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Newsletter from District Governor Rob Fowler to the Lions, Lionesses and Leos of District 410B, Southern Africa

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## Lions enjoy the "All Africa" Forum

Bulawayo, Zimbabwe 8-11, February

It was a hot Sunday afternoon and the Hi-Ace that was loaned to the Bulawayo Lions by the Zimbabwean Council for the Blind was on its way back to the city after a 23km trip to the Chipangali Wildlife Sanctuary. We had just visited this world famous but now very seriously cash strapped animal refuge and the mood amongst the 11 Lion passengers inside was pretty jovial as we watched the green rural landscape pass by. Our thoughts and conversation were mostly focused on the next thirst quencher. We had already heard scary stories of the local security situation and how unwise it was to talk of the local politics in public or to openly discuss the dire economic situation facing Zimbabweans.

It was therefore not a surprise when the general hubbub and noisy banter in the Hi-Ace was replaced by an apprehensive and steely cold silence when the roadblock was first sighted a short distance up ahead. The policeman in his olive green uniform was already standing in the middle of the road waving us to stop long before our vehicle and the now very quiet occupants reached the holding area cordoned off with plastic cones and preceded by an old and much used black and white "Police Stop" sign. There were quite a few similarly clothed and armed policemen about. This was certainly not a time for any uncalled for wise cracks!

The policeman walked officiously towards us and was probably a bit surprised to see a Zimbabwe Eye care vehicle full of seemingly sighted people. "Where are you going?" he demanded. Alex, our driver sitting at the wheel, replied "These are delegates from the AAC – the Lions conference in Bulawayo" then by way of explanation "The All Africa Lions Conference". The policeman looked rather perplexed after looking through the window – there weren't any Lions – only us rather "poep scared" passengers. "We are returning to Bulawayo



Our MD410 contingent - from Left to Right: Rob, DG "D" Bertie Roux, DG "A" Paul de Wet, Kenneth Boemah, CC Hennie van der Westhuizen, DG "C" Heather Hardman, Cliff Hocking, Beaulieu Mare, Nick Mare, Phanius Moatshe, David Morrison, Malcolm Povey with Nkando Chapeshamano in the front



The South African's were the firm favourites of the local Zimbabwean dancing group who entertained the forum delegates with some amazing dance moves and accompanying music.



from Chipangali” Alec continued. “Oh, yes, I've heard about it” the policeman replied rather firmly.

Looking again at the silent passengers around me the policeman asked firmly “Are you having a good time in Zimbabwe?” Not quite knowing how to reply to this strange question in the middle of a road block on a desolate stretch of road there was a continued muted silence. This time louder and demanding an answer “Are you having a good time in our beautiful Zimbabwe?” By this time we had all escaped the preconceptions of our strange circumstances and replied like children wanting a toffee to be thrown to them “Yes”, “great”, “super time”, “wonderful”. The policeman's face now changed into a broad smile as he replied in his best policeman's voice “That is good. You must continue to enjoy your stay in Zimbabwe because if you don't I will be forced to have to ... fine you!” “Is that understood?”

Such is the wonder of this beautiful country. The local people are just wonderful. They are so courteous and friendly and willing to help in any situation that it is actually quite difficult to understand how they can survive when their currency is dated only valid until 31 July, 2007 and inflation runs at over 1200%. The official rate of exchange is Z\$35 to the Rand. The unofficial rate is Z\$650 and more. Those with money buy everything off the shelves if they think they can sell it to their friends and contacts for more at a later time. Depending on how you obtain your local currency your Z\$40 000 Holiday Inn breakfast can cost you either R1142 if you pay your account with your credit card at the hotel reception desk or R61,53 if you have local currency. Those Lions that made use of the convenient hotel room phones to quickly phone their loved one's to tell them they had arrived safely at the Holiday Inn in Bulawayo

Wow! What a great trip. Beaulieu and I were really thankful for the opportunity to join the MD410 delegation and can honestly say that we had a fantastic time. We had the pleasure of having the 1<sup>st</sup> vice president join us for breakfast on Monday morning. He is really going to be a great International President and motivated us immensely.

There is no doubt that the MD410 team was the most visible team there and it is incredible how popular the shirts were. The lady at the Bulawayo check in counter at the airport tried to buy the shirt off my back.

The conference was a good “jol”, but it was also a huge learning experience and motivator.

*Lions Nick & Beaulieu Mare (Benoni van Rhyn)*



were in for a nasty shock when they were confronted at check-out time with an astronomic bill which, when converted to Rands at the ruling bank rate, created serious palpitations and heart burn for some Lions. Enough of the economic woes of what remains a very beautiful Zimbabwe! One can only pray for a quick solution there because it must be straining every aspect of that country's administration to breaking point.

It was just great to be a part of a 14 Lion delegation from our Multiple District at the 12<sup>th</sup> All Africa Forum held between 8 and 11 February in Bulawayo. The forum was convened by our neighbours in District 412 (Botswana, Zimbabwe and Malawi) and from the outset our green and gold shirted Lions from Southern Africa were welcomed as fellow brothers and sisters in Africa. It was a wonderful feeling to be accepted without any animosity by everyone purely by virtue of the fact that we all wore Lions badges and therefore shared a common voluntary service vision with our fellow African Lions.

There were presentations by IPIP Askok Mehta, PID SP Amin, ID Manoj Shah and also 1<sup>st</sup> International Vice President Mahendra Amarasuriya to name a few of the international guests. Our Group 1 DG's met up again with our Group Leader PDG Sangeeta Jatia and PID AP Singh and exchanged ideas on where we still wanted to go in the remaining part of this Lionistic year.

Besides all the economic troubles the convenors were faced also by the unexpected news 4 days before that start of the forum that some 180 Lions from Nigeria had been refused visas by Zimbabwe. The other story doing the rounds was that the visas documents provided

by Zimbabwe were not acceptable to the Nigerian immigration officials as the visa OK was issued in Bulawayo and not in the capital Harare. The organizers could not resolve the paperwork in time and half of their anticipated delegates who had already paid their registration and accommodation fees had to abandon their trip to Bulawayo.

When it appeared a month before the start of the Forum that the organizing committee might buckle under the mounting pressure of one unforeseen disaster after another ID Manoj Shah dispatched two of his own staff (also Lions from Kenya) to help out wherever needed. There was at one time serious talk about relocating the whole Forum to Nairobi but fortunately the ship was steadied and on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February some 185 Lions from all corners of Africa – including a relatively large group from French speaking West Africa flew or drove into Bulawayo.

I think we all soon realised on arrival at the Holiday Inn what a mammoth task it was for the Forum convenors to have even been able to get so far with their planning that the event was actually able to start at all. Some very disgruntled souls were appeased as best as possible by the convenors and the remainder escaped to the local pub for some very chilled local “Zambesi” or a “Bollinger” lager at Z\$2500 (R3,85).

The start of the banquet had to be delayed for an hour to allow the staff to complete their table settings due to an earlier power-out which left the venue in darkness. When the banquet started it was by candle-light which provided a very cosy and pleasant atmosphere.

On the Saturday afternoon – the last day of the Forum – the heaven's opened and the welcome rains helped fill some of the local dams which were expected to dry out completely by August. The arrangements for the outdoor barbeque later that evening also seemed to be cruelly affected by the storm but fortunately by 6pm the rain had moved on and a few brightly shining stars could be seen between the patches of cloud.



Lions from Zambia in their distinctive clothing



1st International Vice President Lion Mahendra Amarasuriya addressing the “All Africa” Forum delegates on his plans and goals for next year

“We left Mafikeng on the afternoon of Thursday 8th February and travelled all night and by 5:30am the next day we were at the Botswana-Zimbabwe border. We arrived at the conference centre at 8:30 and began the registration formalities. There were a few hiccups but with the help of our DG these were solved.

Our colourful MD410 shirts made our presence very visible. Presentations from the various presenters were simply excellent. There was also a lot of socialising between Lions. It is unfortunate that the large Nigerian group could not get the visa problem resolved in time.

This was my third international conference and Lion Kenneth’s first. Besides the initial registration problems we felt that the conference was overwhelmingly successful.”

*Lion Nkando Chapheshamano (Mafikeng)*

By the time it came to close the Forum there was an overall sense of sadness. Our South African contingent had had so much fun and bonded so well with our fellow Lions from all over Africa.

Our own Council Chairman Hennie van der Westhuizen was elevated to the position of Chieftain for legal affairs by the very appreciative Lions of Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi following his lucid debate on certain constitutional issues that were proposed by a group wishing to develop an “All Africa Conference Agreement”.

One of the most important issues for me was the fact that this was the first time in my recent memory when our Multiple District was so well represented at any forum. There were representatives from every District comprising our Multiple District and we all had an opportunity to bond in a very special way with our Lion friends from across the Limpopo and beyond. The CSFII presentation by Coordinator Hastings Chitti from Zambia is certainly the best I have ever heard. His really funny humour had everyone in stitches!



Lions at the breakfast feeding trough - at Z\$40 000 each!

“It was a good opportunity to network with Lions from other countries in Africa.

The conference programme itself and the discussions that took place provided nothing new with the only possible exception of one part of the incoming International Presidents theme for 2007 – 2008.

The repetition of information by a variety of presenters was irritating, to put it mildly. Also the continual “back slapping” and “praise singing” amongst a specific component of participants should have been eliminated.

Other countries may well have the numbers (theoretically – until you look at the outstanding dues situation) but we certainly have far more informed and educated Lions in MD 410. Also, when one hears of the administrative and other issues within a number of Districts and Multiple Districts, we really do not have too many issues to be concerned about except for membership obviously.

*Cliff Hocking (Midrand)*





Neville Mehta (ISAAME Secretary) and PID AP Singh

Lions were able to sit down with our fine and hard working International leadership and share their own thoughts and ideas about what Lions and being a Lion means to them.

We are Lions in Africa and our future lies in being able to share our vast resources, our talents and our common vision for voluntary community service from Cape Town to Cairo. As proud bearers of the same badge and motto we can discard our earlier laager mentality and join our Lion friends to really help make Africa great!



PID's Asoka Gunasekera and Chuck Wijanathen who will be the ISAAME mentors for the African District Governor's next year.



<< Lion Nick reviewing a video by his "rasta" Lion friend from District 412

"The trip to the Lions "All Africa" Forum was a eye opener for me. What overwhelmed me was the love and friendship shown by total strangers from all over the continent of Africa. It is amazing what a Lions Pin can do. I learned about Lionism in other countries ... what they do, how they raise funds and the one thing that was clear, that stood out from all conversations was the love and caring we all have for our fellow man/woman.

It is evident that SightFirst / Eye Care is undertaken in every country. There is a real PASSION for sight projects.

My wish is for all Lions Clubs to take up the challenge of Campaign SightFirst II and go out and raise funds for this really worthwhile project.

To see Lions from Africa hand in donations of US\$100 000 for CSFII at the conference was just amazing. As a Lion I can only thank them.

By attending a conference like this, you as a Lion are taken out of your Club and your District and you see a much bigger / wider picture of Lionism. Lionism is ALIVE in the world.

I now understand how International Directors are appointed, how certain constitutional decisions are taken and I realised just how much PASSION our leaders have for our great organisation. The amount of effort they put into it. The planning, the availability of material, the visual presentations that can be ordered from Lions Headquarters in Oak Brook ..... It is endless.

This conference has helped me to understand the different culture and beliefs of Lions within our own District. We all need to take time out and talk to our own fellow Lions. Above all, the "WE SERVE" motto is really a way of life. Thanks must go to the Lions of Zimbabwe for putting on a great conference, through all the hardships they had to endure."

*410B Cabinet Treasurer Malcolm Povey (Alberton Host)*



Exchanging banners with Lion Roberto Fresia from Italy. He will head a new European/African Lions development initiative