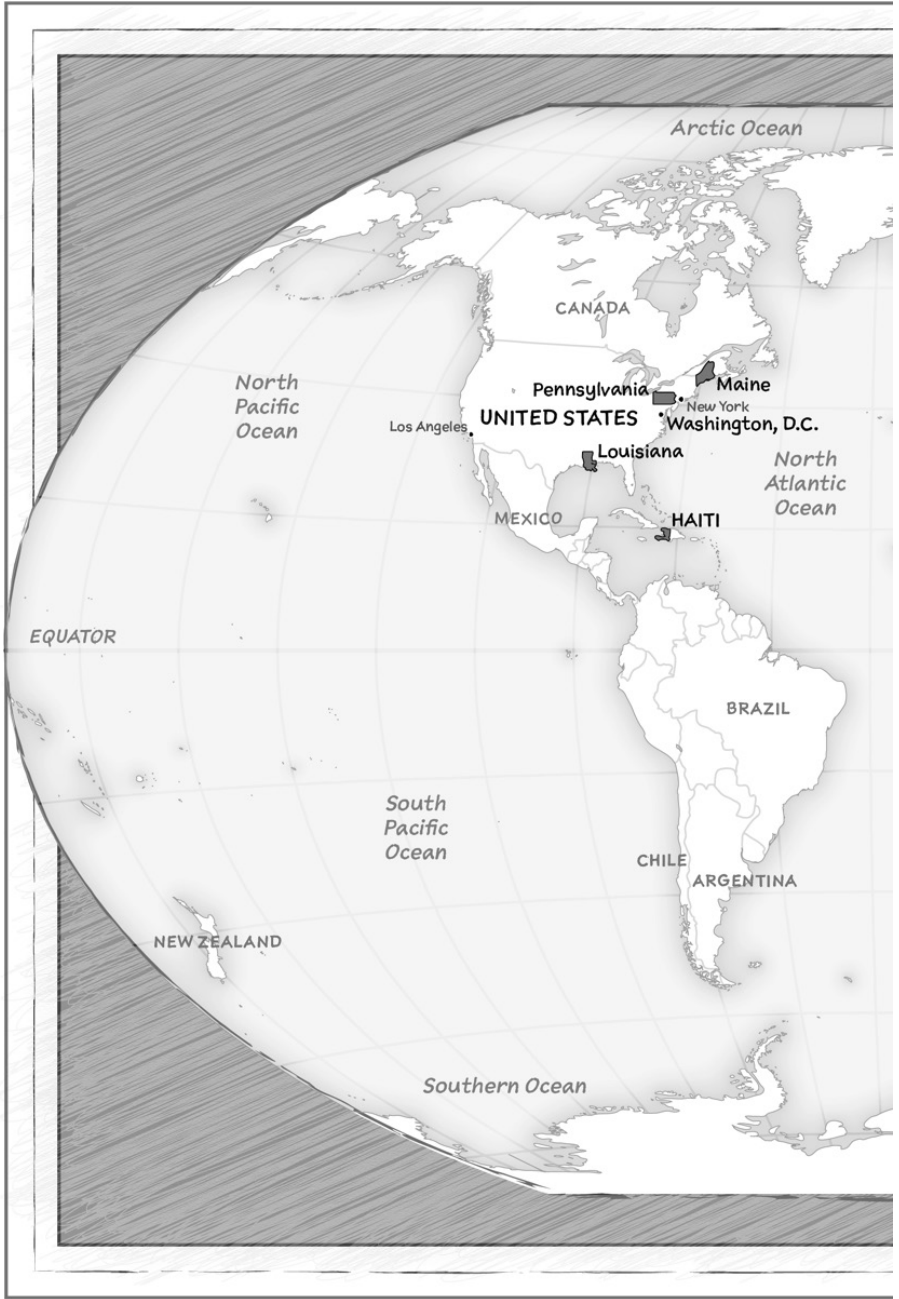
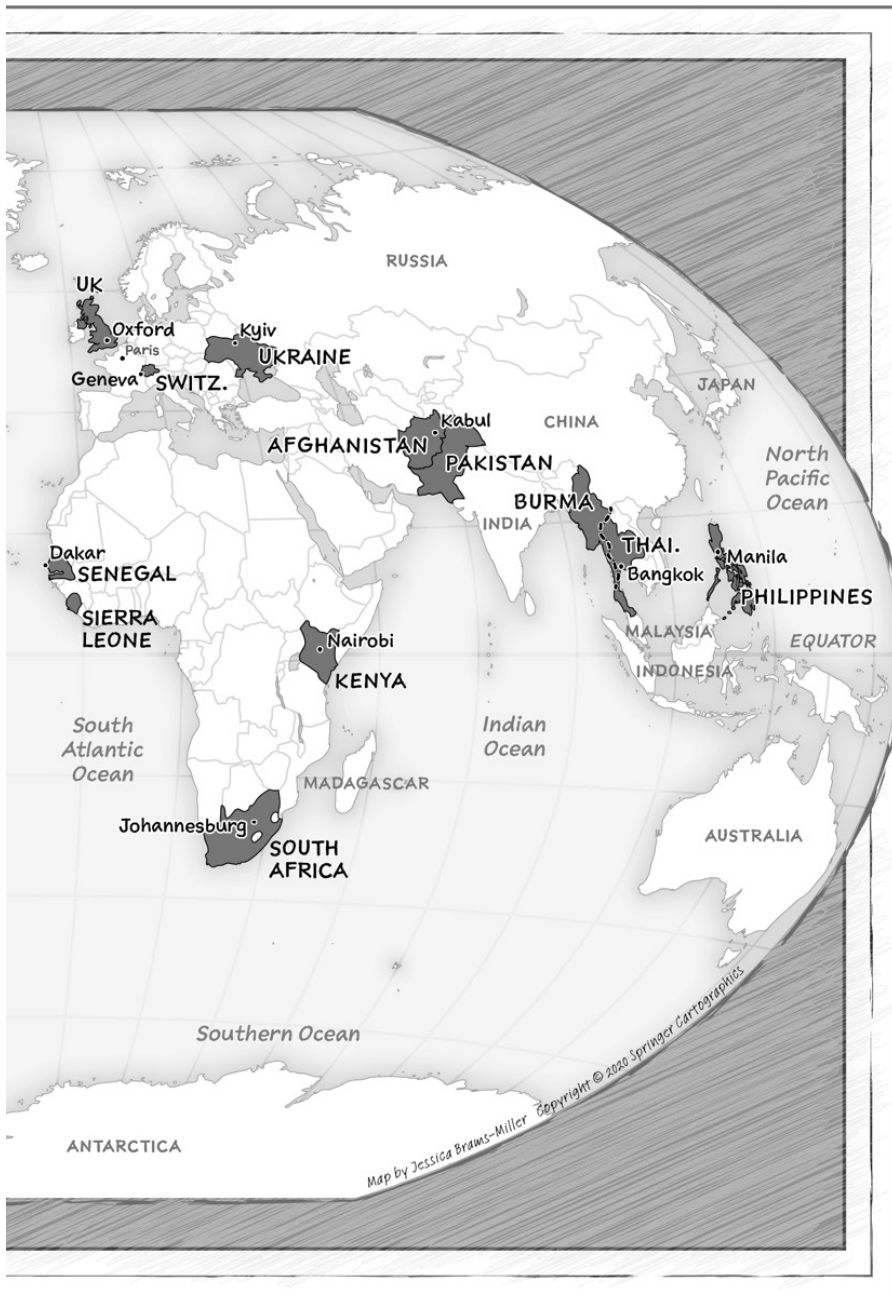


BRING RAIN

**Helping Humanity
in Crisis**

**SARAH DAWN
PETRIN**





TIMELINE OF HUMANITARIAN CRISES

In this book (1976–2020)

1976	Born during a drought in Mumias, Kenya
1985	Ethiopia Famine Relief
1990–1994	Student in High School, literacy volunteer
1992	Somalia Refugee Crisis
1992	Building a school in Kisumu, Kenya
1992–1994	War in the Former Yugoslavia
1994	Rwandan Genocide
1994–1998	Student at Gordon College
1996–1997	Conducting census of Mauritanian Refugees in Senegal
1998–1999	Working in the Senate, U.S. Capitol shooting in Washington D.C.
1999–2000	Working with World Vision in Johannesburg, South Africa
2001	September 11th terrorist attack on the United States
2001–2002	Graduate Student at Oxford University
2001	Start of the U.S. War in Afghanistan
2002–2004	Facilitating resettlement of Vietnamese Refugees in the Philippines
2002–2003	Managing UN relief program, Afghanistan-Pakistan border
2003	Start of the U.S. War in Iraq
2004	Tsunami hits southern Thailand
2005	Managing Tsunami relief, Thailand-Myanmar refugee crisis
2005	Hurricane Katrina hits New Orleans, Louisiana
2005–2006	Assessing needs of Katrina evacuees in Louisiana and Arkansas
2010	Haiti Earthquake
2010–2012	Supporting local Haitian organizations in Port-au-Prince
2011	Start of the Syria Civil War
2012	Founding of Protect the People (PTP)
2012–2018	Advising U.S. military and NATO on the Protection of Civilians
2014	Russia invades Eastern Ukraine
2015	Global Refugee Crisis leads to 1 million arrivals in Europe
2013–2016	Ebola Outbreak in West Africa
2016	Advising Ebola response in Sierra Leone
2016–2017	Managing Hurricane Matthew relief in Haiti
2017	Advising organizations on global refugee crisis, health epidemics, civil-military relations
2018	Advising program on the Protection of Civilians in Ukraine
2019	Analyst at the U.S. Army Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute
2020	Global Coronavirus Pandemic

BRING RAIN

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in Crisis

SARAH DAWN
PETRIN

TREMENDOUS
LEADERSHIP
Leadership with a kick!

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the “doers,” the “helpers,” and people who care.

It is dedicated to the modern-day miracle workers, the humanitarians, who put their own lives on the line to save others.

Aid workers perform miracles every day. They secure food stockpiles before famine arrives, they land planes where there are no runways, they tap water when the well has run dry, they rescue children from the underground, they set prisoners free. They find money in places when all the resources in the world have run out. They are simply amazing, *the best of the best*.

These aid workers come from different backgrounds and have varying beliefs. Yet, they all share a faith in humanity. They believe in the power of extending goodwill to all people simply because they are human beings. They see the promise of a better world and they pursue it.

This book is dedicated to them, and to those of you who will join them in the days ahead. You don't have to be a saint or a superhero to save lives. Whether you are traveling afar or staying close to home, you only have to see the needs around you and be ready to respond.

PROLOGUE

The Call

There I was, sitting by myself at John F. Kennedy airport in New York City when I got the call. And somehow, I knew that my whole life after that moment hung in the balance.

I was fresh off the plane from Nairobi, Kenya and was waiting for a connecting flight to take me home to Maine when an overwhelming feeling washed over me. People rushed by me in every direction, hurrying to get to their destination. I wondered,

Where am I really meant to be?

I didn't want to go home. It was time to do something else, to go somewhere else. I wanted to help the refugees I saw, but what could I do? I was only fifteen years old.

I found a quiet corner where I could gather my thoughts. I wasn't ready to go home yet, but I wasn't sure where else I was going. The world was so big, and there was so much to explore. The team in Kenya built the foundation for a school, but we didn't finish anything. Then, I heard an almost audible whisper.

You will go to many people and many places.

I looked all around. There was no one near me. I looked around some more, then I heard it again.

You will go to many people and many places. You will help many people.

The voice came from deep within my spirit. I knew what it said was true, that this was the beginning of a life-long call to serve people in need.

Yes, I thought, I want to go. I want to go now.

*Wherever that voice was telling me to go, I wanted to go there **right away**. I didn't want to get on the plane home. Then, I thought of my Mom. She would miss me if I didn't come back. Plus, I had to finish high school.*

I got on the plane and flew home to Maine.

When you first sense a call to help others, the world seems to open up before you. This awareness may come from the first time you volunteer in a new area or the first time you travel abroad. There are so many needs, it's hard to know where to start.

That is why I'm going to tell you an important lesson at the outset: The best gift you can give the world is to give yourself. You are a unique person with skills and experiences to share with others. You are one of a kind; there is no one like you.

You have the compassion to help and the determination to do something. How, then, can you best use the skills you've been given? Knowing how, when, and where to go is a critical first step to applying yourself.

Finding Your Mission

I want you to have a great life, no matter where you come from, what you do for work, or where you live. Helping humanity is about seeing the worth and dignity of all people.

Prologue

This book will show you the way to lead a meaningful life by helping people.

This book will also give you a series of steps to help you determine how you are uniquely suited to make a difference. It will take you on a journey from wanting to help to actually going out and acting. Like me, you may face obstacles and setbacks, but I will show you how to surmount every one of them.

This book will give you what it takes to be a helper. You are going to need steadfast determination and the confidence that everything you do—no matter how seemingly small—is part of the bigger picture of human progress.

I am sharing my experiences to embolden you, to help you recognize that the world needs you, and to assure you that you have been called to a high and worthwhile purpose.

In the chapters ahead, I'll show you how to go from knowing that something needs to be done to becoming the person who springs into action. And so, I'll tell you now:

The first step to living a life of service is leaving your comfort zone.

For some of us, that also means leaving home. Whether you go to a new neighborhood or a different country, stepping out from where you are now will lead you to new opportunities. Being able to leave your comfort zone is something that needs to be understood before you go anywhere, and we will revisit this shortly.

Once I decided to pursue humanitarian work, I knew I wasn't going to live a normal life—the kind of normal life where you finish school, get a job, find a spouse, buy a house, have kids, and settle down. If I was going to serve refugees, I

would be traveling and living overseas. I would have to “settle down” later.

I knew this was true when I returned home to Maine for summer break after studying abroad in Senegal where I worked with refugees on the border of Mauritania. Being a humanitarian was going to demand more of me than a career choice—it was an altogether different lifestyle that would determine where I lived, how much money I would make, and who I would eventually settle down with to have a family of my own.

I can remember standing at the top of the Eastern Promenade in Portland, Maine. I could see across Casco Bay with its deep blue waters graced by ferry lines taking passengers to the nearby islands. This idyllic, peaceful place was my home. *Why would I ever want to leave?*

Maine is one of the most beautiful states in the country. Surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean on its right flank and bordered by the state of New Hampshire to its left, Maine is known for its pine green wilderness and ruby red lobsters. It is a vacationland to seasonal visitors who flock to its islands for summer vacations. You can feel the serenity in the sea salt air as it blows across your face. It’s no wonder the state motto is “*The Way Life Should Be.*”

Here I was, on a beautiful summer day, knowing that simply being from Maine was a luxury. But staring out at the serene ocean, I was anything but calm on the inside. My mind drifted back to being in refugee camps in the desert. Only a few weeks before, I was with refugees from Mauritania, some of whom were dying from cholera.

Wouldn’t life be easier, I thought, if I married a nice boy from Maine and stayed here? I had a boyfriend through my last

Prologue

years of high school. He wanted to build a house next door to his parents. He couldn't understand my desire to help people in far-off places. He also didn't know what it really required. He eventually had a family and achieved the American dream.

But I knew that helping refugees meant sacrificing things and people that could limit my opportunities. I stood staring at the ocean—knowing that the course I was choosing meant giving up winters warming by a cozy fire, family dinners, and summers playing in the waves along Maine's rocky coast. I wasn't sure when I would find a partner and have children, but I knew that when I did, I wanted them to be part of my vision to help humanity.

This is an important point for you to remember:

Once you know what you are called to do, don't let anyone or anything get in the way. Other people may have a different agenda for your life, distractions will come your way, and alternatives will present themselves. Don't get distracted—stay the course. Live the life you are meant to live.

Get a Good Education

Another thing that's required to help humanity, in addition to getting out of your comfort zone, is to get a good education. A good education is the foundation of a professional, humanitarian career. Many students pursuing an international career start with an undergraduate degree in International Relations, then specialize in a particular field for their master's degree. For example, as an undergraduate student at Gordon College, I pursued a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in International Relations. I also earned a degree in French by taking all the required language courses and received a Pike Scholar award, which allowed me to design a major in African Studies.

Bring Rain

Thus, I graduated with a degree in three majors: International Relations, French, and African Studies. This is somewhat unusual, but I received extra credit from Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school by taking summer classes at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. and by studying for a semester abroad in West Africa. You might think that I was an overachiever, but I didn't set out to complete three majors. It happened by making the most of every opportunity. While you are a student, you have a suite of people around you to help you learn. Make the most of every opportunity you have for experiential learning.

Selecting a good degree program matters, but numerous majors and types of degrees are options for pursuing humanitarian work. You can pursue political science or business administration and take coursework in international relations. One particular survey of humanitarian workers indicated that regardless of the degree, aid workers did not feel that their education prepared them for the field.¹ This is because the work is complex and varied in nature, with a lot of "on the job" training. What matters most is how you use your education to develop the skills and knowledge you need to thrive in the aid sector.

Eventually, as you pursue specific jobs, your unique skill set will matter more than your educational background. This skill set includes language skills and experience working abroad. To get experience, you can start by doing short-term service projects or study abroad programs with more experiential learning objectives. For example, I chose to study in Senegal, West Africa because the regional bureau for the UN High Commissioner

¹Reis, Chris and Bernath, Tania. *Becoming an International Humanitarian Aid Worker*, Cambridge, Butterworth-Heinemann of Elsevier, 2017.

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for Refugees was located there, and the program included an internship or independent study option with course credit.

Many undergraduates also look to do internships or fellowships with international organizations. For some people in the United States, the Peace Corps is also a good way to get international experience and language skills. Peace Corps volunteers also benefit from a wide network of returned volunteers who support those coming out of their assignments with job placement and career counseling services.

However, Peace Corps service is not for everyone. Although the model is changing, being placed in a remote village is not always the best way to understand the local culture. This is particularly true if you want to work with refugees or migrants who are on the move. Also, female volunteers who are placed in traditional cultural settings can experience enormous pressure to marry a local partner while serving. In my opinion, urban placements in regional centers or towns are more desirable, since these areas are less isolated and tend to have a broader social network. Whatever type of learning experience you pursue, make sure that you are in a safe place where you can highlight what you learned and how you served the community.

While having an undergraduate education is foundational, many humanitarians pursue graduate work in a specialized area. For example, I did my Master's in Forced Migration from the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. You may also want to consider a specialized degree in Anthropology, Communications, Engineering, Finance, Logistics, Medicine, Public Health, Public Policy, International Law, Environmental Studies, Gender Studies, and Regional Studies that emphasize a particular geographic area or sector.

Whatever course of education you pursue, it's important to remember that having experience in the field is often considered more important than education. Many entry-level positions available are within non-governmental organizations that will also provide you with on-the-job training and field experience.

If you only have education but no experience, you are more likely to have a desk job that focuses on administration, analysis, policy, or research. You will need a combination of education and experience, with specialized training and certificates in specific skills like grant writing or program management, to meet the criteria for more advanced positions in this line of work.

When I finished college, I wanted to go abroad right away. But I needed more work experience. I also realized that learning how to advocate for better policies to help people was an important skill I wanted to develop.

I decided to move to Washington, D.C. and work for Senator Olympia J. Snowe from Maine. Strange to think that someone who was desperate to work overseas would take a detour to Washington, but my sense of calling led me there.

As it turned out, Washington was a home away from home for someone like me. Having been born overseas in Kenya, I felt connected to other people around the world from a young age. When I got my first phone, a baby blue land line with a rotary dial, I immediately wanted to call people in other countries. I didn't know anyone living overseas at the time, but I wanted to reach out and make friends with people from different backgrounds.

In the nation's Capital, you find representatives from every state. Within a few square miles, you find embassies with representatives from every country. It's a place full of diversity with new people always moving into the city for work.

Prologue

Specifically, I was looking to work for an international organization that would send me overseas. Back in Maine, there were a few nonprofit organizations helping refugees settle into the state and trade groups working on international business opportunities. I was looking for work that would bring systemic changes to how society cares for vulnerable people, especially those affected by war and disasters. At least I thought that was what I wanted. But was that just an idealistic thought?

Working in the Senate was exciting every day. Senator Snowe served on the powerful Armed Services Committee and was a moderate. She had strong views about making the government work for the people, making health care affordable, and improving the lives of women at home and abroad. In her office, there was a new situation to respond to every few hours, a new legislative proposal that needed to be analyzed, or a new event in the press that required talking points.

I worked my way up from being a front office receptionist to serving as a legislative correspondent, which meant I wrote responses to letters that the Senator received in the mail. I also wrote talking points for media interviews, speeches, and hearing testimony on a wide range of topical issues. Even though I was a young staffer, I did interesting things like give private tours of the Capitol Building to visitors from Maine.

On one ordinary day, I was asked to give a tour of the Capitol to a group of journalists from my home state.

“This is a VIP tour; these journalists are from the largest paper in Maine,” the Chief of Staff of the office told me. “You never know,” he said jokingly, “*one day they could write a story about you.*”

Little did he know, it would hardly be a normal tour.

As my group entered the basement of the rotunda, the center of the Capitol building, my group was looking at the different displays, when an active shooter appeared out of nowhere, storming through the metal detectors.

I heard a loud *bang* that sounded like something heavy hit the concrete, but the second shot was unmistakable. **We were under fire.**

“Take cover!” I shouted to my group. “This way!” I ushered my group into a women’s bathroom about 10 feet away, then closed the door. I looked around to see; did I have everyone with me? I started to count the number of people with me, when one of the journalists came up to me, panicking.

“My wife and my baby—they didn’t make it in. I’m going out to find them,” he said, and he started to push past me.

“No,” I told him forcibly as I barricaded the door with my body. As much as he wanted to find his family, I had to stop him from opening the door. There was more gunfire outside. Whatever was going on, it was far from over. I told him empathetically,

“We don’t know how many shooters are out there. But I can hear the police outside. We have to wait for instructions.” I prayed that the woman and child found cover elsewhere.

When the police knocked on the door of the bathroom, they were ready to escort us out of the building. We quickly exited the area, not knowing what had really happened. When we got back to the front office, the woman and the baby were waiting for us. Just as I prayed, someone—a policeman—had ushered

Prologue

them to another safe location when the shots rang out. It was a tearful, happy reunion.

To finish the story, we watched the office television to learn what happened. A lone shooter, a mentally unstable man, stormed the security entrance to the capital. He killed two capitol police officers before he was also killed by the police.

The next day, I was on the front page of *Portland Press Herald* under the headline:

YOUNG STAFFER KEEPS EVERYONE CALM

The journalists did tell my story, of how I took charge, keeping everyone calm as I ushered the group to safety in the nearest shelter, a women's bathroom.

More to the point, this strange and harrowing event made me decide what kind of life I would lead: *I would answer the call to save lives no matter where I was in the world, no matter the difficulty or circumstance.*

That was an extraordinary day in the office, but there were also plenty of ordinary ones. After all, it was my job to answer the mail. Yet sometimes even the most mundane days presented opportunities to make a difference—which also became an important lesson about following your calling.

Every day, I saw an older woman named Gladys, a janitor who worked hard, cleaning bathrooms in the Senate buildings. One day she appeared tired and discouraged. I heard her tell another colleague that she felt invisible. She wondered out loud, “*What good is all my hard work doing?*”

Immediately, I asked myself, “*On ordinary days that seem to drag on, what can I do?*” An idea came to me. Every day I used the power of the pen to put the Senator's signature on all

kinds of requests. I thought, what if I wrote a letter from the Senator recognizing Gladys and all her hard work? That might lift her spirits. I drafted the letter, and the Senator agreed to send it to the head of cleaning services.

Days later, Gladys came to the office asking who had written the letter. When I met her, she was overjoyed to the point of tears. “Because of this letter, I got a pay raise!”

I tried to deflect her enthusiasm. “You deserved the raise. You’re a hard worker.”

“You don’t understand,” she insisted. “No one in my department has ever received a letter from a Member of Congress.”

From that day on, Gladys held her head up a bit higher.

I’ll never forget what that taught me:

You can help people no matter where you are or what position you are in, as long as you look out for the needs of others and take action.

The impact that one letter made on Gladys, and keeping people calm during the Capitol shooting, taught me a valuable lesson. You don’t have to be in a position of authority to save a life or impact one. You just have to be willing to respond, each and every day, when the situation presents itself. *Look around you, see where there is a need, and be ready to respond.*

Be Ready to Go

When the time came for me to leave Washington, it was through someone who wanted to help me. A leader in a large nongovernmental organization (NGO), whom I met in Senegal, West Africa had just moved to Washington, D.C. He asked me