

And now a word from Michael...

Good things come to she who waits. A very lengthy letter from Michael Werikhe arrived shortly after Christmas. I would like to share it all with you in two or three installments. Here's part 1.

"I have just returned from a 12-day trip to Taipei and Taichung in Taiwan. A trip whose memory will linger in my mind for many years to come. My short but hectic stay in Taiwan opened my mind to new depths of understanding and reasoning. I had gone there at the invitation of Earth Trust and Vitlon Foundation to raise conservation awareness through two short walks, which focused attention on the plight of the rhino and other endangered species of animals. Taiwan is one of the biggest consumer nations of rhino horn in Asia. I had the opportunity to interact with thousands of Taiwanese people in an effort to informing them that the rhino is fast disappearing on the wild due to heavy poaching to satisfy the ever increasing demand for the horn in Taiwan and other nations in South-East Asia. I painfully tried to look for solutions from the Taiwanese people on how best to solve some of the most vexing and mind-boggling problems affecting the survival of this seriously endangered large mammal.

The rhino horn has weathered many a storm in those early years of evolution and is today arguable its worse curse as a result of man's greed and ignorance. The fate of these unique and magnificent animals lies in our hands.

In Taipei, I had the honor of meeting Mayor Huang Ta-Chau who participated in the walk and presented with the key to the city He also declared November 12th rhinoceros Day. The walk drew a crowd of between 6-7 thousand people from all walks of life especially youngsters with their parents. Also present was chairman of Council of Agriculture Sun Ming-Hsien, whose council is responsible for Wildlife Conservation, Forestry as well as combating illegal rhino horn trade and products from other endangered species of wildlife. Later on I met Premier Lie Chan of the Republic of China and discussed with him the grave issue concerning the rhino horn trade in Taiwan. Prior to the walk in Taipei I had also attended another walk in Taichung accompanied by the Mayor of that City and a crowd of 1,5000 people. The news media both print and electronic covered my visit very extensively. During the course of my stay I must have reached well over 15 million people in Taiwan, thanks to the Press.

Taiwan is a highly developed island nation with a

population of about 23 million inhabitants. Taipei, the capital and also the largest city, is situated in a valley like setting surrounded in some parts by fairly rugged mountain ranges giving the city a beautiful background covered by lush green vegetation, contrasting sharply with the concrete metropolitan area. Taipei is a busy ad fast moving city dotted with thousands of small and medium range industries, making it look like a bee-hive in full production. Taiwan has advanced a great deal and is one of the wealthiest nations in the world. The price of development did not come easy nor was it cheap. Progress has been achieved at an enormous expense to the environment. There are over a million scooters and just as many vehicles plying the busy roads every day, year round. Pollution is a big problem and is noticeable even to the weary eyes. On a windless day the air is pungent and heavy smog hangs over the city which then rapidly settles down in the valley, making breathing uncomfortable. Taipei is a city fast choking itself to death with its own success.

In the next issue, read about Michael's talks with medicine men and government officials and his fears about the underground rhino trade.