



Introduction of Graça Machel
An Evening with Graça Machel – June 8, 2017
By Paul Suzman

She was born in Incadine, a village in rural Gaza Province, Mozambique. Her father's dying wish was that his baby girl, the youngest of six children, would be properly educated. The whole family worked hard to keep its promise.

She attended the best schools locally available. The nuns who taught her also saw in her something unique and paid forward her father's wishes, and her family's efforts to fulfil them, by sending the young woman to university in Portugal.

And there she blossomed with the grace that her parents foresaw, and with which her continent was to be blessed, for they had named her Graca.

Mrs. Machel's life has been of Shakespearean proportions, for she has packed into its span more adventure and achievement than most of us will ever live or could imagine.

She is a warrior and a peacemaker, an outspoken advocate and a skilled conciliator. And not unlike Eleanor of Aquitaine who centuries earlier, reigned, first as Queen of England and then France, she was life consort to two heads of state.

Samora Machel, Mozambique's first president, and, many years after his most untimely death, Nelson Mandela, who found in her a fiercely independent partner and, his inspiration.

While Mrs. Machel has, to her name, many accomplishments and has taken on many roles, there are few of which she is prouder than that of freedom fighter for the independence of her home country as it fought to finally strike off the shackles of Portuguese colonial rule.

It was a brutal 16 year conflict, and few here today can imagine the grievous condition in which its former colonizers malevolently left that beautiful land.

After independence Mrs. Machel sheathed her sword in favor of chalk and blackboard, to become Mozambique's first minister of education. A daunting task given the then ruinous state of the school system and high illiteracy rates. Within 10 years, thanks to her unflagging efforts, school enrolment had doubled to over 80 per cent of school-age children.

Ladies and gentlemen, this afternoon we are here to welcome back to Seattle and to honor the most honorable Graca Machel.

She and Nelson Mandela first flew into Seattle in December 1999 shortly after the city had been roiled by the WTO demonstrations which had degenerated into running street battles.

Their arrival at that time of unprecedented social discord was a breath of fresh air and a welcome moment of sanity. It is ironic, that today, 17 years later, our country is more politically polarized than at any time in recent memory. So, to spend this one short evening focused solely on humanitarianism, is, a relief indeed.

That trip to Seattle was sponsored by the Gates and McCaw families and was presciently named 'Building Bridges' for it resulted in several different well-traveled routes that now solidly connects Seattle with the continent of Africa.

Today we focus on one particular bridge which initially concentrated on Mozambique and how to optimize its vaccine distribution, logistics and cold chain, initially in its far North, the least accessible part of the country. And today the tested methodologies developed over 15 years with local partners, are to be applied countrywide

It was Mrs. Machel who was the catalyst behind the concept for VillageReach which was developed and then implemented by Blaise Judja-Sato and Craig Nakagawa who were, both, at the time, working for Craig McCaw's Teledesic.

Craig Nakagawa is here today along with Sir Michael Free who I joined as one of the original board of directors of that embryonic organization. which now employs 124 team members, 74 of whom live and work in Africa.

Today we recognize Mrs. Machel not only for her vision, for her role as our honorary chair, and her ongoing encouragement that resulted in the creation of VR.

We also honor her for her role in the founding of GAVI, for her passionate leadership of the Foundation for Community Development and the Graca Machel Trust. And for her unceasing advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable on earth.

This includes her work for the UN as an expert reporting on the impact of warfare on children. For her campaign against child marriage which relegates young girls to virtual servitude depriving them and their countries of their true potential.

But to our main event. To hear directly from Mrs. Machel, what it is that inspires her in her relentless pursuit of equity and justice and the promotion of civil society.

I will shortly invite her to take her seat on the stage, but it is also my pleasure to introduce Magda Robert, a native of Mexico

Magda has lived and worked in 17 cities across the globe and for over a decade, had, as she put it, the distinct honor of serving as Mrs. Machel's advisor and confidante before moving to Seattle last year to work at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

She counts her time working with Mrs. Machel as the most formative and inspiring of her life. And based on the intensity and duration of the hug they shared at VillageReach this morning, it's obvious that their affection is mutual.

So Magda, I will very shortly hand off to you for this happy reunion. But, Mrs. Machel, we have for you a modest presentation from VillageReach's board, on behalf of its 124 team members.

We hope this framed letter and photographs will take its place on your wall to serve as a simple reminder of how you have touched our lives in Seattle, but more importantly, how VillageReach's team go to work every day, intent on positively impacting their partners and all the communities they jointly serve.

Ladies and gentlemen please help Magda and me welcome to this stage, Mrs. Graca Machel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Suzman is a Board member of VillageReach and Founder and President of OfficeLease, USA . OfficeLease is a five-person real estate firm founded in 1981 that specializes in commercial building tenant and buyer representation. He advises and represents numerous Seattle area companies in their strategic real estate planning, alternative facility evaluations, lease vs. purchase decisions and transaction negotiations. Mr. Suzman attended Hilton College and the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa and immigrated to Seattle in 1979. He has served on the boards of several local companies such as The Learning Garden (now Bright Horizons) and Torrefazione Italia Coffee acquired by Starbucks, and has served as trustee of non-profit organizations including, Pacific Science Center, University of Washington Presidents Club, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Henry Art Gallery. He was a founding board member of the Washington Technology Industry Alliance, served as chair of Seattle's Community Development Roundtable and is active in Seattle Rotary Club. Mr. Suzman is also on the advisory board of University of Washington's Autism Center, is a member of the Seattle Tennis Club, is an avid cyclist and has served as faculty for numerous real estate seminars. And has also authored numerous papers and articles on the subject of real estate negotiations.