

Mobilizing The Volunteers For Peace

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By Courtland Milloy

In her latest incarnation, Luci Murphy -- jazz and blues singer, practitioner of yoga and meditation, administrator of general equivalency exams to young parents -- serves as contact person for the Community Coalition for Justice and Peace.

"A contact person is one who is willing to allow their home phone number to be published far and wide," said Murphy, whose number is 202-234-8840.

Doesn't sound like a big deal -- until all the calls start coming in. Or not going out.

"I feel the government forces have already put stuff on my phone lines, because every phone call I make, I have to dial out twice," she joked. "They think the little people like me are going to cause them difficulty."

They just might. But not in ways that government officials are expecting.

While D.C. police were readying their riot gear for demonstrations today against the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, scores of activists from throughout the Washington area were holding their founding peace conference yesterday at the Martin Luther King Jr. Library.

The aim: educate people about injustice at home and abroad and teach them how to do something about it.

"When I look around Washington, I see forces trying to kick people out of their homes, close down the public hospital, sell off the public schools to private corporations -- and that's just the domestic stuff," Murphy said. "I haven't even gotten to Colombia, which is our silent Vietnam because none of our boys are coming back in body bags. But a lot of poor people are being killed in the name of getting rid of drugs, and most of those dying are the black Colombians. Now, why does that not surprise us?"

The conference was all the more impressive for attracting groups that
together, such as the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee ;
Process Work, D.C. and the George Mason University Community Act
Nagasaki Committee and the Nicaragua Network.

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The coalition plans to meet over the next few months to discuss ways t
and improve the quality of life in the Washington area.

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Other topics on the group's agenda include decolonization of the Distr
justice system, which is viewed by many as racist and unjust.

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Murphy said a new coalition was needed because current efforts to ad
issues have proven ineffective.

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"When you look at the public interest groups and nonprofit social serv
most are run by white males," Murphy said. "One of those organizatio
they thought I would go along with being a token window dresser. But
said I would do, such as recruit black and brown people to serve on the
out and fired me."

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The new coalition was formed to provide what Murphy calls "a legitimate clearinghouse" for information about ways to promote peace and justice.

"I think the average person is beginning to see that human beings have more in common than we do differences," Murphy said. "People are also waking up to the fact that money does not bring happiness or make you nice. In fact, what we are seeing is that wealth can make people downright mean."

Murphy noted that last week District officials abruptly canceled plans to convert a fire station into a shelter for homeless women after realizing that the downtown facility would soon be surrounded by luxury apartments.

More than 90 homeless women who now live in seven trailers parked on a lot at Fourth and L streets NW had been assured that the new facility would be available.

"The hopes of the poor are routinely being dashed in favor of the dreams of the rich," Murphy said. "Sure, it's nice to see some parts of the city looking like something out of Better Homes and Gardens. But what does it say about us as a society that we continue to place property rights over human rights?"

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