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## **Former Myrtle Beach resident to speak to United Nations panel**

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People are a priority and passion for Freyaz Shroff.

Folks –near and far, known and unfamiliar – are precious to her, especially those enduring hunger and poverty.

“I think we all belong to one big family, and you help out when your family is in need,” said Shroff, 37, who began her life as a volunteer at 15 while attending Myrtle Beach High School.

Back then, as a part of the Next Century program, she worked with teachers, parents and other students to help keep her fellow peers in school.

On Thursday, Shroff will speak for people, especially women, often not heard when she speaks during the 56th session of the Commission on the Status of Women taking place in New York.

An official group of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, the commission solely campaigns for gender equality and the progression of women around the world.

Shroff, who moved to Myrtle Beach at 13 from Mumbai, has lived the past five years in the Indian city where she was born simply helping people help themselves.

“I am here to showcase one specific place in India,” said Shroff on Wednesday during a telephone interview with The Sun News as she rode via taxi to the Church Center for the United Nations to sit in on general sessions. “We have been working to empower women and empower the entire family unit to get to that point of well being – to live well and strong.”

She will be one of four people from the FEZANA (Federation of Zoroastrian Associations of North America) team speaking. Shroff said her team’s topic of discussion is “NGO (non-governmental organization) Learnings: Empowering Rural Women to Overcome Poverty and Hunger.” Her presentation will last 30 minutes.

During her talk, Shroff said she will highlight three primary points – empowerment of families, cultural sensitivity and dedication to the cause.

"If we empower the family unit – the husband, wife and children – then that is helping the woman achieve her objectives in that culture," Shroff said. "We have to understand the needs, talk to the families, unite and tackle the needs."

There are an estimated 925 million hungry people in the world, according to 2010 statistics from worldhunger.org. Shroff said people wanting to help any culture combat societal ills must comprehend the community in which they want to be of assistance.

"You can not work from your specific point of view," she said. "You have to understand that specific culture before you can step into the work. If you are not operating in their set of rules, they will not even let you in."

As an example, she used the story of an American who traveled to Iran, where he created a pictorial campaign for the soda company for which he worked. He printed the campaign from left to right, not realizing that unlike Americans, Iranians read from right to left. The ad showed a thirsty man on the left and a refreshed man on the right who had just gulped down the drink.

The Iranians, she said, saw a campaign ad which showed a man dying of thirst after consuming the drink instead of having his thirst sated because they read right to left.

The topic of being devoted to volunteer tasks will also be essential to her commission address.

"The people who step into the work have to be committed and dedicated," said Shroff, a volunteer armed with an MBA from Winthrop University who provides coaching and strategy consulting to businesses. "It is not easy work to do. So if you earn their trust, then you must stay and do the work."

Her dad, Kurush Shroff, and her mom, Nivi Shroff, residents of North Myrtle Beach, who manage several hotels including Grande Shores Ocean Resort in Myrtle Beach, will be on hand to cheer her on.

Other family members, including her sister Nazneen Tse, and her brother-in-law, Tom Tse, and their children, 7-year-old Weston and 3 1/2-year-old Pearl, residents of Carolina Forest, will cheer from home.

"She is just so smart," said Nazneen Tse, 35. "Hunger and poverty are certainly issues that need to be addressed and brought to people's attention, and Freyaz can do it. She is very capable."

Tom Tse, 34, said his sister-in-law is a do-gooder who does not need accolades in order to work hard on behalf of those in need.

"She is savvy and caring," he said. "She looks out for the well-being of others, and she could care less about getting credit for it."

Shroff said there is nothing special about what she does because everybody can make a difference.

"You can get involved in one small thing in your community," she said. "And if you don't have time to volunteer, start at home by raising your children to be more compassionate human beings. Teach them to be citizens of the world."

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