

## **Chinese, Kenyan and U.S. youth beautify Baltimore park**

When she signed up to participate in a youth assembly at the United Nations in early August, Kenyan advertising executive Elizabeth Ndeng'u never imagined she would find herself picking up trash in Baltimore, Maryland.

Neither did Mao Ye, a student at Johns Hopkins University who had arrived in the United States from China just a week earlier to pursue a doctorate in physics.

But both of them responded with enthusiasm when invited by the Youth Federation for World Peace U.S.A. and the China Society to take part in a service project that involved pulling weeds, removing vines and picking up trash in Chinquapin Park.

Ndeng'u and Ye were among about 150 young people from Kenya, China and the United States who joined the clean-up project last Saturday, Aug. 15. The group was welcomed by Wanda S. Durden, director of Baltimore City's Department of Recreation and Parks, and Mendy Nitsch, director of international affairs of the Office of the Secretary of State of Maryland, before getting to work to beautify the park.

After a strenuous morning of sweating cheerfully in the sun, the weary workers flopped down under some trees to share pizza and watermelon and swap stories about themselves, their experiences and their ambitions.

Ndeng'u was part of a delegation of Kenyan young people invited to participate in the Sixth Annual Youth Assembly at the United Nations that took place August 5-9 in New York, in cooperation with the Youth Federation for World Peace U.S.A. (YFWPUSA).

The China Society had also organized a delegation of Chinese students from around the country to take part in the U.N. event. To add a practical dimension to the young people's experience, the two groups planned the service activity along with the Education Association for China's Tomorrow (EACT) and the Tzu Chi Foundation.

It was a rare opportunity for the young people from China and Kenya, nations more likely to be on the receiving end of international aid, to volunteer their service in the United States. It was a "concept-breaking experience," according to Namhi Hwang, one of the China Society organizers.

Many of them said the experience opened their eyes to the concept of social responsibility and the value of connecting with people of different racial and social backgrounds.

“China and America have to work together to be future world leaders; this is the foundation for world peace,” said Shuai Liang, a student in technological management at the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut. “They also have to work with people from poor places and war-torn places, like many in Africa. This kind of teamwork between us, from China, America and Kenya, is very important so we can develop a working chemistry with one another.”

In the afternoon the group was entertained with a traditional Chinese lion dance by the Wong People, one of the performing arts groups that participated in President Barack Obama’s inaugural parade.

Several speakers gave moving and powerful speeches on the significance of the project. Councilor Jianmin Zhang of the Chinese Embassy pointed out that this year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of U.S.-China relations and that projects like this one show a new spirit of cooperation between the two countries.

Other speakers included Chairman of the China Society John Dickson and President of the Youth Federation for World Peace U.S.A. Justin Fong.

David Caprara, director of the Global Peace Service Alliance, expressed the hope that this event would be only the first of many. Events like this could provide the launching pad for a Global Peace Corps, he said. Combining the energy and aspirations of young people from around the world, such a corps could have a powerful global impact for peace.

As the day’s events came to a close, the Tzu Chi Foundation performed Chinese songs and gave a presentation to raise people’s awareness of and concern for the environment, which stressed the importance of developing a lifestyle of recycling.

The day ended on a high, with performances by the Washington AIDS International Teens (WAIT) Team, including hip hop dance, a song, and a skit, showcasing the passion and talent of teens working to promote a lifestyle of abstinence before marriage and faithfulness within marriage, as well as to educate the public about the dangers of HIV/AIDS.

The local TV station WBAL covered the Saturday event, as did China’s Xinhua News Agency.