

JUST WHAT DOES TIGRINYA, Apache or Zulu sound like? Have you ever heard of the languages Igbo or Ga? You may have, depending on where you live, but most people don't even know they exist.

World Voices Project lets you listen to these and over fifty other languages reading The United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It's an artistic and educational audio installation and informal online database of recordings whose primary message is that regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, age, or cultural barriers, we share a common humanity that carries with it an international standard of justice and equality of treatment.

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." He noted that he sees inequality between people, especially men and women, as a worldwide problem. "When I was growing up, those sorts of things were never mentioned, but I knew they existed," Ganbat said. "It was good to hear they were actually written in the declaration."

World Voices Project was borne out of a humble desire to create a little more harmony in the world. As a sound recordist on documentary films, I had grown close to many colleagues on different continents. I was consistently struck by the fact that from Jakarta to Cairo, we always found ways to laugh together; that despite our cultural dif-

ferences there were many common threads in humor, aspirations, compassion and good will. Creating the World Voices Project was a way to turn my mundane technical skills into a creative force for education and a measure of enlightenment for those who haven't had the opportunity to travel extensively; to help dissipate the climate of fear and xenophobia that permeates the media; and to express our common humanity through sound.

Another woman from Kashmir, India said after experiencing the exhibit, "People should hear this entire declaration on the radio in their native language. Most poor people, the ones whose rights are abused, can't read and don't even know this declaration exists." I looked at her and said, "You're right. Why don't you do that? Maybe you can get local stations to read it on-air." She nodded at first reluctantly, then as she thought more about it, she smiled and I could see that she was mentally taking on the task. I was thrilled. Maybe the exhibit had made a difference and inspired someone to take action. I could only hope.

Speaking Out for Human Rights

World Voices Project art installation draws attention to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

BY BRENDA RAY, DIRECTOR AND AUDIO ARTIST

"Did you travel around the world to record these languages?" someone asked me. I laughed that I should be so lucky to have that kind of funding. But no. The project is predominantly self funded and while the languages I recorded represent peoples from around the world, I barely had to cross 42nd Street to find them. All but four voices were recorded in the New York City area, thanks to the city's melting pot status. I met my "Armenian and Mongolian voices" at a bar during a birthday party for a friend. Both were investment bankers. Later that month I met each at their respective offices and after recording Ganbat, my new Mongolian friend, he was inspired to help me. "There's a man from China who sits around the corner. Let me see if he's still here." He was, and Ganbat proceeded to bring me willing co-workers from Germany, France, and Romania. He later said that having grown up in communist Mongolia, he had never read the Declaration. He was struck by Article One that says,

ferences there were many common threads in humor, aspirations, compassion and good will. Creating the World Voices Project was a way to turn my mundane technical skills into a creative force for education and a measure of enlightenment for those who haven't had the opportunity to travel extensively; to help dissipate the climate of fear and xenophobia that permeates the media; and to express our common humanity through sound.

World Voices Project premiered at New York's South Street Seaport in July 2008, where a jungle of almost sixty hanging headphones representing as many languages were suspended from a grid in an atrium space overlooking New York's East River. One visitor, Tammy Morris, said, "As a parent and as a New York mom, I think this is amazing... all good moms around the world are trying to teach their children that every person in every country has these rights. And who wouldn't want to hear what so many different languages



"Most poor people, the ones whose rights are abused... don't even know this declaration exists."

The goal of World Voices is to do just that: to travel around the world, to schools and to other public forums and to inspire people to either take action, stand up in defense of every person's rights, or at minimum to change their minds about long held stereotypes or beliefs. I think almost every person has a natural inclination to create harmony in the world we live in. Many just don't know where to begin.

The digital audio tracks are offered to anyone who wants to present it themselves in exchange for a voluntary contribution to help keep the project going. Please visit www.worldvoicesproject.org for more information or write to info@worldvoicesproject.org. **MD**