn't sure what to expect. My first impression of 100 Soviets and 450 Americans milling around the Radisson Mark Plaza Hotel was a mixture of excitement and confusion.

My most lasting impression, after four and a half days of general and small group sessions in which I had the opportunity to talk personally with Soviet film directors, educators, journalists and trade experts, was a strong feeling of optimism. Everyone seemed convinced that world peace is possible.

I was amazed at the number of grassroots organizations already working to increase understanding, to share ideas and concerns, to get rid of armaments, and to solve the problems of hunger, pollution and terrorism. Some of the organization names, such as Beyond War and Sister Cities, were familiar. But I also met representatives from Global Family, International Peace Museum, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Global Women's Peace, Planet Earth Project, Athletes United for Peace, World Cultural Alliance, the World Future Society, and both the American and Soviet Peace Marches. That's only a partial list.

As a semi-skeptic, whose life has been forever altered by three major wars and untold minor ones, I couldn't help but wonder if these people were all naive dreamers. Did they really think there was a way to affect the individuals, corpo-

rations and countries that depended on the manufacture and sale of arms? Did they think that average citizens could make a difference in the search for peace? The answer to both questions was yes. As one Soviet put it, "It's time for the good people of the world to find each other — and go to work."

Of course, the war mentality juggernaut has not been stopped. But it has been slowed, beginning with changes of attitude in both the U.S.S.R. and U.S.A., and the signing of the INF Treaty last December. And there is no doubt that the people-to-people projects like Sister Cities and Citizen Exchanges have played an important part.

My conclusion is that citizens at this summit are, indeed, dreamers, but they are not naive. They are putting their actions and dollars behind their belief that peace should be our number one priority. Psychologists tell us whatever we can visualize, we can achieve. So let's dream on.

The focus of the summit was on the task forces, each of which was asked to come up with at least one practical project to improve Soviet-American relations. This was not to be a paper exercise, but something the task force group was willing to work on and implement.

My group, Management of Change, designed a meeting of American and Soviet heads of large corporations to share ideas and work together to improve the way they do business. Among the projects planned by other task forces were joint space missions (a natural because both astro-

nauts and cosmonauts were present), global computer classrooms, global energy networks, and a World Congress of Olympians.

Among the more famous people there were Amory Lovins of the Rocky Mountain Institute, who gave a stunning demonstration on ways to reduce energy use world wide; Ted Turner, Turner Broadcasting System, who is lobbying both legislators and presidential candidates to become more involved in peace and disarmament efforts; Dr. Robert Muler, former Assistant U.N. Secretary-General, who has asked the summit staff to organize a summit for the U.N. Non-governmental Organizations; and football coach John Ralston, who is planning to take 10 coaches to Russia to teach Soviets how to play, and eventually organize U.S.A./U.S.S.R. games.

I was continually struck by the Soviets' sense of humor and their willingness to poke fun at the stereotypes on both sides. For example, during the summit, a delegation of 12 Soviets was invited to a prayer breakfast at the Pentagon, of all places. This was the first time Soviets have ever been invited inside the Pentagon. When Genrikh Borovik, president of the Soviet Peace Committee, was asked to report what happened at the breakfast, he said with a straight face, but a twinkle, "I would like to tell you all about it but I can't. It's top secret!"

Another example, which provided the most notable quote of the week, came at dinner one evening. I described the joint U.S.S.R./U.S.A. meeting of top business leaders that my task force

was planning and asked my Soviet dinner companion what he thought the CEOs could learn from each other. He thought a long time and then said, "If the Soviets were put in charge of the Sahara Desert, there would be an immediate shortage of sand."

Thinking how I would feel under similar circumstances, I asked one Soviet if they felt overwhelmed by the 4-1 ratio of Americans to Soviets. His answer surprised me. "Oh no!" he said. "We want as many Americans as possible to talk with us and see us as people."

Boulder and Colorado were well represented at the summit. Conference staff and volunteers from Boulder were Co-chair Barbara Marx Hubbard; Marian and Glenn Head (Marian ran the "Convergence Center" where reports and proceedings were coordinated and distributed); Greg and Gail Hoag; Sandy and Bob Jeffrey; and Sharon White. Other Boulder participants were Cindy Hammond, Phyllis Kirk, Michael Lach, Michael Reynolds, Oakleigh Thorne II, and David and Nicole Yardley.

Other summits will be held. The next one, like the first one, which was held in March of 1987 (for 30 Americans and 58 Soviets) is planned for Moscow. You can get more information from: the Center for Soviet-American Dialogue, 3328 Maryland Avenue, NE, Washington, D.C. 20005.

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