

Secretariat News

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

APRIL 1992

Play highlights an "evolutionary step for mankind—UN peacekeeping"

For most American playwrights a "Peacemaker" was the Colt 45 wielded in the Wild West. Karen Sunde, New York playwright and scriptwriter, is determined to highlight the real peacemakers—UN staff and peacekeeping missions.

Her play *In a Kingdom By the Sea*, based on the kidnapping of UN staff in Lebanon, is being considered by several theatres, and she has already started work on a film script about what she considers "An evolutionary step for mankind"—UN peacekeeping missions.

"The idea of stopping war, should be a moral principle as strong and as instinctive as defending ones home", she says. "I wanted a UN context in which I could talk about a man learning the peacekeeping process; the techniques for stopping wars, stopping conflicts. It's a series of steps that UN peacekeepers have been developing to avoid conflict. These guys put themselves between opposing parties, try to cool things down, and persuade them that it's not worthwhile. The more they do it, the more expert practitioners they become at all the different levels of peacemaking".

She was happily surprised that the basic techniques, on the face of it so alien to military people, should be



Dramatist Karen Sunde wants Americans, and the world, to know about the "immense amount of selfless work" being carried out by UN staff. Photo by M. Bourdalen

adopted so thoroughly and enthusiastically by the ordinary soldiers she met in UNFICYP, UNIFIL and UNTSO.

Being an American herself she considered the "at best indifferent attitude of Americans towards the UN" to be one of the problems "and at worst, they know nothing at all about it".

She felt that some of the accusations about the UN's cumbersome bureaucracy were true—but that critics ignored the immense amount of selfless work being carried out by staff.

She decided that the next time she got the chance to write something for herself, "it would be about the UN—simply because I wanted Americans to know."

She focussed on the peacekeeping forces because "they offered heavy

action, their work was exciting, dangerous, noble and heroic—it had everything".

"Part of my difficulty was that there were not many Americans involved," and she knew it would be almost impossible trying to explain the works of the UN to the US without an American character.

That changed, however, when an American serving with the UN in Lebanon, Colonel William Higgins, appeared on TV—videotaped by his kidnappers. "And as I wandered around Louisville, I discovered that he was a local boy".

Armed with an advance from a Louisville theatre, she explored the idea and found Colonel Higgins was not entirely sure whether he was working for the US or the UN to which he had been seconded.

"The problem was—how do I make this guy a hero? So the play is fiction based on this event. In Louisville, he's a local hero—but he was a much more complex character. And at least one director I spoke to felt that 85% of Americans would identify with him—they wouldn't mind in the slightest if he was working for the US as well as the UN—he so perfectly embodied us as a nation".

"I've still got a screenplay on peacekeeping in draft" she says, hoping that the growing profile of the UN could give her the chance to show the world—or at least America, what the UN does.

Ian Williams

For more information call Paula Hajar at (212)866-7235