Following that Inner Nudge

by Mary Gilbert, QEW Representative to the UN

I am working on the idea that sometimes really small nudges that we might not identify when they happen could actually be Leadings. Last week I let myself be nudged.

I was attending the Permanent Forum of Indigenous Peoples at the UN and fell into conversation with a guard, a young woman from Ghana named Darlyn. I asked her whether there are indigenous people in her country who do not participate in the main part of society, speak their own language—not the English spoken by the majority as a result of British colonialism—dress differently, etc. I wanted to know about the dynamic between the dominant Nigerian society and indigenous groups, because it crossed my mind that the tribal nature of African society might blur the distinction. She had to think for a minute, and then said, "Yes, there are some. They are way, way in there and we don’t see them, but they are there."

Darlyn observed that over the five years she has worked at the UN she has never seen members of Indigenous groups from Ghana or any other West African countries at the Permanent Forum. It turns out that Darlyn would be thrilled to provide hospitality to any such attendees if they could manage the travel to New York. I suggested that she might use her connections to locate indigenous Ghanians. Thinking about who her connections are she realized that she knows the Ghanian Permanent Representative to the UN. We agreed she would talk with him about it.
Well, guess who came through the gate exactly then. Yes, the Permanent Representative himself! Darlyn and I floated the possibility that Indigenous representatives from Ghana might come next year and he stopped to think about it. I asked if those groups have recognized organizations, because that is a requirement for the mechanics of being approved to come, and he assured me that they do. He didn't commit himself--that would have been very atypical for a diplomat--but he was clearly pondering the possibility. He will also bring it up with representatives from other West African countries.

I have been assured by the director of the Quaker UN Office in Geneva that even at the UN way opens through personal rather than official relationships. I am hoping that this short interchange will lead to more Indigenous Peoples' involvement with the exciting developments in the global Indigenous movement. Darlyn has my card and plans to call me with updates. We will see what happens next year.

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[Image: Kente cloth, known as nwentoma in Akan, is a type of silk and cotton fabric made of interwoven cloth strips and is native to the Akan ethnic group of South Ghana. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kente_cloth]

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